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HOLOCAUST POSTMEMORY IN CONTEMPORARY ANGLOPHONE
CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

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Abstract

This dissertation discusses contemporary Anglophone children's literature that represents the Holocaust. More specifically, the genre considered is historical fiction and the works analyzed have been written by 'non-related' authors, meaning writers who are not witnesses nor their descendants. On the basis of Hirsch's concept of postmemory, this writing claims that through historical novels child readers can acquire a specific kind of postmemory, which I call 'attitudinal postmemory'. Attitudinal postmemory is based on the readers' establishment of a personal-emotional link with the Holocaust by means of narrative empathy towards the characters; it is an 'active' kind of memory because it will hopefully convert into an informed, respectful attitude towards peers that opposes the Nazi ideology.

The dissertation is structured into two main parts, each comprising four chapters. Part One, "From Collective Memory to Postmemory. Media and Literature, Emotions and Relationships", focuses on critical works referring to Holocaust Studies and Memory Studies and it provides an overview of the origins and development of Holocaust memory in Western countries, from the years right after World War II to the present. In particular, Chapter 1 introduces two major debates in the subject areas of historiography and literature so as to offer a framework of reference for the claims regarding historical fiction proposed in Part Two. Chapter 2 discusses three major issues concerning the Holocaust: naming, the need to represent, and the 'right to' represent, which are inseparably linked to the forms and genres used (and considered 'appropriate') to tell the Holocaust in literature. By claiming that it is necessary to consider the scope of literary narratives to evaluate their usefulness in promoting Holocaust memory, Chapter 3 explains how the presence of a personal-emotional link is essential to acquire Holocaust postmemory and how this applies to attitudinal postmemory. Since children's historical fiction is the specific focus of this dissertation, Chapter 4 describes the criteria adopted with regard to the case studies.

Part Two, "Translating History into Historical Fiction, Historical Fiction into Attitude", discusses the process of interweaving historical truth with fiction and how historical fiction helps child readers develop a postmemorial attitude through the acquisition of attitudinal postmemory. This part starts with a brief overview from the origins of the genre until the present time in Chapter 5; then, Chapter 6 considers the two main expectations of historical fiction (teaching and 'entertainment') and it probes how it is possible to meet these while avoiding a disrespectful stance towards the Holocaust. Chapter 7 introduces the analysis of the novels considered by discussing some issues in the representation of Nazi evil and the idea of empathy as it has been developed within the social sciences and literary criticism. On the basis of the previous considerations, Chapter 8 offers a comparative analysis of the case studies proposed, including authors John Boyne, Eilís Dillon, Jackie French, Morris Gleitzman, Lois Lowry, Michael Morpurgo, Jerry Spinelli, and Jane Yolen.

A mio nonno e Trilly, che ho perso durante il dottorato.

A mia nonna, a cui piaceva andare a scuola ma è
andata a lavorare. Mentre scrivevo sulla memoria,
lei ha cominciato a perdere la sua.

Alla mia famiglia.

Alla bambina seduta al banco che pensava a cosa fare.

“Once you realise that hate is like bacteria infecting others,
you know you have to stop it.”
Jackie French, *Goodbye, Mr Hitler*

“When people have been mean to you,
why would you want to be good to them?”
“You *wouldn't* want to. [...] That's what makes it hard.
You do it anyway. Being good is hard.
Much harder than being bad.”
Jeanne DuPrau, *The People of Sparks*

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Introduction

The year 2020 marked the 75th anniversary of Auschwitz liberation and the end of World War II. Seventy-five years mean that there are at least three generations of survivors' descendants and that the only witnesses still with us were either adolescents or children at the time. Already in the 1980s, Holocaust Studies scholars worried about the progressive fading of first-hand witnesses;¹ inevitably, the need to find new, innovative ways to maintain and promote memory is even greater today. Young generations will learn to remember what historically happened thanks to the great number of documentary materials as well as by means of accounts, memoirs, and works of art encompassing sculptures, films, and museum exhibitions. However, is there a way for them to learn to remember the Holocaust in a more 'personal' way? Children cannot live the past in person like literary characters do in 'time slip' historical novels (see ch. 5). As a matter of fact, they can study the Holocaust as a historical subject at school, they can watch movies or documentaries about it, or they can read fiction and nonfiction about it. However, what can they actively *do* for turning it from a faraway traumatic historical fact into a fact they *actively* remember in their life as a human rights tragedy never to be forgotten, whose memory must be preserved to preserve, in fact, humanity?

In all the countries that are members of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), governments have institutionalized a Holocaust Remembrance Day and official commemorations.² Apart from participating in similar forms of remembrance, young generations can and should develop a deeper historical consciousness of what happened and why, so to become aware of the complexity and of the many visible and invisible subtleties that led to the Holocaust. They can learn a way of approaching that historical trauma not only as a distant event to be remembered at the cognitive level, but also as a human fact that needs to be addressed, questioned, and condemned. As this research will start to explore, to do so they can interweave the historical memory with their lives, for instance through carefully conceived historical fiction helping them to acquire a more conscious attitude: even though Nazi evil cannot be changed, they can learn that it is important to oppose its ideology by behaving in a different way in their present. This means that children can adopt an ethical stance and become agents of historical consciousness by developing what I have called an 'attitudinal postmemory', which is the concept that this dissertation intends to outline and

¹ For example, see Lang, *Writing* 1-289.

² As the IHRA website specifies (see "Membership", accessed 04.10.2021).

probe through an overview of contemporary Anglophone children's historical fiction regarding the Holocaust. Similarly, this dissertation will also question how such narratives contribute to promote Holocaust postmemory, as per Marianne Hirsch's renowned studies.

Memory Studies have provided an extremely rich lexicon referring to collective and individual memory, especially during the 1980s, when Maurice Halbwachs' concept of *mémoire collective* became the basis for many ramifications and further developments – let it suffice to think of Jan and Aleida Assmann's communicative, cultural, and political memory (see J. Assmann, "Globalization" 122), and of Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney's idea of "dynamic" (Erll and Rigney, "Introduction" 2) cultural memory. In the same period and until the present time, Holocaust Studies have also offered many scholarly perspectives: for example, Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory dates back to the beginning of the 1990s, while Michael Rothberg's monograph on multidirectional memory was published in 2009. Despite this well-established and highly developed background, I would like to propose the concept of 'attitudinal postmemory' as another term that specifically works in conjunction with children's literature because young readers can acquire it by means of narrative empathy (see Harrison 255-88) when they read historical fiction regarding the Holocaust. 'Attitudinal postmemory' maintains Holocaust memory within present and future generations thanks to the establishment of a personal-emotional link with the Holocaust. I postulate that if contemporary children do not engage with the topic also emotionally and empathically, therefore developing a deeper 'relationship' with the historical fact itself, they might not be able to 'feel' the Holocaust in a 'personal' way that goes beyond cognitive knowledge acquired through the study of historiography in educational contexts. This 'personal link' with the Holocaust should go beyond the mere knowledge of what happened, compelling children to become active agents of an ethical and more conscious attitude towards others.

Undoubtedly, my idea of 'attitudinal postmemory' is grounded on Hirsch's idea of postmemory as well as on the relevance it attributes to the postgenerations' "affiliative" (Hirsch, *Generation* 36) relationship with the Holocaust. In addition to this, I define 'attitudinal postmemory' as a kind of 'active' memory that aims to remember the historical fact through the acquisition of an informed and respectful behaviour towards others, which will hopefully convert into a 'postmemorial attitude'. In this form, Holocaust postmemory will become part of children's everyday life, guiding them to approach others and establish positive relationships with them.

I acknowledge that mine is an ambitious and complex intent, which I have pursued through intersecting three main areas of studies: Holocaust Studies, Memory Studies, and

children's historical fiction. Consistently, this dissertation is divided into two parts, each structured into four chapters. In Part One, "From Collective Memory to Postmemory: Media and Literature, Emotions and Relationships", I discuss theories and approaches belonging to Holocaust and Memory Studies so as to provide the contextual and scholarly framework for each of the above areas. I will then focus on historical fiction, empathy, and the literary representation of evil in Part Two, "Translating History into Historical Fiction, Historical Fiction into Attitude".

In Part One, to fully appreciate the relation between attitudinal postmemory and the Holocaust, I will probe how Holocaust representations originated and developed in the media (chapter 1 and 2). In particular, I will maintain my focus on literature in discussing some of the major issues concerning Holocaust representation: naming, 'appropriate' forms and genres, authorship, and the idea of 'who has the right to' represent the Holocaust. Many scholars have called for a widening of the canonical forms and genres, including Terrence Des Pres, Sara Horowitz, Samantha Mitschke, and Sue Vice. To probe the above issues will help me lay the basis to make a double claim: on the one hand, children's historical fiction should be accepted as a genre to represent the Holocaust and to help promote its memory; on the other hand, even those authors to whom I refer as 'non-related' can make a positive contribution to encourage and preserve Holocaust memory. 'Non-related' authors are individuals who are non-Jewish and non-direct witnesses, they do not bear any kinship with first-hand witnesses and they are postmemorial individuals, just like the children for whom they write. It is interesting to notice that these writers and their works are not usually comprised in the traditional Holocaust Literature canon.

In chapter 3, the discussion of recent approaches in Memory Studies intends to frame 'attitudinal postmemory' within a scholarly context, where many theories share the presupposition that, for memory to be retained, there must be a personal link (i.e., a link based on emotions) between the individual and the past that he or she should remember. From Michael Rothberg's multidirectional memory to Alison Landsberg's prosthetic memory, from Marianne Hirsch's postmemory to Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney's dynamic cultural memory, emotions are constantly present. Among so many forms of memory, where is children's 'attitudinal postmemory' situated?

Child readers occupy a peculiar position within the society and in the acquisition of Holocaust postmemory because of their young age. In particular, the novels that I discuss in this dissertation are marketed to a readership aged between late-childhood and pre-adolescence, which corresponds to the period when young people are likely to get in contact

with the Holocaust in their educational context. Therefore, the acquisition of Holocaust knowledge (historical and cognitive dimension) and Holocaust postmemory (personal and emotional dimension) overlap: ‘attitudinal postmemory’ conveyed by historical fiction inserts between the two so as to enable children to make both Holocaust memory and the Holocaust part of their life. This is what I will probe in Part Two, “Translating History into Historical Fiction, Historical Fiction into Attitude”.

As the title suggests, to enable children’s acquisition of ‘attitudinal postmemory’, it is necessary to interweave history with fiction. There have been countless debates regarding the relationship between the two subjects, which proves that the mingling between the two has always raised criticisms and that, at the same time, it has not been possible to offer a definitive answer. Therefore, it is likely that the same occurs with historical fiction representing the Holocaust, precisely because it tells a traumatic historical fact. In the first chapter of Part Two, I discuss definitions and characteristics of the genre with the aim of identifying the main features of ‘good’ historical fiction, which is defined so by scholars if it succeeds in making child readers ‘feel’ the past. In the following chapter, I consider the main criticisms about the use of children’s historical fiction as a genre to represent the Holocaust. Inevitably, ‘feeling’ the past implies that children are encouraged to use their emotions and empathic skills while reading, two components that contribute to acquire ‘attitudinal postmemory’. Therefore, I build upon Joel Smith’s and Mary-Catherine Harrison’s ideas about empathy in the social sciences and literature as a basis to explain how young readers may acquire ‘attitudinal postmemory’ through the reading of historical novels (chapter 7).

The empathic process allowing the acquisition of ‘attitudinal postmemory’ is not based simply on the socio-cultural, religious, or national belonging of child protagonists; it is possible because readers and characters share the fact that they are all children. Therefore, contemporary readers are likely to understand how the protagonists feel in specific situations by comparing these to what they have experienced in their own life.

Narrative empathy especially occurs when child protagonists meet evil. This encounter may take place either as a direct meeting with Nazis or in a metaphorical form, where characters experience the consequences of Nazi persecution and murdering (for example, when they are forced into a ghetto or a concentration camp, or when they lose or are separated by their loved ones). When the protagonists encounter evil, they are obliged to take an active stance and make a personal decision: do they prefer to do good or evil in response to what they experience? Do they defend their positive relationships with adults and peers or do they surrender to the corruptive, ‘infective’ power of evil? To answer these questions, the

historical novels I discuss provide young readers with a variety of fictional peers to condemn or to imitate; above all, these interrogatives represent the narrative experiences with which child readers can empathise and form their own ‘attitudinal postmemory’ by recognizing evil and hate as “bacteria” (French, *Goodbye, Mr Hitler* 190). Through most of the historical novels herein discussed, children are enabled and encouraged to refuse hatred and evil at the literary and at the personal level. This is what the comparative analysis of the works offered in chapter 8 claims. Certainly, this dissertation is not a definitive study of ‘attitudinal postmemory’; nonetheless, its aim is to propose an idea that acknowledges the complexity of the research areas involved and that could become the basis for further research, developments, and studies, including wider linguistic-geographical approaches about the contemporary fostering of Holocaust memory.

PART ONE

**From Collective Memory to Postmemory.
Media and Literature, Emotions and Relationships**

The first part of this dissertation addresses the complex issue ‘What kind of memory?’ in the light of recent theories and reflections in Holocaust Studies and in Memory and Trauma Studies. In particular, the focus will be here on the concept of ‘attitudinal postmemory’ applied to Holocaust Studies and contemporary children’s literature in English, the latter of which has been interested by a constant presence of novels written by authors who are not directly related to the historical fact. To understand these writers’ position in relation to the Holocaust, and the kind of memory that they promote through their works, it is necessary to dwell on the beginning and following spread of Holocaust memory within the wider society, relevant scholarly theories, and the role of literature and other media both in conveying the Holocaust as subject matter and in fostering remembrance. These aspects are divisive and the following preliminary overview does not aim to provide any definitive interpretations; on the contrary, it is meant to highlight some debated issues that are also central in children’s literature about the Holocaust and that form the framing theoretical context into which this production and attitudinal postmemory are inscribed.

After the witnesses’ initial difficulties in having their accounts published, their own testimonies were highly looked for as a consequence of the broadcasting of the Eichmann trial in 1961; twenty years later, the fear of the decreasing number of witnesses paralleled many debates about who else, if any, could represent the Holocaust, and what the ‘rules’ were in undertaking this task. The controversy between Friedländer and Broszat and White’s theses about the relationship between history and narrative are paradigmatic of the time.³

When the Holocaust entered domestic space, this was the first step towards a reduction of the distance – personal, ethnic, temporal, geographical – between the wider society and the Holocaust and towards the chance to develop a personal, emotional relationship with it. However, it also symbolized the passage towards mass cultural products and representations, which may evolve negatively into appropriation of the Holocaust for economic reasons, or

³ Broszat and Friedländer’s epistolary controversy was about the historicization of National Socialism: Broszat claimed that historicization was a progressive step in the study of the Nazi period, while Friedländer contested the idea by accusing it of implying a “*shift of focus*” (Broszat and Friedländer 280; emphasis in original) from the Holocaust that could easily become a revision process of Nazi culpability, horrors, and regime. Hayden White’s main theory was that historiographical and literary narratives make use of the same literary devices, which is at the same time a cause and a proof that the first are not as objective as they are traditionally thought, but rely on the historian’s perspective and storytelling techniques.

even for revisionist and denial claims. Not by chance, in the 1980s there was a wide acceptance of a “Holocaust etiquette” (Des Pres 218) that informed Holocaust representations, but these rules were to be ‘broken’ by cultural products like *Maus* (1989) and *Schindler’s List* (1993), a trend that continued during the 1990s.

The number of mass cultural works about the Holocaust increased steadily, as well as the institutionalization of Holocaust memory. The media continued to have a central role; literature and cinema were particularly relevant in conveying influencing Holocaust representations, although scholarly criticisms show that these new examples were sought and unwelcome at the same time. Nonetheless, the spread of Holocaust memory brought to the inclusion of other social groups not previously considered, such as in the case of Marianne Hirsch’s concept of postmemory, which is not limited to descendants but it also takes into consideration people who did not live through the Holocaust and who are not related to someone who did. Other approaches in Memory Studies focused on the kind of Holocaust memory that individuals could have, regardless of their socio-cultural, ethnic, and religious background, and encompassed many perspectives, from the socio-political (Levy and Sznajder) to the socio-cultural (Rothberg), from the ethnic and familial (Aarons and Berger) to the generational (Landsberg). Nonetheless, to acquire Holocaust memory implies that the individual must develop a personal relationship with it through active engagement and “imaginative investment” (Hirsch, *Generation 4*).

The Holocaust is a subject that easily forms a polarization of theoretical positions apparently irreconcilable, such as in scholarly discussions regarding its uniqueness, politicization, and symbolicization-iconicization.⁴ For example, the ‘global’ character of Holocaust memory has been discussed both in positive and negative terms and it is an example of the fear that the undesired consequences of new modes and ways to represent the Holocaust, as well as of their background theoretical positions, may be more than the positive ones. In particular, new kinds of representation are commonly associated to the fear that the relevance and severity of the Holocaust would be lessened and that the historical fact would be increasingly perceived as ‘ordinary’ because these representations are not respectful, accurate, or authentic enough. Therefore, it is necessary to discuss issues of simplification, “*shift of focus*” (Broszat and Friedländer 280; emphasis in original), and abuse of the Holocaust while claiming that these new representations may share the aim to foster its memory with ‘canonical’ forms, and that they try to promote it in innovative ways.

⁴ On the symbolicization-iconicization of the Holocaust, see for example Levy and Sznajder (87-106) and Alexander (“Social Construction” 5-85; see also his monograph *Trauma: A Social Theory*, 2012).

Sixty years after the trial, new theories, modes of representation, and a wider concept of Holocaust memory should be accepted to update the canon. When the aim is to maintain and promote Holocaust memory, new forms are not in competition with or trying to substitute previous modes: they are an addition to them. An example of the need for up-to-date ways to communicate Holocaust memory is provided by the use of social media by official institutions, like the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and the Yad Vashem, which are key in guiding and promoting Holocaust memory (Manca, “Digital” 1-17). These new forms can be considered as an encouragement to the dialogue between the witnesses and their descendants with other individuals, as they draw Holocaust memory nearer to and make it more deeply felt by the contemporary society. In providing a means through which people can get in contact with and develop a personal ‘link’ to the Holocaust that, as already said, is fundamental to maintain Holocaust memory, these forms contribute to foster its remembrance. Therefore, the answers to Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider’s questions “Can an event [...] be remembered outside the ethnic and national boundaries of the Jewish victims and the German perpetrators? Can this event be memorialized by people who do not have a direct connection to it? [...] Can solidarities and mutual responsibilities transcend territorial boundaries?” (88) are all affirmative. Children’s historical fiction offers a positive contribution to preserve and promote Holocaust remembrance through a specific kind of memory that I define ‘attitudinal postmemory’, and that I will further discuss and probe in this dissertation.

Chapter 1

From ‘Silence’ to Mass Representation: Stocktaking the Historical and Literary Background of Holocaust Studies

In the 21st century, to think about the Holocaust often means to associate the term to a cultural product, such as a literary work, a photograph, a film, or an online archive, which constitutes an example of what Aleida Assmann calls ‘mediators of memory’ (see A. Assmann, “Canon” 97-107). These works usually add to the set of information studied at school and provide the individual with a cognitive, visual, and emotional rendering of the Nazi ‘final solution’. Certainly, today in the Western world both the words *Holocaust* and *Holocaust Memory* are known and used; however, many people might not know that it was only sometime after World War II that the term Holocaust was adopted to denote that tragedy. There was a time when this was not ‘named’, nor ‘defined’ (see ch. 2.1); in fact, there was a moment when very little was known about it. It is traditionally claimed that, for the first twenty years after the end of World War II, knowledge about the Holocaust as well as Holocaust memory were not a subject of public discussion and concern. Witnesses had relocated in other countries and were trying to go on with their lives, adapting to a new context. Countries were not ‘prepared’ yet to search deeper into historical documents and to listen to witnesses’ testimonies as they were busy reconstructing and recovering from the war effort (see Berberich 1-3).⁵

It took time before the scholarly community started to investigate, and therefore name, not only what happened in the extermination camps, but also how what happened became a lasting individual and collective trauma.⁶ Today, Holocaust Studies have become a fully developed area of studies, itself part of Memory and Trauma Studies, finally acknowledging the importance not only to preserve the historical account of what happened, but also the importance of assessing different narratives of what happened. Holocaust memory is therefore recognized as necessary to both remember and heal; however, it remains a complex ground to explore due to the many contrasting positions that ensue. For example, it is possible to talk about *Holocaust memory* and *Holocaust literature* only if what the term *Holocaust* refers to is known; however, even with this premise, what *Holocaust memory* and *Holocaust literature* stand for is far from a univocal definition and unanimous consensus. Does Holocaust memory include only witnesses’ recollection of their first-hand experiences? Does it comprise their

⁵ As I will further discuss in this chapter, Levy and Sznajder claim that information about the Holocaust as well as Holocaust memory were not looked for in some post-war countries for specific political reasons.

⁶ For example, Raul Hilberg’s first edition of his influential historiography of the Holocaust *The Destruction of the European Jews* dates 1961.

descendants' inherited traumatic memory? Does it extend to what contemporary young generations remember of what they learn about the Holocaust at school?

Holocaust memory is undoubtedly recognized as necessary, but there are different and sometimes contrasting positions regarding its most adequate form and who is authorized to share it, for example by writing literary works promoting it. Holocaust scholar David G. Roskies tried to reach a working definition of Holocaust literature that encompasses all the many examples of written works that were produced during and after World War II by Jewish authors: "Holocaust literature comprises all forms of writing, both documentary and discursive, and in any language, that have shaped the public memory of the Holocaust and been shaped by it" (166).⁷

Certainly, literature about the Holocaust and Holocaust memory are strictly interwoven. Against common knowledge, Roskies claims that there never was a period of 'silence' about the Holocaust after World War II. In proposing his encompassing definition, he attempts to make a detailed reconstruction of the literary production about the Holocaust that is also indicative of "The Literary Phases of Public Memory" at the same time (Roskies 166). By doing so, the scholar enables readers to appreciate the stages of dissemination of Holocaust knowledge and memory in the literary area.⁸ The process covers five phases, which are: "wartime memory (1938–1945); communal memory (1945–1960); displaced memory (1960–1978); personalized memory (1978–1991); and essential memory (1991–present)" (*ibidem* 167) and which prove "a cumulative, though truncated, process of public memory" (*ibidem*).⁹

As per Roskies' discussion, works written during the war years have a fundamental place in Holocaust literature. The production written by Jewish authors that he ascribes to 'wartime memory' is characterized by "the use of codes and cryptic language; the close interplay of genre and audience; [...] the reemployment of prewar tropes and literary traditions; or the search for meaning" (*ibidem*). Authors were driven to adopt or re-elaborate written and oral codes to communicate within and to receive communications from outside the ghetto, because correspondence and the Hebrew alphabet were heavily censored (see *ibidem* 168). In order to be understood by a wider audience in the ghetto, writers used

⁷ Considering the Russian case, Roskies later modifies this definition as follows: Holocaust literature is composed of "all forms of writing, . . . which have shaped the public *and private* memory of the Holocaust and been shaped by them" (200).

⁸ For a complete reference, see Roskies and Diamant's volume *Holocaust Literature: A History and Guide* (2012).

⁹ The 'present' referred to corresponds to the beginning of the XXI century, since Roskies' article was published in 2005.

Yiddish, while in private they wrote in Hebrew (see *ibidem* 169). Despite the humiliating conditions, there was a “street culture [based on] cryptic speech, punning, dialect, diglossia, and the Hebraic-Judaic stratum of Yiddish” which proves “group solidarity” (*ibidem* 168). These authors used a variety of genres, ranging from novels and short stories to sermons, from political compositions to school texts, from poetry to music; whereas theatrical works required a further degree of carefulness because texts had to receive approval from the Judenrat to be staged (see *ibidem*).

In Roskies’ view, rootedness in time and place is a characteristic unique to these writings (see *ibidem* 167). One of the genres that was best able to present “the changes in the conditions of ghetto life, and most accurate in charting the growing awareness of the Final Solution” was the reportage (*ibidem* 169). In the context of the ghetto, it “was a species of engaged journalism written for an imagined, highly literate, mass reader” (*ibidem* 170), but there was also an active underground press discussing about the return to the Middle Ages, as the ghettoization was defined (see *ibidem*).

One of the common themes to be found in many literary texts is “the search for meaning” (*ibidem*), which was carried out in many ways: for example, some authors used metonymies,¹⁰ intellectuals searched for historical archetypes, while the political underground looked for precedents (see *ibidem* 170-71). Within the 1938-1945 literary production, the texts dated 1943-1944 express “overwhelming grief, sorrow, and rage” (*ibidem* 172) because their authors must handle questions impossible to answer: for whom they will write and whom they will try to mobilize “if every last Jew in Europe was condemned to death” (*ibidem*); what it will be of their writings since their life is threatened, and who will “revenge [...] the systematic murder of an entire people” (*ibidem*). Writing and producing artistic works in the belittling and unimaginable conditions of the ghetto were indeed counteractions,¹¹ that is why Roskies states that “Jewish writing of the Second World War was [...] ‘a literature of resistance’” (*ibidem*).

As already said, the period from the end of the 1940s through the end of the 1950s is commonly considered to be characterized by silence about the Holocaust (see *ibidem* 199; see also Alexander, “Social Construction” 6-7). Witnesses wished to go on with their life, wounded countries were focused in recovering from war and were enmeshed in a “legacy of betrayal, collaboration, disastrous defeat, and Fascism, which the myth of the Resistance (or

¹⁰ Among the most common metonymies, the “parent-child relationship became a universal trope” (Roskies 170).

¹¹ Although controversial for their role, Roskies also refers to the writings of the *Sonderkommando* as part of the literary production of the war years.

the Russians' Great Patriotic War) could alleviate but not erase" (Roskies 174; see also Berberich 1-3), or they were involved in new international conflicts – the Cold War and then the Vietnam War. Nonetheless, as Roskies contends, "in each period, the Holocaust was discovered anew, for different reasons, by a different public. The public memory of the Holocaust proceeded in fits and starts, differently in Communist-bloc countries from those of the free world, differently for the speakers of one language from the speakers of another" (199).

In this period, the writings of the war years were unearthed and gathered and, since "[h]istorical commissions were set up almost as soon as the fighting stopped" (*ibidem* 173), many first-hand testimonies were recorded. This process "occurred in five settings: the courtroom; the DP camps; sessions of historical commissions; annual commemorations of the Warsaw and other ghettos; and the Jewish mass media" (*ibidem* 172-173). Despite the high number of accounts – "more [...] than about any other instance of mass murder in history" (*ibidem* 173) – these first-hand testimonies were to be used "to establish the guilt of the Nazi party, the SS, the Gestapo, and the captains of German industry, rather than to document the suffering of the Jews" (*ibidem*).

Focusing on the production of Jewish authors both in European countries and abroad, Roskies notes that Ka-Tzetnik's *House of Dolls* was first published by the American Yiddish press in serialized form in the 1950s, and within children's literature, "what happened to the Jews of Europe was considered appropriate reading material for the young. There one can find perhaps the earliest instances in Holocaust literature of mixing fact and fantasy" (*ibidem* 178). Given the relevance of the languages used by the authors of Holocaust literature with regard to Holocaust memory, Roskies claims that "Yiddish was (still) the universal language of the Jews" (176): the main literary production of this period, which comprised novels and the press, was in Yiddish and Hebrew, and it developed at an international level, from Latin America to Canada, from the USA to Europe, "even (sporadically) in Tel Aviv" (*ibidem*). The press had an important role because "[t]he public memory of the Holocaust [...] defined one's Jewish consciousness. It coexisted with the daily news wherever Yiddish was spoken and read" (*ibidem*).

Considering all this, one may agree with the scholar when he claims that "from 1945 to 1960, nowhere [...] was there a conspiracy of silence" (*ibidem* 182), despite what is commonly thought. Even though he does not state it plainly, one may also infer that Roskies believes that the Eichmann trial in 1961 was the first chance for the testimonies to be heard as first-hand accounts of the horrors and violence that the witnesses had experienced. There was

a “frenetic activity” (*ibidem* 173) of recording and gathering testimonies in these years, but “there appeared but a tiny window for disseminating and publishing eyewitness accounts about the fate of the Jews” (*ibidem*).

Before 1961, from Italy to the Soviet Union, from France to the Netherlands there were market forces and political contexts that did not help nor were they positive for witnesses who tried to get their writings published (see *ibidem* 174). Witnesses’ written accounts were rarely accepted by publishers, if not refused at all, because they lacked a readership. Primo Levi’s *Se questo è un uomo* was “first published by a small Italian press in 1947, [but] failed to attract a larger readership. It was only in 1957 that it was picked up and reprinted by the more influential Italian publisher Einaudi, and not before 1959 that an English translation was published” (Berberich 3). The same happened with Elie Wiesel’s *Un di velt hot geshvign* in 1954, since his “manuscript was eventually picked up by an Argentine publisher but barely sold any copies” (*ibidem*). Only in 1958 it was published “the much slimmed down version *La Nuit* which was then eventually published in English as *Night* in 1960” (*ibidem*). Charlotte Delbo’s first and second part of her 1947 memoir were published only in 1965 and 1970 (see Roskies 174). Apparently, both patriotic works and others proposing a universal message were hardly welcome by publishers and readers alike (see *ibidem* 175).

According to Roskies, it is possible to explain the low number of published accounts after the Second World War by comparing this situation with what happened with the writings about the Great War. Annette Wieviorka claims that first-hand writers of happenings of World War I “were certain of finding a receptive audience in the millions of former soldiers” (*ibidem* 174); on the contrary, “the survivors of the deportations were comparatively few in number” (*ibidem*). This might explain why the number of witnesses’ accounts published after the Eichmann trial was higher: the trial broadcasting on television brought the Holocaust and its witnesses to a wide audience and, as a consequence, “a new, non-survivor audience was drawn into the story” (*ibidem*). Even though Jewish authors writing in Yiddish and Hebrew were intensely active since the war years, first-hand accounts in other languages struggled to find a publisher and a readership because the general public, which was not acquainted with these languages, was unconcerned by the Holocaust and its horrors until the Eichmann trial. Until 1961, then, there was not *utter* silence about the Holocaust, but the wider society was not knowledgeable about it and, therefore, common people could not actively take part in Holocaust memory, while other media had not represented it yet.

Inevitably, at an international level, television and the Eichmann trial played a major role in promoting a widely spread knowledge and consciousness of the Holocaust. Despite the presence of witnesses emigrated after the war, those were the means through which Western countries got in touch more directly with the range of Holocaust horrors and the depth of its trauma.¹² By watching witnesses' testimonies, international public opinion received a great impulse to develop an interest in knowing more, as it was clear that much more than what was imaginable had not been faced yet. The Holocaust was brought into private homes, into the family space; in a relatively short span of time, it was no longer 'hidden' or covered by silence within the wider society, it started to become a shared (though divisive memory). The trial worked as a means for a 'revelation' or 'uncovering' similar to the one experienced by Alice Kaplan when she discovered the shocking photos that her father, a prosecutor in the Nuremberg trials, had in his drawer (see Hirsch, *Generation* 103-04).

Historical truth could no longer be relegated to another place and time. As a consequence, there was an increasing search for and availability of first-hand accounts. After the difficulties that witnesses like Primo Levi, Charlotte Delbo, and Elie Wiesel experienced in the years right after the conflict, publishing houses were eventually interested in printing and distributing testimonies that had now found an audience. That was also the first time when these were linked to the bodily and linguistic presence of the witnesses themselves in the room: the trial was central in foregrounding the witness' direct testimony and the witness him/herself as a person, given that the former Nuremberg trials (1945-1949) "highlighted the facts, the overall and horrific crimes against the Jews, but did not allow – yet – for personal stories, the individual account" (Berberich 3). At the time, pre-recorded first-hand testimonies were presented as evidence against the Nazis and "[t]he world did not want personal stories, it wanted the larger picture" (*ibidem*).

The personal component is what the Eichmann trial added to the first handling of the Holocaust as historical fact in the years after the war. Witnesses' live accounts of what they saw and experienced not only gave voice to them as victims, enabling the audience to know what happened from their own words, but also brought a physical and visual level to the testimonies that is inextricably interwoven to the accounts themselves. Testimonies like Ka-Tzetnik's and Bomba's provided the audience with information, places, people, violence,

¹² Author David Grossman remembers "being glued to the radio every single night to hear highlights from the day's proceedings" (Roskies 183), although Roskies contends that "the trial was broadcast only four times a week for a mere 25 minutes, and even this was a hard-won concession by the staff at Israel Radio" (*ibidem*).

torture, death while adding emotional, psychological, and physical depth to what happened.¹³ It added the individual sphere to what Nazi officials, doctors, and others were condemned for in the Nuremberg trials in front of the larger society. As the Yad Vashem acknowledges, “[t]he trial introduced the Holocaust into the historical, educational, legal and cultural discourse, *not merely in Israel and the Jewish world, but on the consciousness of all peoples of the world*. [I]t focused attention upon the account of the suffering and torment of the Jewish people” (qtd. in Berberich 3; my emphasis). In direct opposition to the overall trend in the fifteen years after the war, from 1961 the society’s interest in witnesses’ accounts and the Holocaust increased steadily and this was no longer strictly linked to being part of the Jewish culture. It is not by chance that a common term was found: the word Holocaust was increasingly used (see *ibidem*) until it became of common usage to refer to the whole set of horrors of the Nazi genocide.

In addition to the personal-emotive component, the Eichmann trial also brought about a relevant change in terms of commemoration of what happened. According to Christine Berberich, until 1961 “[t]he earliest form of ‘commemoration’ was to seek justice [in] the Nuremberg War-Crimes tribunal” (3). Only with the sustained use of the word Holocaust to refer to the Nazi genocide,¹⁴ “official commemorations could start, and ‘the Holocaust’ became a collective cultural property, seemingly belonging to all who want to engage with it” (*ibidem*). In Roskies’ view,

[t]he very fact that the Eichmann trial was covered by every major news agency, with snippets of it televised abroad, marked a turning point in the public memory of the Holocaust. For Americans, it brought home the face of Nazi evil. In Israel, the trial was doubly cathartic. For the survivors, as poet Haim Gouri [...] recalled many years later, it “legitimized the disclosure of one’s past. What had been silenced and suppressed gushed out and became common knowledge”. (183)

Therefore, the Eichmann trial had three major consequences: it can be considered as the first step to widen interest in and knowledge of the Holocaust, it enabled a greater ‘participation’ in commemorating practices in Western countries, and, at the same time, it constituted the first step towards mass representation, the risk of appropriation, and potential forms of abuse, including representations focusing on kitsch rather than the horror.

¹³ For a discussion of Ka-Tzetnik’s testimony, see Roskies (183), while for Bomba’s, see Roberts Baer (378-79).

¹⁴ An instance of the increasingly wider acceptance of the term Holocaust is the debate, occurred in 1968, surrounding the Library of Congress catalogue reference for works about the Holocaust. Participants in the discussion were to opt for specifying ‘Jewish’ or not and what dates were to be included to provide readers with an entry encompassing the great variety of works on the subject (see ch. 2.1).

In 1982, Saul Friedländer denounced in *Reflections of Nazism: An Essay on Kitsch and Death* a ‘new discourse’ on Nazis and the Third Reich that involved “a form of representation that repeatedly figures them in outlandish, sexualised terms” informed by “Michel Foucault’s idea that ‘power carries an erotic charge’” (Boswell 15).¹⁵ According to Berberich, the televised trial was “the first foray into a dubious ‘Holocaust entertainment,’ the appropriation of historical trauma for financial gain and viewing figures of a worldwide TV audience” (3), that is, what Norman Finkelstein calls ‘Holocaust industry’.¹⁶ As if they were trying to oppose these market-driven representations, some Jewish writers maintained “Judaic, non-Western modes of self-expression” (Roskies 186), which were “both a way of proclaiming one’s artfulness, artistry, and artifice, and of reclaiming the Holocaust for the Jews” (*ibidem*). At the same time, though, scholars like Hannah Arendt and Bruno Bettelheim were “intent upon wresting universal significance from the tribal experience of the Jews” (*ibidem* 183).

During the 1960s and the 1970s, there was “a revolt of the younger generation to find out about their parents’ and grandparents’ culpability in the crimes committed during the Holocaust” (Berberich 3). In contrast with the previous period, when their published works were mainly in Yiddish and Hebrew, Jewish authors wrote also in their acquired languages because they were talking to a wider “adopted audience” (Roskies 184).¹⁷ Among the major writers of the period there were well-known names like Aharon Appelfeld, Paul Celan, Henryk Grynberg, Edgar Hilsenrath, Jerzy Kosinski, Jakov Lind, Arnost Lustig, Piotr Rawicz, Peter Weiss, and Elie Wiesel (see *ibidem*).

All these authors wrote about the Holocaust in a “telescoped, fragmented, and individualized” (*ibidem* 185) way. In step with the evolution of literary styles, they responded to the refusal of mimesis and the spread of magic realism through works like *The Tin Drum* (1959) by Günter Grass and *The Last of the Just* (1959) by André Schwarz-Bart, which “viewed the war and the fate of European Jewry through the perspective of a boy” (*ibidem*). Innovations included “antirealistic means” (*ibidem*) and new genres like black comedy and Elie Wiesel’s “dialogues-in-novel-form” (*ibidem*), the latter of which attempted to answer the question “Who is responsible?” while many others focused on the search for meaning (see *ibidem*).

¹⁵ Kitsch elements will also be found in *Schindler’s List*, since “the nexus of pain and pleasure [...] evolves, according to Dudai, into a tangle of kitsch and simulacra” (Goldberg and Hazan, “Preface” xiii).

¹⁶ The term derives from Finkelstein’s volume *The Holocaust Industry* (2000).

¹⁷ From Roskies’ discussion, it can be deduced that he is critical of this change. The trial broadcasting “displaced [the Holocaust] morally, temporally, geographically, linguistically, and nowhere more profoundly than in works of the literary imagination” (Roskies 183). The consequence of this displacement was that “[t]he languages in which the Holocaust was lived were now replaced by the languages in which it was relived” (*ibidem*).

After the Eichmann trial, another major drive to Holocaust public memory was the airing of the mini-series *Holocaust* (1978) on North American and European televisions (see *ibidem* 188). Once more, the Holocaust was brought “into the living rooms of ordinary citizens all over the world” (Berberich 3) and it was made present into the daily lives of the wider society. In order to provide readers with ““authentic material, not readily available, and to preserve the memory of our martyrs and heroes untainted by arbitrary or inadvertent distortions”” (Donat qtd. in Roskies 190), the Holocaust Library was inaugurated in New York in the same year, making knowledge and information about the Holocaust accessible to all (see *ibidem* 190-91).¹⁸

The representation of the Holocaust through a TV series caused understandable fears regarding its reception and abuse, since television assured a large audience but, at the same time, it could easily convert the Holocaust into ‘spectacle’. However, despite the concerns, *Holocaust* and the inauguration of The Holocaust Library form part of the events that fostered the spread of Holocaust memory and that marked the end of the 1970s (see *ibidem* 188). In addition to these, other major impulses were provided in 1979 by the *Report to the President*, presented by the President’s Commission on the Holocaust chaired by Elie Wiesel, on 27 September that year; The Holocaust Survivors’ Film Project; and the volume *Children of the Holocaust* by Helen Epstein (see *ibidem*). All of these events occurred in the USA and they prove the increasing presence of Holocaust memory in the country as well as the consolidation of the role of the USA in safeguarding it (see *ibidem* 189). This meant that the American perspective on Holocaust memory was highly influential:¹⁹ the *Report to the President*, for example, contributed to “enshrine [the Holocaust] within the civil religion of the United States of America” (*ibidem*) also because “the Commission recommended the establishment of a National Holocaust Memorial/Museum in the nation’s capital” (*ibidem*). The *Report* also called for the institutionalization of “Days of Remembrance of Victims of the Holocaust to be proclaimed in perpetuity and to be held annually” (*ibidem*) almost twenty years before the establishment of the International Task-Force (ITF) in 1998.

¹⁸ It seems that the aim of the Library was not particularistic, but universal, in its reference to “the moral reconstruction of today’s hate- and violence-stricken world by means of retelling the ‘Holocaust story’” (Roskies 190).

¹⁹ This process would later be called ‘Americanization’ of the Holocaust. Apparently, the process of appropriation and nationalization is typical of Anglophone countries, as scholars have also written about the ‘Canadianization’ (see Chalmers) and the ‘Australianization’ (see Silverstein) of the Holocaust. The term ‘Britishization’ is not currently used; however, it is evident that many novels for children set in World War II and written by UK authors present the country as inherently good, courageous, and generous, especially by representing refugee children arrived in the UK via the Kindertransport (see Henderson and Lange, “Introduction” 3-16).

The Holocaust Survivors' Film Project began in 1979 also thanks to the English literary critic Geoffrey Hartman, who reached the UK with the Kindertransport. Two years later, "the videotaped testimonies were deposited at Yale University and became the core collection of the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimony, now numbering 4,200 interviews" (*ibidem* 190): given in English and characterized by "radical minimalism" (*ibidem*), these video testimonies focus on the war years. A similar archive, called Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation, would be established by Steven Spielberg in 1994.

In the 1970s, those witnesses emigrated to the USA became naturalized American citizens and the "American literary and academic tastes began to shape and delimit the canon of Holocaust literature" (*ibidem* 191-92). First-hand witnesses tried to hint at the severity and enormity of the Holocaust to their descendants by making it "the crucible of culture" (*ibidem* 193) for which "[n]o linguistic or stylistic register, no one generation, no one level of reality can get at the truth" (*ibidem*). In addition to witnesses' video testimonies, the voice of the second generation started to appear thanks to *Living After the Holocaust: Reflections by the Postwar Generation in America* (1976), edited by Lucy Steinitz and David M. Szonyi, Helen Epstein's article "Heirs of the Holocaust" (1977), and her monograph cited above (see *ibidem* 191). The second-generation descendants founded the International Network of Children of Holocaust Survivors and then, in the 1980s, they tried to "translate" their parents' trauma and grief (*ibidem* 194), expressed through "denial of love and emotional overload, through silence and cryptic signals" (*ibidem* 193), into a "complex cultural medium" that could allow the "active reader [to] experience[e] the texture of a deeply buried past" (*ibidem* 194).

Despite sharing the scope of their parents' testimonies, the rise of a second-generation literature paralleled a linguistic change: while witnesses first used Yiddish and Hebrew and then wrote in adopted languages, their descendants wrote in English (see *ibidem* 191). However, both generations united to react against what some consider "the myth of suppression" (*ibidem*), denounced by Wiesel's 1970 manifesto. As Roskies discusses his words,

[i]f an indifferent, disbelieving, and hostile world had cowed the survivors into silence, because "they were afraid of saying what must not be said, of attempting to communicate with language what eludes language;" and if "one generation after," these survivors and their offspring had finally come of age, then by banding together to break the silence, they would now force the world to listen. [...] *Who spoke for the Holocaust were all those who bore its psychic scars and were now prepared to bare them.* (*ibidem*; my emphasis)

Roskies' reference to the second-generation descendants highlights the gradual inclusion of other people in the task of promoting and maintaining Holocaust memory, first by adding them, then by comprising also individuals who are not Jewish.

Being these the first phases that would evolve into the more recent production of literary and mass cultural products about the Holocaust, what was the situation within scholarly criticism like? Both Memory Studies and historiography were to voice their ideas and the 1980s were the decade when major debates took place.

Memory Studies as study area reacquired more visibility. During those years, there was a renewed interest in Halbwachs' *mémoire collective* and many theoretical discussions emerged about the relationship between history and literature, and their role with respect to the Holocaust. From the 1960s until the 1980s, scholars had approached the Holocaust from a historical point of view and they had analysed Holocaust literature works. Consequently, by the end of the 1980s, canonical critical volumes such as James E. Young's monograph *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust* (1988) and *Writing and the Holocaust* (1988) edited by Berel Lang were published. In addition to this, a set of 'rules' called 'Holocaust etiquette' (see ch. 2.2) was established, and literary representations of the Holocaust were expected to strictly follow it. Nonetheless, the wide availability of materials and historical data contributed to intensify the fear that a "saturation point may have [already] been reached" (Sontag qtd. in Hirsch, *Generation* 105),²⁰ and the constantly decreasing number of witnesses who could counter this was an additional issue.

Another major discussion among scholars was about the historicization of the Holocaust. In 1987, Saul Friedländer, an historian and first-hand Holocaust witness, and Martin Broszat, another history scholar, had an epistolary exchange on the historicization of National Socialism. They defended their opinions in six letters, but they were eventually unable to find a common perspective. The controversy was ignited by Broszat's essay "A Plea for a Historicization of National Socialism" (1985), whose main idea Friedländer opposed because he thought that it was a means to devalue the importance of the Holocaust by urging a "*shift of focus*" (Broszat and Friedländer 280; emphasis in original) in the historiography about the Nazi period.

²⁰ Sontag voiced the fear about the "saturation point" (Hirsch, *Generation* 105) thirty years after the Holocaust; writing seventy years after the Holocaust, Hirsch thinks that "[Holocaust images] have become all too familiar. The saturation point that 'may have been reached' for Sontag almost forty years ago has certainly been surpassed by now, causing many commentators on the representation and memorialization of the Holocaust to express serious concerns and warnings" (*ibidem*).

In Friedländer's view, this shift might easily change into a revision of the culpability and of the horrors committed by the Nazi regime (see *ibidem* 269-71). On the contrary, Broszat claims that historicization of National Socialism was necessary at the time and it did not

involv[e] a *revision* [...] of the clear judgement on and condemnation of the dictatorial, criminal, inhumane aspects and measures of the Nazi regime, aspects and measures which have by now been researched and documented in detail and at length. [...] Rather, the making conscious of the process of historicization [...] or the plea for greater historicization of the Nazi period, aims more at a meaningful *continuation*, at a *new stage* in dealing with the Nazi past [...], *on the basis* of this evaluation of the essential political-moral character of Nazi rule. (*ibidem* 274-75; emphasis in original)

As Broszat continues, historicization would oppose “stereotypes, embarrassment constraints and over-generalizations” (*ibidem* 275) that he ascribes to the kind of historiography available at the time. He claims that, together with public opinion, it had

remained strangely shadowy and insubstantial, precisely because of the “obligatory” and preeminent underscoring of the philosophical-political basic features. It is more often a black-and-white construct viewed in retrospect rather than a genetically unfolding multidimensional history; it is a landscape inhabited less by plastic, psychologically convincing figures than by types and stereotypes drawn from the conceptual vocabulary of political science. It is framed more by moral-didactic commentary than by historical report. (*ibidem*)

Despite agreeing on the “basic values”, as Friedländer makes clear in the sixth letter, his and Broszat's are contrasting views due to polarized perspectives and “differing emphases, differing foci in the general description of that epoch” (*ibidem* 293, 298). On the one hand, Broszat calls for historicization – a necessary distance that the historian of the Nazi period has to adopt to write about it; in his opinion this would allow the historian to develop new research that would form a broader view on the Nazi regime so as to better understand how it could carry out a genocide (*ibidem* 276). On the other hand, Friedländer states that a “‘detached’ history [...] remains [...] a psychological and epistemological illusion” (*ibidem* 294) for their generation, precisely because they “are all inextricably caught in a web composed of personal recollections, general social conditioning, acquired professional knowledge, and attempts at critical distancing” (*ibidem*). Even though he admits that this situation is common to all historians, in the “extreme case” (*ibidem*) of National Socialism “a kind of purely scientific distancing from the past” is not possible (*ibidem*).

Apart from the (im)possibility of historicization for scholars belonging to their generation, Friedländer and Broszat did not agree on a basic point: the focus of the scholarly

work on National Socialism. Broszat thinks that historiography focused on social-political aspects of the regime as well as what, in his opinion, surrounded it and that was scarcely “contaminated by the Nazi ideology (industry, bureaucracy, the military, churches, etc.)” (*ibidem* 276) is the best approach to the period. On the contrary, Friedländer thinks that Broszat’s idea of historicization does not urge a broader view on the regime but shifts the focus regarding what is really important when discussing the period in historiographical terms.²¹ He claims that it is not possible to write about the Nazi period by considering elements belonging to normal social life because there was not any “normality” during the Nazi regime (see *ibidem* 282-97). In his opinion, Broszat’s approach may well be useful to the German society to talk about the past, but it cannot be perceived in the same way by the victims. By saying this, Friedländer gives voice to his deep fear that historiography about National Socialism may ‘forget’ to maintain victims at its centre and he claims that it is not possible to write about the period without being fully and always aware of the genocide (see *ibidem* 281-83).²² Therefore, there are not any ‘uncontaminated’ areas, because “[e]ven nonparticipation and passivity’ were ‘as such elements serving to stabilize the system’” (*ibidem* 276).

The letters conveying their intense theoretical exchange contain open remarks and occasional reservations that seem to hide sharper words, together with highly debatable positions on Broszat’s part.²³ Their controversy on focus is very well akin to an opposition between the adoption of a perspective that mainly considers the German population, or another one that poses victims at the centre. Read in this way, the debate conveys the idea that their views can be ascribed to a German and a Jewish standpoint. This seems evident when Broszat compares the “mythical memory” (*ibidem* 272) of victims and the ‘rational’ German

²¹ The scholars’ differing positions when discussing historiographical focus are clear in the epistolary exchange: Broszat foregrounds the question posed by Germans that belonged to the Hitler Youth and their own descendants, who all have a problematic past; Friedländer reminds him of the fact that victims who were the same age at that time and also their following generations have a horrifying past themselves, even though from a very different standpoint.

²² Friedländer does not mention the Holocaust, but it seems clear that he is referring to it.

²³ Broszat seems to claim that the historiography available at their time was not ‘reliable’. Considering the general tone of his letter, his words could easily be perceived as an implicit attack on the victims’ point of view and of their importance in being included in historiography about the Nazi period (see Broszat and Friedländer 273-79). This is especially the case when he implies that this kind of historiography is understandable from the victims’ viewpoint, and particularly from the “Jewish experience” (*ibidem* 276), but “[f]ormulated in absolute terms [...] it would serve to block important avenues of access to historical knowledge, and would also hardly satisfy the demands of historical justice” (*ibidem*). While claiming that the scholarly basis of his idea of historicization is “a principle of critical, enlightening historical understanding [...]” (*ibidem* 266), and calling for the necessity of other approaches in historiography, he seems to hide a downplay of the importance of the works already available. In addition to this, some statements made at the end of the 1980s such as “there is no longer any great need for the charging and prosecution of perpetrators, since at the present time there are very few left who might properly be accused of direct responsibility” (*ibidem* 268) are highly debatable.

historiography. Even though the misunderstanding originated by his words is eventually clarified, it is an example of the great difficulties in discussing the Holocaust and the Nazi period at the end of the 1980s. Despite agreeing that there should be “[s]ome measure of openness” between them (*ibidem* 285), it is clear that a dialogue between German and Jewish views was still problematic. In the last letter of the exchange, Friedländer admits that their “positions have come closer together as a result of this exchange”, but “[w]hat might be viewed as a kind of ‘fusion of horizons’ is not in sight” (*ibidem* 293, 298). The Holocaust and the war years were still too near²⁴ and the resonance they had in the mass media could not but help feeling the first even more present.

The vitality of their exchange surely is a sign of the general scholarly atmosphere about the Holocaust at the time. Both scholars agreed on the importance and need of a dialogue between Jewish and German people – an exchange that should now be extended beyond them as it should encompass witnesses and all other social groups and cultures. Only by continuing the dialogue in a productive and historically-conscious way the preservation of Holocaust memory is feasible.

However, Friedländer was pessimistic about the future of memory and historiography of the Nazi period. In his third letter, he brings together all the generations that were young during the Nazi period, both victims and perpetrators, because “they are the *last* groups active on the public scene whose members carry a personal, clear memory of the Nazi period” (*ibidem* 293; emphasis in original). They have to “confront” their memory of the period, however different their viewpoint is,

with what they may perceive as a kind of shift of collective representations of that past in surrounding society in general. [...] The dissonance between personal memory and socially constructed memories, within one’s own society as well as within the counterpart groups [...] is [...] one of the reasons which give the present debates their peculiar intensity, aside from the various familiar political-ideological elements. (*ibidem* 293-94)

Friedländer voices a widely diffused fear among Holocaust scholars: Holocaust representations that cannot be considered canonical might bring about a change – for the worse – of the common perception, knowledge, and memory of the Holocaust as historical fact. This is not surprising, since it is during the 1980s that Des Pres made reference to genres

²⁴ See Broszat and Friedländer: “[a]s expressed by a younger historian, Wolfgang Benz: ‘Thus, an open and candid approach to National Socialism, and its treatment – solely for purposes of scholarly interest – as but one era of German history among others, does not as yet appear to be such an easy and ready option. An interval of only 40 or 50 years is still not enough to make the Nazi period something historical’” (295).

not belonging to the “Holocaust etiquette” (Des Pres 218) that should be accepted to convey a useful literary representation of the Holocaust (see ch. 2.2).

Almost preempting Berel Lang’s concerns about the ‘future’ of the Holocaust,²⁵ Friedländer worries about the “attitude toward the [...] epoch” and the kind of “perception” and memory (Broszat and Friedländer 294, 295) that future generations will have. Since he already notices “enormous simplifications in the presentation of the Holocaust” (*ibidem* 298) in his time, and “[l]ittle can be done to counter this” (*ibidem*), he thinks that in a few years’ time a progressive “erosion” (*ibidem*) will be dominant within the collective memory of the Holocaust and of the regime. In his view, it will be so precisely because of “the detached gaze of the future historian” (*ibidem*) that will foreground what he has been trying to oppose: “the normal aspects of the picture of the Nazi epoch[,] [t]he *intermediate categories* of representation which contain just enough elements of the nature of the regime to make them plausible” (*ibidem*; emphasis in original).

Even though this process of simplification is not the consequence of “any conscious desire to eliminate the horrors of the past” (*ibidem*), of globalization, or of a ‘Westernized’ view and appropriation of the Holocaust (cf. Goldberg and Hazan, “Preface” x-xv), Friedländer believes that it will be the “dominant mode of perception” (Broszat and Friedländer 298) because of the natural tendency of the human mind “to dwell on the normal rather than on the anormal, on the understandable rather than on the opaque, on the comparable rather than on the incomparable, on the bearable rather than on the unbearable” (*ibidem*).²⁶ Despite his worries about the potential devaluing of the importance of the Holocaust and the ‘normalization’ of National Socialism, time would prove that the Holocaust was far from being peripheral in collective memory – although the approaches were to vary greatly during the 1990s, as I will discuss later in this chapter.

The historians’ debate is an example both of the tensions between different views of historiographical writing and of some fears that are still common in Holocaust Studies. However, it is also interesting because it dwells on topics that are fundamental in discussing historical fiction about the Holocaust, such as the focus issue. Indeed, focus is a central

²⁵ I am referring to Lang’s volume *The Future of the Holocaust* (1999).

²⁶ Writing almost a decade and a half after Friedländer, Levy and Sznajder seem to interpret “historiographical reflexivity” (Levy and Sznajder 96) in a more positive connotation: “Three central changes characterize this period: (1) a generational transition from social to historical memories. The war generation, whose experience was based on autobiographic memories, was gradually replaced by postwar generations whose understanding of the Holocaust was based on symbolic representations; and (2) a growing historicization of the event. The resulting historiographical reflexivity greatly contributed to its iconographic status. And (3) with the broadcast of the TV series *Holocaust* at the end of the 1970s, a major turning point in the media representation and the ‘Americanization’ of the Holocaust was accomplished” (*ibidem*).

concern in literature more or less widely touching upon the Holocaust, or with the Holocaust as subject or setting. Bookshops offer examples of ‘perpetrator fiction’²⁷ and there is an increasing number of Holocaust fiction works – including children’s literature – written by authors who did not experience the war period and who do not have a close relationship to someone who did.²⁸ As it will be discussed in chapter 2.2, the Holocaust literature canon acknowledged by scholars in the 1980s supported the dualism author-content,²⁹ which makes the focus issue even more difficult in presupposing an inextricable parallel between the writer’s life experiences and the truthfulness of the story he or she tells (see ch. 2.3). In addition to literature, focus-related tensions in representing the Holocaust and in fostering its memory will also characterize scholarly reflections on other forms of Holocaust representation³⁰ and Memory Studies, the latter of which will discuss the differences between personal and collective memory.

Focus was not the only scholarly concern about Holocaust memory and representation at the end of the 1980s. How is history supposed to be written? Hayden White and Saul Friedländer were the main protagonists of a major debate among historians regarding this issue. White contended that history and literature used the same literary devices and that history writing is a narration, based on real historical artifacts and data, ‘made’ by the historian as much as a writer pens a narrative work. History writing, then, is a narrative influenced by the historian’s opinions and his ideas about what facts and happenings include, and in what way. Consequently, the historical narration cannot have one form, but many, depending on the writer-historian’s own contribution.³¹ Many of White’s colleagues opposed this view (see Ankersmit 182-93), Friedländer being the most prominent historian who criticized his perspective as for what it meant in terms of Holocaust representation (see “Epilogue” 411-15).

In 1989, Hayden White presented his postmodernist theories about history in a talk at UCLA, which caused intense reactions on the part of “more traditional historians” (*ibidem* 412), as Friedländer defined them. White’s ideas, however, date back at least to 1966,³² when

²⁷ For a discussion of ‘perpetrator fiction’, see Pettitt’s study *Perpetrators in Holocaust Narratives* (2017).

²⁸ In the latest decades, there have been some blameworthy examples of trivialization of the Holocaust and of its memory that exceed Friedländer’s worries about simplification (see Housham, accessed 30.10.2021). However, these instances do not share the aim of making Holocaust memory more present within the wider society.

²⁹ On the dualism author-content, see for example Howe (175-99).

³⁰ For example, on the representation of the Holocaust in cinematic form, see Bratu Hansen (292-312).

³¹ For example, see White’s “The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality” (1980), “The Question of Narrative in Contemporary Historical Theory” (1984), and “Introduction: Historical Fiction, Fictional History, and Historical Reality” (2005).

³² See White’s “The Burden of History” (1966).

he proposed them within a polemic about the narrative styles still used by historians – which he regarded as obsolete – and the uncertain status of history as a discipline caused by historians themselves, who defended it either as a more scientific or artistic subject depending on the kind of criticisms received. This precarious balancing was no longer applicable, in his opinion. While defending history as discipline, White claimed that its antiquated modes were still used “as if the historians believed that the sole possible form of historical narration was that used in the English novel as it had developed by the late nineteenth century” (“Burden” 127). By using these techniques, they caused “the progressive antiquation of the ‘art’ of historiography itself” (*ibidem*) and the low reputation it had among other intellectuals. Historians should be inspired by the stylistic advancements and techniques gained by recent literary authors like Henrik Ibsen, James Joyce, and William Butler Yeats when they “try to relate their ‘findings’ about the ‘facts’ in what they call an ‘artistic’ manner” (*ibidem*). Only the adoption of more modern narrative approaches to history, in his view, could improve the status of history within the realm of other disciplines.

White presented his theories about narrativity and history in a series of articles³³ and further developed them for his talk in the conference “Probing the Limits of Representation”, organized by Saul Friedländer in response to his colleague’s theses presented at UCLA.³⁴ As White explains,

[s]o natural is the impulse to narrate, so inevitable is the form of narrative for any report of the way things really happened, that narrativity could appear problematical only in a culture in which it was absent-absent or, as in some domains of contemporary Western intellectual and artistic culture, programmatically refused. [...] *Far from being a problem, then, narrative might well be considered a solution to a problem of general human concern, namely, the problem of how to translate knowing into telling, the problem of fashioning human experience into a form assimilable to structures of meaning that are generally human rather than culture-specific. We may not be able fully to comprehend specific thought patterns of another culture, but we have relatively less difficulty understanding a story coming from another culture, however exotic that culture may appear to us.* (White, “Value” 5-6; my emphasis)

The use of narrative style and literary devices and genres to tell historical facts is posed as a self-apparent reality because White refuses the idea that facts ‘tell themselves’. This is one of the differences he claims between imaginary and real – therefore, historical – facts: it is quite easy to accept that “in the domain of the imaginary, even the stones themselves speak” (*ibidem* 8), but for the latter, facts cannot tell their own story.

³³ For example, see White’s “The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality” (1980). See also White’s “The Question of Narrative in Contemporary Historical Theory” (1984).

³⁴ Contributions by eminent scholars, including White, were then published in the volume by the same title, edited by Saul Friedländer: *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the “Final Solution”* (1992).

“Real events should simply be; they can perfectly well serve as the referents of a discourse, can be spoken about, but they should not pose as the tellers of a narrative” (*ibidem*): White’s position is in open contrast with Friedländer’s ideas voiced in his theoretical debate with Martin Broszat. Friedländer thinks that there cannot be any space for interpretation as far as National Socialism and the Holocaust are concerned: “In any event, when one abandons the field of normality and semi-normality and enters the manifold criminal dimensions of the regime, the plasticity of description becomes practically impossible. One may wish merely to produce the documentation: More would be untenable or obscene” (Broszat and Friedländer 297). Since in White’s theses the proper story-form is attributed by the historian, this process implies some level of handling and interpretation of the material – the historical facts – available to him or her. This is clear in the comparison he makes between the three types of historical representation. To be deemed as “proper history” (White, “Value” 9), narrativity is just one quality that the historical representation must have because “the account must [also] manifest a proper concern for the judicious handling of evidence, and it must honor the chronological order of the original occurrence of the events of which it treats as a baseline that must not be transgressed in classifying any given event as either a cause or an effect” (*ibidem*). The other two forms of representation traditionally accepted in the field, annals and chronicles, “fail[] to attain to full narrativity of the events of which they treat” (*ibidem*) and present only the two basic characteristics explained above.

Since history cannot tell everything, the historian’s intervention in terms of modes of narration is evident also in what he or she includes or excludes.³⁵ This process depends on the historian’s specific interpretation of the material. Thus, ‘proper history’ is the reporting of historical facts in a structure with a “central subject about which a story could be told” (*ibidem* 13), whereas in annals “[t]he calendar locates events [...] in chronological time, in time as it is humanly experienced. This time has no high points or low points; it is, we might say, paratactical and endless. It has no gaps. [...] But there is no story conclusion” (*ibidem* 12-13). The presence of a “central subject” (*ibidem* 15) differentiates narratives from annals and chronicles, and it is “a social center by which both to locate [the facts] with respect to one another” (*ibidem*).

Narrating historical facts in these terms, though, always presupposes a level of moralizing: if facts hinge on a “social center” (*ibidem*), it is implied that they are “charge[d] with ethical or moral significance” and that they are given “a structure [that] they do *not*

³⁵ Since the historian organizes the historical facts by imposing the form of a story, it means that he opts for some facts to be included in the narrative while he does not include others.

possess as a mere sequence” (*ibidem* 15, 9; emphasis in original). As a consequence, “every historical narrative has as its latent or manifest purpose the desire to moralize the events of which it treats” (*ibidem* 18) and its significance derives from the surrounding society.

The “desire to moralize”, of course, is the historian’s, since he or she is the crafter of the story. However, precisely because the historian is inserted into a given society, it could be said that his act of moralizing is influenced by the social context he works in, and it could be in accord or in contrast with it. The moralizing aspect of his narrative will in turn influence the social context. Thus, the historian’s role, like literary writers, is highly relevant when presenting historical facts to the wider society. For this reason, it is important that scholars recognize their own influences and cognitive patterns determined by the society where they live.³⁶

In White’s view, “[i]t is this need or impulse to rank events with respect to their significance for the culture or group that is writing its own history that makes a narrative representation of real events possible” (*ibidem* 14), but it is quite clear why Friedländer made reservations about this idea. If facts do not ‘tell themselves’ and the historian consciously or unconsciously includes his or her own perspective in the narrative, there is a tangible risk of a “*shift of focus*” (Broszat and Friedländer 280; emphasis in original). A great responsibility is cast over the historian, who may even use historical reporting as a way to diffuse an altered view of real facts, in a negative sense.

From the opening to other forms of narration and the historian’s unavoidable presence in structuring the facts in ‘proper history’ to the moralizing aspect, White’s theses posed serious concerns as they were perceived “as eliminating the boundary between fact and fiction and dismissing history as we understand it” (“Epilogue” 411).³⁷ Considered within the context of the Nazi period and the Holocaust, they were potential hints at revisionist and denial claims (see *ibidem*).³⁸ White’s views may be considered an addition to the group of intellectuals who were critical of a strict and well defined canon of Holocaust representation in literature, even

³⁶ This self-awareness could be considered the basis of the remarks that Goldberg and Hazan make to the concept of cosmopolitan memory of the Holocaust proposed by Levy and Sznajder (see Goldberg and Hazan, “Preface” x-xv).

³⁷ Friedländer does not specify whom he refers to by saying “we” (“Epilogue” 411), although it may be inferred that he includes other historians and himself, or the general society that he regards sharing a ‘traditional’ view of history that he and other historians privilege.

³⁸ The “Probing the Limits of Representation” conference organized by Friedländer gathered intellectuals agreeing with or opposing White’s position and it intended to “put to the test” (“Epilogue” 411) his theories, especially in relation to the Holocaust. On White’s side were Sande Cohen, Berel Lang, and Dominick LaCapra, whereas against his theories were Perry Anderson, Carlo Ginzburg, and Friedländer (see “Epilogue” 412). Friedländer admits that the conference was also aimed at “mak[ing] [White] see that he couldn’t relativize history as he did without falling into some kind of revisionist trap” (“Epilogue” 412).

though for that conference White produced “more nuanced” (*ibidem* 412) positions and “limited the kind of emplotments” (*ibidem*) that could be used to represent historical facts like the Holocaust, for example “excluding comic or pastoral representations from the range of adequate narrative accounts” (*ibidem*). Nonetheless, literary and Holocaust scholar Terrence Des Pres had already considered humour a useful means, if used consciously, a perspective shared in more recent times by Samantha Mitschke, who claimed that genres like ‘Holocaust cabaret’ and balagan could stop the “Holocaust fatigue” (see Mitschke 431-54; see also ch. 2.3) perceived in wider sectors of American population.³⁹

Going beyond the specific remarks made to White’s ideas, the debate was useful to highlight the potentials of narrative. The opposing positions should not be viewed as a controversy on the content of what was remembered about the Holocaust. The need to talk about the Holocaust and to convey it to the society as historical subject in a way that makes clear that it is a fact that really happened is unquestionable. The basic point of the controversy is how narrative can represent the Holocaust, whether it can be useful to commemorate it or if it allows space to revisionist claims. An unavoidable ethical issue is at work when White states that “[w]here, in any account of reality, narrativity is present, we can be sure that morality or a moralizing impulse is present too” (“Value” 26), because it might mean to convey the Holocaust as if it was somehow ‘useful’.

Strictly related to this, another debated problem was White’s statement that

[i]n order for an account of the events to be considered a historical account, [...] it is not enough that they be recorded in the order of their original occurrence. It is the fact that they can be recorded otherwise, in an order of narrative, that makes them at once questionable as to their authenticity and susceptible to being considered tokens of reality. In order to qualify as “historical,” an event must be susceptible to at least two narrations of its occurrence. (*ibidem* 23)

In White’s view, facts are “authentic” in that they can be presented chronologically and if they can be told in at least two ways. This raises multiple objections with regard to the Holocaust: How could another narration of it be? From what perspective? Taken as it is, the statement allows for too much space for revisionism. However, if considered within the rest of White’s discussion, that is, within a framework in which the scholar is trying to widen the ways to tell history, narrative is seen in its positive potential, as an additional mode, and there is not a hidden attempt to change official history about the Holocaust.

³⁹ I am referring to Des Pres’ chapter in the volume edited by Berel Lang, published in 1988, just one year before Friedländer’s conference.

It is true that historical discourse, written by a historian with a specific socio-cultural background, cannot be entirely objective as it is traditionally thought, but it is equally true that if the narrative devices employed are used to convey a misrepresented vision of historical reality, this is ethically wrong. It is even against the principles of historical writing, because such narration would lack the “judicious handling” (*ibidem* 9) of the facts and would become an ideological report more than an historical one.

Criticisms against the moralizing aspect inherent in White’s concept of ‘proper history’ are similar to the remarks that can be made to literary works. Holocaust scholars think that to extrapolate a moral from the Holocaust means to attribute a kind of ‘usefulness’ to it, which cannot be accepted. However, White’s “moralizing impulse” (*ibidem* 26) should be intended as reading the facts according to a particular socio-cultural view: in this sense, the social framework is relevant when one tries to ‘understand’ the Holocaust and its representation. Undoubtedly, the influence of the surrounding society is common to everyone who wishes to read about historical happenings, since everyone is embedded in a specific socio-cultural context.⁴⁰

If one agrees upon White’s basic characteristics of ‘proper history’ – chronological order, ‘plasticity’ of representation, narrativity – it is clear that two given historians may have different modes of expressing the same facts because they are influenced by the socio-cultural context in a different way. Regardless of facts included or excluded from their narration, their ‘fact-ness’ is not doubted:

The historian operating under such a conception [of “proper history”] could thus be viewed as one who, like the modern artist and scientist, seeks to exploit a certain perspective on the world that does not pretend to exhaust description or analysis of all of the data in the entire phenomenal field but rather offers itself *as one way among many of disclosing certain aspects of the field*. [...] [W]e do not expect that Constable and Cezanne will have looked for the same thing in a given landscape, and when we confront their respective representations of a landscape, we do not expect to have to choose between them and determine which is the “more correct” one. (White, “Burden” 130)

Without going deeper into the debate, what is of main interest in this dissertation is the fact that if historical writing in the form of ‘proper history’ uses literary devices, this does not mean that the historical facts it conveys are not ‘real’.⁴¹ Hence, literature and history, literary language and historical facts are not incompatible. The first can be a means to tell the latter,

⁴⁰ These reflections presuppose the respect of historical truth, of course, regardless of what the historian’s specific personal perspective may be.

⁴¹ It reveals the writer’s prejudices, stances and ideologies.

and they are tools in addition to (not in substitution of) other forms like the annal and the chronicle.⁴²

According to White, the relationship between historiography and narration is “conventional” because “the very distinction between real and imaginary events, basic to modern discussions of both history and fiction, presupposes a notion of reality in which ‘the true’ is identified with ‘the real’ only insofar as it can be shown to possess the character of narrativity” (“Value” 10). When the scholar wonders “Could we ever narrativize without moralizing?” (*ibidem* 27), it is easy to understand the objections raised in relation to the Nazi period and the Holocaust. If “the real” is identified by means of its inherent “character of narrativity”, then the Holocaust and other similar extreme historical facts pose huge problems in that the Holocaust is traditionally regarded as unspeakable and impossible to represent. Moreover, if moralizing parallels narration, the historian’s attempt to represent a mass killing may be regarded as a way to draw ‘lessons’ from it.⁴³

White’s theses can be discussed by considering the aim of the narration. It is necessary to tell the Holocaust for future generations to know and remember it, but if narration implies moralizing, one wonders who else has the authority to offer its representation apart from witnesses. It is an issue of primary importance, since moralizing can become appropriation in various forms (see ch. 2.3). These could be seen as the opposite sides of a coin: when appropriation is made with questionable objectives, the kind of moralizing is equally negative.⁴⁴

‘Moralizing’ is not here intended in the sense of drawing useful ‘lessons’ from the Holocaust, but as a process through which the historical fact is inscribed within the social culture where the book is read and, therefore, where the Holocaust is personally and collectively felt.⁴⁵ Therefore, when there is a positive appropriation,⁴⁶ the moralizing is ethically right. This happens when the appropriation aim is not disrespectful towards the witnesses and the historical truth, that is, when the aim is to foster the memory of what

⁴² In White’s perspective, annals and chronicles are not “‘imperfect’ histories” (White, “Value” 10) as it is traditionally thought, but “forms of historical representation [and] particular products of possible conceptions of historical reality, conceptions that are alternatives to, rather than failed anticipations of, the fully realized historical discourse that the modern history form is supposed to embody” (*ibidem*).

⁴³ Many scholars have taken position against the process of ‘drawing lessons’ from the Holocaust (see for example Novick, “The Holocaust” 47-55).

⁴⁴ Bos’s objections to the appropriation of the Holocaust (see Bos 50-74) can be understood through this point: appropriation by someone who is not linked to the Holocaust may easily become ‘moulding’ history for purposes other than remembering the victims and the Holocaust. Also Jeffrey C. Alexander’s reflections can be understood in the same way: when the Holocaust is ‘appropriated’ by political discourse, it is abused (see Alexander, *Trauma* 6-96).

⁴⁵ The author may or may not share the reader’s same culture.

⁴⁶ See chapter 2.1 for the differentiation between positive and negative appropriation.

happened and to whom. In particular, in literary works, the objective must adhere to the aims of witnesses' accounts: to increase knowledge about the Holocaust, to promote its remembrance, and to avoid other instances of mass killing. Considering the scope of the narration is the only way to avoid the risk of interpreting other forms of storytelling and representation as implying some 'usefulness' of the Holocaust while at the same time maintaining a wide range of representational means.

It has been said that when narrative devices are used in historiographical writing to present historical facts, an ethical approach is inseparable from the handling of the material, especially in case of historical traumas. It is even more so if historical facts are represented in literature. Since the controversy between White and Friedländer can be seen as a discussion on the potentials of the narrative form, one may infer that traditional historians like Friedländer conceive narration mainly as a cluster of potential revisionist hints. On the contrary, White makes Roland Barthes' position his own: "narrative 'is simply there like life itself . . . international, transhistorical, transcultural'" (qtd. in White, "Value" 5). Narratives are a valuable means to make temporally and geographically distant historical facts nearer to contemporary readers. They can bridge the gap between Jewish culture and the rest of the society, or other cultures. Narrative enables both personal and emotional relevance and impact to go beyond one's socio-cultural belonging because "narrative is a metacode, a human universal on the basis of which transcultural messages about the nature of a shared reality can be transmitted" (*ibidem*). Therefore, narrative is instrumental in spreading the idea that the Holocaust should not be conceived as a 'Jewish experience', but as an experience historically lived through by Jewish people that "might happen to anyone" (Levy and Sznajder 96).

As a common metacode, narrative is known by all social groups and, therefore, they are likely to understand this form quite easily. Being easier for readers in terms of reception, use, and understanding, historiography in the form of 'proper history' and literature are more engaging. Despite sharing this characteristic, 'proper history' and literature have other, differing features and aims that make them two different modes of presenting historical facts. Especially in case of historical traumas, they should not be considered enough on their own, as both of them are useful and, indeed, accepting both of them as valuable forms gives more advantages than considering the positive outcomes offered by just one. The same can be said of the wide range of cultural works about the Holocaust, from the oral and audio-visual accounts to historical fiction.

The great variety of available works is particularly important when children are considered. For example, child readers should at least be able to count on textbooks with a

historiographical approach to the Holocaust and literary works representing it in a different mode. Video testimonies, meetings with witnesses, visits to museums, films, documentaries, and archive material are other forms of representation that they should be given access to because they are complementary in helping to reconstruct Holocaust relevance and severity for them. Only the joint contribution and the interaction of all modes will be able to provide children with a better idea of what happened, although incomplete.⁴⁷ White's theses contributed to lay the basis for the development of new kinds of representation in the 1990s and, in claiming the non-comprehensive and objective character of historiography,⁴⁸ they also help to understand the current contribution of children's historical fiction about the Holocaust in the context of the promotion of Holocaust memory.

As it has been discussed, the 1980s were a decade of contrasts, where canonical forms of Holocaust representation, following a set of rules, were paralleled by the urge to find innovative ways that would go beyond these same rules. It is not surprising that the decade saw both the release of Claude Lanzmann's nine-hour documentary *Shoah* (1985), which was to be considered as the 'norm' for cinematic representations, and the publication of Art Spiegelman's *Maus* (1989), the first example of the new, provoking ways that would appear during the 1990s. As I will discuss in the following paragraphs, these innovative forms proved successful in spreading and promoting Holocaust knowledge and memory.

Some of the main worries within Holocaust Studies are well posed by Friedländer's fears about theoretical positionings and representations that have the potential to downsize the relevance of the Holocaust and of its remembrance. One of the main issues is to avoid that the Holocaust be perceived as something past, no longer relevant to contemporary societies, or that it may become an historical fact to speculate on rather than to commemorate and reflect on. For example, the broadcasting of Gerald Green's TV series *Holocaust* gave rise to criticisms because it could be seen as a representation of the Holocaust in 'spectacle' form and, therefore, as an abuse. Similar remarks were quite common during the 1990s as a consequence of the varied forms of commemoration and Holocaust representation: the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) was harshly criticized and defined "just

⁴⁷ Because they lack direct experience (see ch. 2.3).

⁴⁸ Similarly, Leavy claims that the press, traditionally considered the major example of objective narration, is far from offering a neutral stance. Leavy proposes later political uses of the original events represented in the press. The author offers examples of "contained events" (Leavy, Kindle edition, ch. One, par. "Selection of Events") and does not take into consideration the Holocaust because, according to her differentiation, it belongs to the group of "diffuse" (*ibidem*) events. However, it is easy to make a parallel between the first and the socio-political uses of the Holocaust, or examples of literary abuse.

another ‘theme park’” (Rothberg, *Traumatic* 251), while Spielberg’s *Schindler’s List* (1993) was disapproved through many lenses – from the representation of Jewish people to its real focus (see *ibidem*; see also Bratu Hansen 292-312).

Nonetheless, what Roskies calls ‘essential memory’ – the phase going from 1991 to the beginning of the XXI century – is a period characterized by ‘openings’ that show the wide range of Holocaust representations, their long-distance consequences, and the increasingly present mass culture, which had been progressively developing interest in the Holocaust. As already claimed, the first example of ‘opening’ the Holocaust literature canon to other forms and genres can be traced back to *Maus* (1989), soon followed by *Maus II* (1992). Holocaust memory and commemoration no longer seemed “exclusive domains” (Roskies 194) and at the same time, with the fall of the Berlin wall and the end of the Soviet empire, “a new territory opened up—real places on a real map, accessible to all” (*ibidem*), where second-generation descendants went for impossible “returns” to their parents’ countries and cities to retrace the past (see Hirsch and Spitzer, “We Would” 256-57).

When the USHMM opened in Washington, D.C., in 1993, Spielberg’s *Schindler’s List* was released, ‘opening’ Holocaust representation to mass culture (see Landsberg in this chapter):⁴⁹ it was acclaimed but it was also less valued than Lanzmann’s *Shoah* by scholars (see Rothberg, *Traumatic* 221-63).⁵⁰ Thanks to these events, the 1990s were the beginning of an advanced expansion of approaches and perspectives on Holocaust memory that carried both positive and negative consequences: on the one hand, the wider audience had a range of available practices for commemoration and to get access to knowledge – including at universities and schools;⁵¹ on the other, it brought about an increased risk of exploitation and abuse and more worries about the future of Holocaust memory.⁵² Non-related authors’

⁴⁹ See the discussion of Landsberg’s ideas in this chapter.

⁵⁰ Bratu Hansen explains that the film was criticized because it “is and remains a Hollywood product” (296) and one wonders “‘Is it possible to make a feel-good entertainment about the ultimate bad experience of the 20th century?’” (Hoberman qtd. in Bratu Hansen 297), which is strictly connected to the second criticism regarding “the film’s inadequacy to the topic it engages [because] it does so in the form of a fictional narrative” (Bratu Hansen 297). Another criticism is about “the way it allocates subjectivity among its characters and engages the viewer’s subjectivity in that process” (*ibidem* 299), because “the film narrates the history of 1,100 rescued Jews from the perspective of the perpetrators [whereas] Jewish characters [are] reduced to pasteboard figures, to generic types incapable of eliciting identification and empathy. Or worse, some critics contend, they come to life only to embody anti-Semitic stereotypes” (*ibidem* 299-300). Eventually, Bratu Hansen reports one more “objection to *Schindler’s List*[:] it violates the taboo on representation (*Bilderverbot*), [...] it tries to give an ‘image of the unimaginable’” (300). The representation of Jewish characters and perpetrators and the focus adopted are at the centre of Rothberg’s criticism of the novel and the film (see Rothberg, *Traumatic* 228-31).

⁵¹ As Berberich notes, “[s]ince the late 1980s, the Holocaust has been everywhere: on the small and on the big screen; in school curricula; on university syllabi; on ever-elaborate memorials and museums specifically dedicated to it” (3). See also Roskies: “In the 1980s, Holocaust curricula were introduced into state schools in the United States, Germany, France, and elsewhere” (190).

⁵² For example, see Lang’s volume *The Future of the Holocaust* (1999). See also chapter 2.3.

contemporary production for children about the Holocaust is part of this process of expansion of literary-artistic productions that continued into the new century. Therefore, in order to better understand criticisms and potentialities of such literary production, it is necessary to reflect upon the theoretical frameworks that developed in Memory Studies from the 1990s onwards, and the issues they tackled or gave rise to.

Like historiography, literature, and cinematic representations, the ‘opening’ wave and the ever-increasing interest in memory, remembrance, and the Holocaust also involved critical approaches. The 1990s provided plenty of theories about Memory Studies and, during the first two decades of the XXI century, Holocaust memory was at the centre of many scholarly works following two main lines of interest: the first approach focuses on inherited Holocaust memory and trauma in second, third, and later generations (see Hirsch, *Generation*; Aarons and Berger),⁵³ while the second approach adopts a broader view on Holocaust memory. It encompasses studies discussing its universal value and its relevance within other cultural contexts and social groups also by means of comparative perspectives, its relationship to mass culture and technology, philosophical reflections, and the advantages and disadvantages in the use of digital media.⁵⁴

In 2002, the *European Journal of Social Theory* published in the same issue Daniel Levy and Natan Sznajder’s “Memory Unbound. The Holocaust and the Formation of Cosmopolitan Memory”⁵⁵ and Jeffrey C. Alexander’s “On the Social Construction of Moral Universals”.⁵⁶ Levy and Sznajder discuss the transnational (and specifically Western) evolution in an ethical sense of the Holocaust memory and of the Holocaust. Their view is that, in contemporary society, the Holocaust has become the basis for the construction of a common European memory and its memory has acquired a universal meaning because it is understood as a transnational symbol opposing “good and evil” (Levy and Sznajder 95). Similarly, Alexander claims that the Holocaust has become “the master symbol of evil”

⁵³ On inherited Holocaust memory and trauma, see for example Hirsch’s monograph *The Generation of Postmemory* (2012) and Aarons and Berger’s volume *Third-Generation Holocaust Representation* (2017).

⁵⁴ On the value and relevance of Holocaust memory within other cultural contexts, see for example Levy and Sznajder’s article “Memory Unbound: The Holocaust and the Formation of Cosmopolitan Memory” (2002) and Alexander’s monograph *Trauma. A Social Theory* (2012); examples of comparative perspectives are Stone’s article “The Historiography of Genocide: beyond ‘Uniqueness’ and Ethnic Competition” (2004) and Rothberg’s study *Multidirectional Memory* (2009); Landsberg investigated the relationship with mass culture and technology in *Prosthetic Memory* (2004); Lang offers philosophical reflections *The Future of the Holocaust* (1999); Manca discusses the advantages and disadvantages in using digital media in “Bridging cultural studies and learning science” (2021) and “Digital Memory in the Post-Witness Era” (2021).

⁵⁵ Their study was first published in German in 2001 and then translated into English in 2006 as *The Holocaust and Memory in the Global Age*.

⁵⁶ Interestingly, the same issue presents Peter A. Meyers’ review of Peter Novick’s volume *The Holocaust in American Life* (1999), about the Americanization of the Holocaust. Alexander’s considerations were then presented in the volume *Trauma: A Social Theory* (2012).

(“Social Construction” 49) and that it should be understood as a sociologically-constructed cultural trauma. In his view, the Holocaust has become “a sacred-evil, an evil that recalled a trauma of such enormity and horror that it had to be radically set apart from the world and all of its other traumatizing events, and which became inexplicable in ordinary, rational terms” (*ibidem* 27). Then, the Holocaust was defined and separated with a term on its own; consequently, it became “a bridge metaphor: it provided the symbolic extension so necessary if the trauma of the Jewish people were to become a trauma for all humankind” (*ibidem* 29), and it was used both as metonymy and analogy.⁵⁷ In becoming an “archetype” (*ibidem* 30), Alexander contends, the Holocaust was reconfigured as “trauma drama” and it has assumed a central role in the “vocabulary of ‘universal human rights’” (*ibidem* 31, 49). The ever-present references to the Nazi genocide, which may make people think that “any evil that befalls anyone anywhere becomes a Holocaust” (qtd. in Alexander, “Social Construction” 51), brought many scholars to criticize this practice “as depriving the Holocaust of its very significance” (Alexander, “Social Construction” 51), but Alexander believes that “these very attacks often revealed [...] the trauma drama’s new centrality in ordinary thought and action” (*ibidem*).

Apart from memories strictly connected to the nation-state, namely, referred to specific socio-ethnic groups, Levy and Sznajder identify “a new form of memory [...] which [they] call ‘cosmopolitan memory’” (87-88). In the age of globalization, this is another basis for collective memory, which has been traditionally built on national memories. Their thesis derives from the recognition that, in the contemporary era, “an increasing number of people in Western mass-consumer societies no longer define themselves (exclusively) through the nation or their ethnic belonging” (*ibidem* 88): Holocaust memory shows that it is possible to “imagine collective memories that transcend national and ethnic boundaries” (*ibidem*).

⁵⁷ Alexander reports cases occurred from the 1960s to the 1990s, when analogies with the Holocaust were made to condemn and discuss “the historical treatment of minorities inside the United States” (Alexander, “Social Construction” 46), so that “analogies between various minority ‘victims’ of white American expansion and the Jewish victims of the Holocaust” (*ibidem*) were suggested and the internment camps where Japanese-American citizens were detained during World War II “became reconfigured as concentration camps” (*ibidem*). During the Cold War, the Holocaust “became analogically associated with the movement against nuclear power and nuclear testing and, more generally, with the ecological movements that emerged during that time” (*ibidem*) because “[p]oliticians and intellectuals [...] t[old] stories about the ‘nuclear holocaust’ that would be unleashed if their own, democratic governments continued their nuclear policies” (*ibidem*). In the 1990s, the analogy was used to “fram[e] the Balkan events” (*ibidem* 47) and it “propelled first American diplomatic and then American-European military intervention against Serbian ethnic violence” (*ibidem*). Alexander’s tone when referring to the “engorged, free-floating Holocaust symbol” (*ibidem* 46), to the Holocaust as “engorged metaphor” (*ibidem* 47) as a consequence of its social construction as cultural trauma, and to the Holocaust as ‘weighing’ symbol for evil in the contemporary era might sound offensive at times and received some negative criticisms (see Kaplan 633-37).

Levy and Sznajder think that Holocaust memory is an example of cosmopolitan memory because it passed from being associated to national remembrance issues to a wider recipient – people from many countries who share this memory despite not being directly linked to the historical fact. In their opinion, Holocaust memory is not strictly limited to a specific social group or to national boundaries any longer, so it “facilitate[s] the formation of transnational memory cultures, which in turn, have the potential to become the cultural foundation for global human rights politics” (*ibidem*).

The two scholars do not claim that ‘cosmopolitan’ implies that Holocaust memory is the same in all countries: rather, there are “nation-specific and nation-transcending commonalities” (*ibidem* 92) involved in the cosmopolitan character thanks to “the encounter of global interpretations and local sensibilities” (*ibidem*). Indeed, the fact that Holocaust memory crosses national boundaries enables the formation of memory communities – “memory cultures” (*ibidem* 88) – that can adopt and promote a kind of ethics and solidarity going beyond the interests of the geographically- and politically-defined nation-state. This is because the process implies that “issues of global concern are able to become part and parcel of everyday local experiences and moral life worlds of an increasing number of people” (*ibidem*).⁵⁸

Levy and Sznajder’s view of Holocaust memory makes them part of the group of scholars who attribute an inclusive meaning to the term Holocaust (see ch. 2.1) and it can be understood in the context of positive and negative appropriation (see ch. 2.3). One of the merits of their concept is to conceive Holocaust memory beyond socio-cultural belonging. This means that it goes beyond Jewish culture and it is extended to other countries apart from those more directly involved in Europe. However, Levy and Sznajder analyze the spread of Holocaust memory mainly in political terms. They consider the period of ‘silence’ about the Holocaust in the years after the war as a consequence of specific national intents. Similarly, national aims urged the beginning of its representation and remembrance after the 1961 trial, because the Holocaust had entered common people’s houses so it was not a subject known only by witnesses, historians, and intellectuals any longer.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ This is a “process called ‘internal globalization’” (Beck et al. qtd. in Levy and Sznajder 88).

⁵⁹ Israel started to commemorate the Holocaust fourteen years after the end of the war, even though “almost half of its population consist[ed] of Holocaust survivors” (Levy and Sznajder 94). Levy and Sznajder contend that “conscious collective memory was impossible until there was a suitable framework” (*ibidem*) and, in any case, they think that the country’s commemoration of the Holocaust has always been ambivalent and influenced by Zionism (see *ibidem* 95). Germany did not talk about the Holocaust right after the war because “[t]he Federal Republic originally saw its foundation as a complete break with the past [...]” (*ibidem*), so it accepted to be “the ‘successor state’ to Nazi Germany” (*ibidem*) only if a complete division was made. This division was attempted through “linguistic distancing”, “shift[ing] attention away from the victims of the Germans”, “[s]elf-

Despite the recent ‘Americanization’ of the Holocaust, after the end of World War II the USA privileged “a universalistic perspective emphasizing atrocities in general [where] there was no room for the ethnic fate of the Jews, but instead the diversity of victims was emphasized” (Levy and Sznajder 95). Modernization, optimism for the future, and attention to ongoing conflicts were the main topics of interest (see also Alexander, “Social Construction” 5-85). Given the nuclear war threat of the period, more attention was given to Hiroshima because it “symbolized the destructive potential of nuclear weapons in the present” (Levy and Sznajder 95), whereas “the Holocaust represented a period that had been overcome” (*ibidem*). In other words, “[t]he Holocaust was not [yet] perceived as a timeless and de-territorialized measuring stick for good and evil, but instead as a terrible aspect of a particular era” (Novick qtd. in Levy and Sznajder 95).⁶⁰ After the Eichmann trial, a double perception began: American Jews shared Israel’s particularistic-ethnocentric view of the Holocaust as “the culmination of the history of anti-Semitism” (Levy and Sznajder 96), while American non-Jews considered it in the United Nations’ perspective as the “history’s worst act of racism” (*ibidem*).

In Europe, the adoption of Holocaust memory as the new touchstone to build European collective memory was guided by political reasons (see *ibidem* 97-100). According to Levy and Sznajder, the end of the Cold War and the crisis in the Balkans, with its extensive media coverage openly offering references to the Holocaust (see *ibidem*), both had a great impact in urging this process and they could be regarded as a contribution to the formation of a cosmopolitan memory of the Holocaust much like *Schindler’s List* and the opening of the USHMM.⁶¹

Despite Levy and Sznajder’s merits in highlighting the international and political character of Holocaust memory in the contemporary era, some reservations can be made. In

victimization”, and “acknowledgment of political responsibility” for the crimes limited to “a small murderous gang of Nazis in the name of Germany” (all quotes from *ibidem* 94; see also Broszat and Friedländer 276). After the Eichmann trial, in Israel the Holocaust “became a symbol for existential fears and the necessity to construct and maintain a strong military state” (*ibidem* 96) because it was thought as one of the many historical attempts to “exterminate” (*ibidem*) Jewish people; then, it was collocated in relation to the Arab/Israeli conflict (see also Alexander, *Trauma* 97-117). In Germany, there was a confrontation between the new generation and their parents’ “refusal [...] to address their own Nazi past” (Levy and Sznajder 96), but Holocaust memory was still “less about Jewish victims than about the lessons the Federal Republic should draw from this past” (*ibidem*).

⁶⁰ In Novick’s opinion, discussed by Levy and Sznajder, this approach to the conflict also explains why witnesses’ stories were considered “only insofar as [they] served as testimony to the ability to leave the past behind them and become fully integrated members of society in the future” (Levy and Sznajder 95) and “the victims of concentration camps were primarily depicted as political prisoners” (*ibidem*).

⁶¹ From “[a]n award winning (sic) news photo of an extremely thin old man seen through a fence” (Levy and Sznajder 98) to the global broadcasting of the war between Bosnia and Kosovo as a “morality play” (*ibidem*), metaphors, images, and parallels had references to the Holocaust. Also “[m]ilitary involvement [...] was primarily framed as a moral obligation largely in response to previous failures to intervene on behalf of innocent civilians” (*ibidem* 99). Not by chance, Levy and Sznajder call the conflict “Kosovocaust” (*ibidem* 97).

“Memory Unbound”, the scholars fail to provide readers with a definition of memory. If one recalls Friedländer’s reservations about the future of Holocaust memory, proposed during his epistolary controversy with Broszat (see Broszat and Friedländer 295-98), in Levy and Sznajder’s presentation of cosmopolitan memory it seems clear that the focus is not on victims anymore because memory has acquired a political connotation in which the Holocaust is misused for national and international political aims. It is debatable that governmentally-supported official commemorations of the Holocaust based on these premises have been institutionalized because national governments shared the witnesses’ aim to remember what happened and to avoid that it will happen again.⁶²

In the scholars’ view, Holocaust memory has become a “globalized memory, drawing on its universal message” (Levy and Sznajder 100) because the Holocaust has become an international symbol of the war between good and evil. However, when Holocaust memory is considered from a political point of view, it would be more appropriate to talk about a *global reference* to the historical fact. Considering the Balkans war, the Holocaust as historical antecedent was constantly referred to in the media for socio-political aims: for example, allusions to the Nazi genocide were intended to represent the war as a chance for Western countries to act in time, as if they could ‘expiate’ the fact that they did not during World War II (see Levy and Sznajder 99). Holocaust *memory* was not really part of the reference, because memory presupposes a degree of personal involvement and it is ethically responsible-aware, whereas a generic ‘Holocaust reference’ encompasses all kinds of written, visual, metaphorical allusions to the Holocaust, which may even constitute an abuse.

Levy and Sznajder’s idea that Holocaust memory crosses national boundaries has been criticized by many scholars. Goldberg and Hazan’s volume *Marking Evil: Holocaust Memory in the Global Age* (2015) collects essays from many intellectuals who negatively remark upon the highly politicized view of Holocaust memory and they think that what Levy and Sznajder posited is more of a Westernized than a real cosmopolitan Holocaust memory because their reasonings are only applicable to Western states. For example, Amos Goldberg discusses the gathering of “forty distinguished representatives of states and international organizations” (Goldberg 3) at the opening of the Yad Vashem museum on 15 March 2005, among which there were “the UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, sixteen state presidents and prime ministers, [...] foreign ministers, other senior ministers, influential political figures, and

⁶² However, this kind of official commemoration can contribute to the kind of positive appropriation by young generations born after the institutionalization of Holocaust memory for political purposes.

Israel's most prominent political leaders [...]” (*ibidem*). The scholar contends that the official photo that was taken seems to

indicat[e] that many of the world's leaders, and certainly those of the Western world, are unified in regarding the commemoration of the Holocaust as a defining and important memory, and in their support of the Israeli Yad Vashem institution, which is to a large extent perceived as the representative and the mouthpiece of the victims. This is, as it were, a most lofty public declaration, proclaiming that the Holocaust has become an event of international political and cultural importance, the memory of which extends far beyond its direct major historical agents—namely, the Jews and the Germans. (*ibidem* 4)

What Goldberg refers to is the use of Holocaust memory in Western countries' contemporary geo-political arena, not Friedländer's idea of Holocaust memory that hinges on the victims. The Holocaust is remembered, in Levy and Sznajder's analysis, because it has become a “moral touchstone” (Levy and Sznajder 93) but, since it is so, it seems ‘separated’ from the original context, including those who were more directly affected. This is not to claim that only Jews and Germans should talk about the Holocaust or promote its memory, but it is necessary to acknowledge that there are differences between world-wide references to the Holocaust and its memory for political agendas and Holocaust memory as intended by Friedländer or Hirsch. In the first case, the Holocaust is used as ‘yardstick’ for good and evil (see Goldberg 8) and it may become a convenient parallel, even if superficial and deprived of conscious links to the historical Holocaust; in the latter case, Holocaust memory presupposes a deeper relationship with the past. Levy and Sznajder's idea of the Holocaust as ‘moral touchstone’ connects their theory to Jeffrey C. Alexander's claim of the “universalization of the Holocaust” (Berberich 4), since the ““originating historical event...has come...to be redefined as a traumatic event for all of humankind”” (Alexander qtd. in Berberich 4). In both theses, “the Holocaust is no longer considered a specific tragedy that happened to real people, but that it is increasingly being used as a metaphor, as a fixed image to connote general rather than specific trauma” (Berberich 4).

Remarks to Levy and Sznajder's concept are not meant to refuse the idea at the basis: indeed, “the Holocaust has undergone a form of globalization and that its memory has become a supreme ethical imperative for many societies in the world” (Goldberg 4). On the contrary, they highlight that these societies are all located in the Western world. By considering this geo-political area, it is true that “Holocaust memory [...] seemingly generates a form of common identity or common awareness of belonging that creates a very large kind of imagined community of the ‘global village,’ or at least the Western global village [...]”

(*ibidem* 5).⁶³ Supporting this idea is the geographical distribution of museums and institutions that are considered the main “‘sites of remembrance’” (*ibidem*) of Holocaust commemoration, since it “‘roughly delineates the current boundaries of the areas of intensive presence of Holocaust memory—Israel, North America, and Western and Eastern Europe’” (*ibidem*).

Even though these places are “‘global shrines of memory that attract pilgrims from a multitude of nations’” (*ibidem*), Goldberg opposes the idea of a cosmopolitan memory of the Holocaust. His position may be understood in that Levy and Sznajder’s cosmopolitan memory seems a Western appropriation of the Holocaust with two main consequences: firstly, Western countries feel that they have ‘power’ over Holocaust memory and commemoration practices; secondly, they tend to impose what they regard fundamental within their own cultures to the rest of the world – an attitude which is quite common in their history.⁶⁴ If one agrees with Goldberg’s idea, a cosmopolitan Holocaust memory encompassing all countries in the world seems overly ambitious.

Among those who agree with a basically Western Holocaust memory, Peter Novick even wrote that it is impossible to extend it to a global reach. In his opinion, what is outlined as a ‘global’ memory of the Holocaust is not only Western-centric – it is an especially Americanized version considered to be universal. As he contends,

Americans’ wholehearted embrace of Holocaust memory is repeatedly presented as the bellwether of “‘global Holocaust memory’”: incontrovertible proof that one need not have the direct relationship to the Holocaust shared by Jews and Germans, or the indirect relationship characteristic of Europeans, for the Holocaust to take hold of a nation’s consciousness. (Novick, “The Holocaust” 51)

Novick is critical of the idea that American people can have a ‘real’ Holocaust memory because in its Americanized version there is a “‘conflation [...] of ‘sites of memory’—mnemonic aides to memory like films and museums—with memory itself” (*ibidem*): this process is “‘obscuring agency’” because “‘these mnemonic devices [were] created by particular individuals and groups for various particular purposes [but are thought] as if they were

⁶³ Similarly, Alexander notes that “[i]n Hindu, Buddhist, Confusion, Islamic, African, and still Communist regions and regimes, reference to the ‘Holocaust,’ when made at all, is by literary and intellectual elites with markedly atypical levels of participation in the global discourse dominated by the United States and Western Europe. Of course, non-Western regions and nations have their own identity-defining trauma dramas” (“Social Construction” 59). In the scholar’s opinion, more than non-Western areas’ “‘attachment to” (*ibidem*) and “‘vicarious participation in” (*ibidem*) the Holocaust as social trauma, it is interesting to reflect on “‘the degree to which the cultural work that constructs [non-Western] traumas, and responds to them, reaches beyond issues of national identity and sovereignty to the universalizing, supra-national ethical imperatives increasingly associated with the ‘lessons of post-Holocaust morality’ in the West” (*ibidem*).

⁶⁴ For example, during empires with colonies, as well as in the postcolonial world by means of economic, political, cultural and social ties.

spontaneous emanations of the society as a whole” (*ibidem*). In his opinion, the American sites of Holocaust memory are “the result of initiatives coming from the 2 percent of the American population that is Jewish [...] acting independently of the organized Jewish community” (*ibidem* 51-52) while the wider society was engaged only afterwards.

In his criticism, Novick also claims that extending memory to a global dimension may mean to “pluck something positive out of the horror” (54). Considering the widespread idea that the Holocaust is “unambiguously, a ‘world-transforming’ event” (*ibidem*), it is commonly thought that it is “desirable, and perhaps inevitable that this fact be acknowledged around the world by the Holocaust becoming a ‘global memory’” (*ibidem*). Novick seems to fear that the spread of Holocaust memory on a global level be conceived as ‘positive’ not because people should know and commemorate it but because, for its extreme details, it can contribute to ethically ameliorate the society; thus, the Holocaust would be a ‘useful’ mass killing. A global commemoration in these terms is not to be looked for as it is an abuse.

Pondering on Novick’s remarks about the Americanized and Westernized approach to Holocaust memory, it seems that his basilar assumption is strictly linked to Friedländer’s fears: the idea that the Holocaust and Holocaust memory are – and must exclusively be – handled by witnesses, or Jewish people at most. Other perspectives are considered distant from, even extraneous to, the historical fact, and they may hide a form of abuse in implying some ‘usefulness’, or ‘lessons’ to be learnt.

However, it is important to adopt a stance that does not convert into negative what it would otherwise be a positive perspective, idea, or contribution. By saying this I mean that, despite some limits, Levy and Sznajder’s view is valuable in that they acknowledge the expansion of Holocaust knowledge and references within the Western world thanks to technology and the media. This has relevant implications for young generations born after the institutionalization of official commemoration in these countries, as they grow up embedding Holocaust memory in their lives and socio-cultural memory through education and the media. Levy and Sznajder’s aim is not to downgrade the importance of Holocaust memory, but to collocate the historical fact within the European and Western socio-political frame. Although there are weaknesses in their political approach, it must be acknowledged that their objective is constructive: they regard Holocaust memory as the basis for the formation of a European memory and of global cultures, both of which aim to respect human rights. In this sense, their perspective follows the witnesses’ intent to avoid other similar mass killings to happen.

Even though cosmopolitan memory might seem a form of appropriation, it is useful to highlight that it “implies some recognition of the history (and the memories) of the ‘Other’”

(Levy and Sznajder 103). This recognition is central in promoting and maintaining Holocaust memory: Levy and Sznajder's view is problematic because they link that acknowledgement to the growing "diffuse[d]" differentiation "between memories of victims and perpetrators. What remains is the memory of a shared past" (*ibidem*). They contend that this happens because today "it is no longer the atrocities themselves that are at the center of attention (especially in light of the fact that the majority of surviving victims have died), but how the heirs of the victims, the perpetrators and bystanders are coping with these stories and the evolving memories" (*ibidem*). Indeed, the number of witnesses has been decreasing rapidly in the latest years, but their claims easily cause misunderstanding and may sound disrespectful because one may deduce that witnesses and perpetrators' representations of the Holocaust are of secondary importance now, and that the descendants' works are supplanting those of their parents.

Another interpretation considers Levy and Sznajder's words as referring to the increasing number of works available that present the descendants' specific memory of the Holocaust, an amount that is surpassing the witnesses' works due to their old age and passing.⁶⁵ By adopting this interpretative key, their words about witnesses' and perpetrators' memories could signify that new generations are able to overcome the socio-cultural and ethical difficulties of the dialogue between witnesses and perpetrators as conveyed in Friedländer and Broszat's letters. The 'cosmopolitan' presence of the Holocaust may further urge this conversation.

Levy and Sznajder claim that cosmopolitan memories do not substitute old nation-specific memories but they are equally present within a given society. Similarly, it would be nonsensical to consider descendants' and non-related young generations' memories separated from witnesses' memories of the Holocaust. They coexist, and the first are informed by the latter. In this view, Levy and Sznajder's idea that "it is no longer the dichotomy but the mutual constitution of particular and universal conceptions that determine the ways in which the Holocaust can be remembered" (92) can be understood in a positive and productive way. If a social group prefers particularistic conceptions and another one favors instead a universal reading of the Holocaust, it does not mean that either is inherently wrong. On the contrary, they can start a dialogue in the same way as people related and non-related to the Holocaust should talk about their own kind of Holocaust memory. Non-canonical literary and artistic

⁶⁵ In *Writing and the Holocaust* (1988), Lang and others worried about the already decreasing number of witnesses; Levy and Sznajder wrote their article 14 years later.

works help this dialogue only if one agrees to focus on their aim more than on potential negative consequences.

Another valuable point in Levy and Sznajder's perspective regards emotions. Even if Holocaust memory and references are conveyed through the media, emotions are still present: "[t]he story of the Holocaust told by survivors to their children is different from what you learn from the movies or in school. But there is a fallacy in thinking that impersonal representations are somehow fake and not connected to our real emotions and real identities" (*ibidem* 90). This is the basis of Landsberg's concept of prosthetic memory. Contemporary representations have specificities and limits with respect to witnesses' oral and live accounts, yet the media offer the chance to engage with the Holocaust at the emotional level. A wider concept of Holocaust memory is necessary now that witnesses are few and it is the duty of their descendants and of non-related people to maintain and promote it. Broadening its borders does not mean to abandon emotions and the 'personal' link; similarly, it does not imply that a political approach interested in intergovernmental alliances and international agendas should be privileged.

Levy and Sznajder's words imply that Holocaust memory and the dialogue surrounding it should include people who did not experience it first-hand, for example young generations. An opening to other perspectives has positive consequences as it presupposes a dialogue between cultures with different histories that enables them to understand better each other's differences as well as similarities; consequently, specific histories may seem less differing by getting to know each other's past and the common condemning of mass killings. This acquired socio-cultural closeness is possible precisely by focusing on shared emotions, including those about past injustices, atrocities, and mass killings. Moreover, the focus on emotions avoids that the progressive approaching of people belonging to different cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds (also within the same state) be a process deriving from political agendas, or governments pursuing strategical advantages.

Levy and Sznajder are not alone in defending the idea that media representations of the Holocaust allow the presence of emotions, as Alison Landsberg sides with this view in theorizing what she calls 'prosthetic memory'. All of them think that it is necessary to take into consideration the characteristics of contemporary society when discussing memory;

Landsberg, however, focuses on the mass culture that shapes Western social collectivities⁶⁶ through mass media rather than political agendas.

Prosthetic memory is a “historically specific form of memory” that derives from modernity and mass culture and it is made possible thanks to the “advanced state of capitalism and its ensuing commodity culture” (Landsberg, *Prosthetic* 146, 18). Given its socio-economic origins, it crosses national borders like cosmopolitan memory. As for Holocaust memory, Landsberg claims that media are central because museums and films like the USHMM and *Schindler’s List* are mediators of memory enabling the acquisition of prosthetic memories.⁶⁷

Unlike many scholars, Landsberg considers capitalism-derived commodification in a positive way because it “is at the heart of mass cultural representations [and it] is precisely what makes images and narratives widely available, available to people who live in different places, come from different backgrounds, from different races and from different classes” (Landsberg, “Prosthetic” 149). Therefore, she considers “the commodification of memories through history films, television, museums and the Internet” (*ibidem* 145) as a new way “to imagine a relationship to memory that facilitates, rather than prevents, the formation of progressive political alliances and solidarities” (*ibidem*).

The positive idea of commodification can be understood by reflecting on Landsberg’s discussion of the origins of prosthetic memory, which can be traced back to the beginning of the XX century, when industrialization caused huge migrations towards industrial cities in the USA. As a consequence, there was “the rupture of generational ties, rendering the traditional modes for the transmission of cultural, ethnic, and racial memory” (*ibidem* 146),⁶⁸ both within families and in larger communities, “increasingly inadequate” (*ibidem*).

New modes to convey memory were necessary. In the same period, “the birth of the cinema and other technological innovations led to the emergence of a truly mass culture” (*ibidem* 145) and responded to the new need

by making possible an unprecedented circulation of images and narratives about the past. Thanks to these new technologies of memory on the one hand and commodification on the

⁶⁶ Landsberg makes reference to the case of the USA, but her reasonings can be applied to Western countries in general, given that capitalism is their common economic structure and considering the influencing role that the USA have in shaping Western popular culture since World War II.

⁶⁷ Landsberg thinks that the USHMM is an example of experiential site. She thinks that works like *Maus*, *Schindler’s List* and *The Pianist* represent “the ways in which the Holocaust circulates in American mass culture” (Landsberg, *Prosthetic* 23).

⁶⁸ The “rupture of generational ties” (Landsberg, *Prosthetic* 146) is also at the basis of Hirsch’s concept of postmemory.

other, *the kinds of memories that one has 'intimate', even experiential, access to would no longer be limited to the memories of events through which one actually lived.* (*ibidem* 146; my emphasis)

Landsberg calls these media-conveyed memories 'prosthetic memories' for specific reasons:

they are not 'authentic' or natural, but rather are derived from engagement with mediated representations (seeing a film, visiting a museum, watching a television show, using a CD-ROM). Second, like an artificial limb, these memories are actually worn on the body; these are sensuous memories produced by an experience of mass mediated representations. [...] Third, calling them 'prosthetic' signals their interchangeability and exchangeability [...]. [...] Finally, [...] these memories [are] prosthetic [because they are] usefu[l]; because they feel real they help to condition how an individual thinks about the world, and might be instrumental in generating empathy and articulating an ethical relation to the other. (*ibidem* 149)

The scholar contends that commodity culture should be seen also in a positive view, rather than merely in a negative one, because prosthetic memories are able to make the audience feel empathy; thus, these memories "pave the way for unexpected political alliances" (*ibidem*).

In Landsberg's view, films and other mass culture technologies are "technologies of memory" (Landsberg, *Prosthetic* 1) because they are able "to transport individuals through time and space" (*ibidem*), thus they are means to acquire knowledge through the 'experiential'. In the process of memory acquisition, there are three elements involved: the individual, the historical fact or period (remediated through mass culture technologies),⁶⁹ and "an experiential site such as a movie theater or museum" (*ibidem* 2).⁷⁰ These experiential sites are "*transferential spaces*" (*ibidem* 23; emphasis in original) that mass culture has provided the audience with and where

people might have an experience of events through which they did not live. In these transferential spaces people might gain access to processual, sensuously immersed knowledge. They might take on "prosthetic memories" as bodily symptoms which, on the one hand, afford

⁶⁹ Landsberg defines this remediated representation of the past "historical narrative" (*Prosthetic* 2).

⁷⁰ Landsberg narrates her own personal experience inside the museum because she thinks that it "illustrates the power of this experiential mode of historiography to produce prosthetic memories and new kinds of knowledge" (*Prosthetic* 137). While inside the USHMM, she heard a guard "reporting that there was smoke emanating from a vent above [them]" (*ibidem*), and she first "wondered whether [they] were being gassed" (*ibidem*) instead of thinking about a fire. In her words, "[t]his experience shows rather dramatically how the museum's transgression of the traditional exhibiting strategies—its blurring of the boundary between the spectator and the exhibit—might actually make vulnerable the bodies of its spectators. In other words, the absolutely irrational—that visitors could be gassed in the Holocaust Museum—seemed, if only for an instant, possible. It was momentarily conceivable that something as sinister as systematic genocide could take place through normal government channels, that even a public institution might not be safe. Of course, that was what happened during the Holocaust. To be in a position in which something absolutely unthinkable becomes, if only for an instant, imaginable might be as close as one could come to understanding the logic of the Holocaust" (*ibidem*).

anamnestic solidarity with the dead and, on the other, make available strategies of political engagement for the present and future. (*ibidem* 24)

Landsberg's idea of prosthetic memories is particularly useful herein. In her view, they "enable people to *feel* [...] *an engaged and experiential relationship to the past*. [...] Prosthetic memories are indeed 'personal' memories because they derive from engaged and experientially oriented encounters with technologies of memory" (*ibidem* 142; my emphasis). Prosthetic memories are available to all users of mass culture technologies: in other words, these 'personal' memories are not referred to a specific socio-ethnic group.

Prosthetic memories allow people to acquire memories of past facts, even traumatic ones, that go beyond cognitive knowledge of historical details because they presuppose an experiential mode of acquisition. This experiential character implies an involvement of the individual's emotions and body, which enable him or her to *feel* the memory. Although it is not the same of what Landsberg calls 'authentic' memory – the memory derived from living a fact – because it is 'added' afterwards, namely, it is prosthetic, the acquired memory is personal and with a potential for the collectivity because it can "change a person's consciousness[,] enable ethical thinking and [form] previously unimagined political alliances" (*ibidem* 143) as well as raising consciousness, which are the bases for social improvement.

The 'unimagined political alliances' to which Landsberg refers are not the same that Levy and Sznajder claim in connection with cosmopolitan memory. Landsberg's idea is set against a less institutionalized background where individuals who acquire prosthetic memories and develop an empathic stance⁷¹ can have an impact and cause a social change precisely because they are influenced by prosthetic memories. The political alliances in Levy and Sznajder's theses involve national governments and international organizations, whose engagement with Holocaust memory and commemoration is far from empathy and has to do with their own agendas.

However, the two theories share two assumptions. Firstly, engagement with the past is useful to promote human rights and respect between socio-cultural groups (living in different countries or within the same one); and, secondly, individuals are influenced by the official commemoration practices adopted by the country they live in. For children, the acquisition of a cognitive and emotional Holocaust memory in an active sense is important at the social, historical, and ethical level, because it is necessary to preserve Holocaust memory within

⁷¹ In Landsberg's analysis of *Blade Runner*, empathy is learned: "Empathy, the film concludes, is not an inherently human trait, and it comes naturally to no one. Empathy is learned and acquired through work and knowledge" (*Prosthetic* 47).

future generations and it can be instrumental in children's development of an informed and respectful relationships with others. This is why Holocaust memory will be discussed in terms of attitude in chapter 3.

Prosthetic memories acquired by people who did not live directly through the historical facts are considered in a positive way by Landsberg and they can be an example of what I will later define 'positive appropriation' (see ch. 2.3). Far from claiming that they are "inherently positive or progressive" (Landsberg, *Prosthetic* 154; emphasis in original), the scholar calls for the recognition of their potential for social change in that they can cause empathy.⁷² In other words, in Landsberg's approach prosthetic memories are considered for their potential positive consequences rather than the risks deriving from mass cultural representations of historical traumas like the Holocaust.⁷³ Thus, it could be said that prosthetic memories highlight the positive aim that mass cultural products may have.

According to Landsberg, the individual's "desire [...] to be part of history" (*ibidem*) and willingness to acquire prosthetic memories by going to the cinema or to a museum should be understood optimistically. It could be said that, at least, his or her engagement with mediators of memory does not necessarily mean using history in a self-centered way or hiding appropriation aims. The individual who purchases a film ticket may feel a real interest in the past, far from issues of "envy" (Baer and Baer 86),⁷⁴ or at least he or she may develop a real, personal connection to it after watching the film.

An example will make this clearer. If a person watches a TV series like *Rosewood* for no particular reason apart from spending some free time, the fact that the mass cultural product is able to make the audience 'see through another's eyes' has the potential to make the unengaged viewer a more socially and historically aware subject who empathizes with the characters (Landsberg, *Prosthetic* 148). This parallels the opportunity that individuals have to

⁷² Obviously, it is intended a positive social change.

⁷³ An example of Landsberg's perspective is provided by her comments on the potential of *Schindler's List* (see *Prosthetic* 111-39).

⁷⁴ In "Postmemory Envy?" (2003), Elizabeth and Hester Baer, respectively mother and daughter, discuss their own positionality in relation to Nanda Herbermann's *The Blessed Abyss: Inmate #6582 in Ravensbrück Concentration Camp for Women*, a "concentration camp memoir by a German, Catholic woman, imprisoned for resistance to the Nazis, who is also a distant relative of [the scholars]" (Baer and Baer 75). As scholars and distant relatives, Elizabeth and Hester discovered that their own approach and relationship to the work were "ambivalent" (*ibidem* 87) but also differed from each other: "Elizabeth's desire for authenticity and legitimacy as a Holocaust scholar informed her apprehension of Nanda Herbermann and her analysis of *The Blessed Abyss*. By contrast, Hester sought to disavow and problematize her relation to Herbermann as well as the discourse of authenticity and legitimacy constructed by Holocaust Studies, a position that informed her critical reception of Herbermann's memoir" (*ibidem* 87-88). The scholars later thought of "[t]his cycle of desire for and disavowal of identifications with Herbermann and her historical significance" (*ibidem* 88), of "this complex as a case of 'postmemory envy'" (*ibidem*). Therefore, 'postmemory envy' is "to desire to lay claim to the personal and historical traumas that have shaped the place from which the second generation speaks" (*ibidem* 89). See also Giglioli's ideas about 'trauma envy' in note 192.

become aware of their own initial self-centered position and to adopt a more responsible approach to the subject represented, in contrast with their initial motives to watch the TV series. Despite its weaknesses, Green's TV series *Holocaust* may have had the same consequences. Mass culture technologies are the means through which anyone, irrespective of his country and culture, can 'access' a representation of "what is intellectually at a great remove" (*ibidem* 47) in a mediated form. The same is true for historical facts that are geographically or temporally distant, or that are historically and traditionally considered relevant for and specific to a particular culture more than others: through prosthetic memories the audience can "learn to feel emotionally connected" (*ibidem*).

Levy and Sznajder propose a cosmopolitan memory that goes beyond national borders and that at the same time maintains country-related specificities. Similarly, Landsberg's prosthetic memory implies that this kind of memory is possible in many countries thanks to mass culture technologies, but the impact on the single individual is unpredictable because each one experiences prosthetic memories in his or her own way. Therefore, a personal component in experiencing and decoding prosthetic memories is always present. This is the reason why, in Landsberg's view, prosthetic memories commonly derive from shared experiences of media – such as watching a film with other people at the cinema – but are not collective memories.⁷⁵ The individual's own life experiences interact with prosthetic memories in the acquisition process, and, one may say, also in the kind of empathic response during the prosthetic experience and in the ethical engagement after the acquisition.

Prosthetic memories, like cosmopolitan memory, foreground the necessity to widen the group of people that is informed about the Holocaust at a cognitive level and also 'remembers' it in an active way. Indeed, widening the concept of Holocaust memory means not only to approve other perspectives and types of memory, including those of people who did not live through it, but it also implies to accept that Holocaust memory can be 'active'. Since they are able to promote "unexpected political alliances" (Landsberg, "Prosthetic" 149), it is implied that prosthetic memories are a kind of active memory in the same sense outlined by Erll and Rigney (see Erll and Rigney, "Introduction" 1-14).

What is the role of literature in promoting such memory? The active, socio-political consequences of prosthetic memories derive from an individual's empathic engagement with mediated representations of the past. In addition to Landsberg's mass cultural technologies

⁷⁵ See Landsberg: "Two people watching a film may each develop a prosthetic memory, but their prosthetic memories may not be identical. For each, the memories are inflected by the specificities of his or her other experiences and place in the world. Thus these memories are not exactly 'collective' in Halbwachs's sense" (*Prosthetic* 21).

like films and experiential museums, the same positive effects can be reached through literature, especially novels for children, regardless of the shared or individual character of the reading experience. For example, memory derived from children's historical fiction is active because it presupposes the adoption of a different and more informed attitude in relating with others (see ch. 3).

This kind of memory, which I call attitudinal postmemory, shares many features with prosthetic memories: it is acquired at a second stage through mediated representations, it 'feels real', and it promotes empathy in the young readers. However, a key point that makes it different from prosthetic memories is that it does not imply, or require, that readers identify with the characters. Empathy does not derive from identification, it is "a more complicated form of engagement [...] [that] ultimately compels [the reader] to take the necessary action to bring about social change" (Landsberg, *Prosthetic* 47).

Landsberg highlights the importance of empathy, but she also contends that

[w]ith the aid of mass cultural technologies, it becomes possible for a person to acquire memories that are not his or her "natural" or biological inheritance and thus to feel a sense of kinship with people who might otherwise seem very different.⁹¹ [...] Prosthetic memory [...] enables people to take on memories of the past, even to identify with people from the past, but it works also to emphasize their position in the present even as they take on the past [...]. (*ibidem* 22)

Landsberg establishes identification as a possibility, not as a constant. Nonetheless, it seems that she considers it as if it was a further step of empathy, but this is doubtful. Empathy presupposes a progressive approach of the reader-viewer to the characters he or she interacts with: he or she considers them as peers. The reader is at their same level, because they share the same position as human beings, and the deriving sense of peer-ness is enhanced by other extra-cultural factors, such as being the same age, or the relevance of friendship. The 'sense of kinship' to which Landsberg refers is possible precisely because of this sense of peer-ness and it is more authentic through empathy rather than identification, which presupposes the usurpation of another's place.⁷⁶

Peer-ness is what allows young readers and viewers to 'understand' the historical situation represented, even if it is temporally, culturally, or geographically distant from their own, and to side with the characters for whom they feel empathy. On the contrary, identification enacts a replacement: the reader-viewer collocates himself in the character's

⁷⁶ Usurpation does not lay the basis for a dialogue, but a monologue. If the reader-viewer must establish a personal relationship with the past, it means that he should participate in a dialogue.

own position, a situation that is not only impossible, especially in the case of the Holocaust, but also ethically debatable.⁷⁷

There are manifold issues arising from an identifying process. For example, if the reader-viewer is in the character's place, the original character is 'cancelled' or forgotten, and in case the reader-viewer would have acted differently, there might be a subtle accusation towards the character of having acted in the wrong way. Moreover, both the reader-viewer's and the character's own life and agency are devalued through identification. As far as historical fiction about the Holocaust is concerned, these issues cause problematic inferences about the choices of those who experienced it first-hand, regardless of the fact that the novel's plot is based on a specific true story or not.

One more drawback of identification is its limited time length. Since in prosthetic memories identification is possible through mediators (such as, for instance, movies), it lasts as long as the mediator (for instance the film) runs. After leaving the movie theater, people lack the incentive to move from their reality to the one represented. In case of historical traumas like the Holocaust and other mass killings, it is debatable that viewers can identify with people who lived through it in person, however engaged in the remediated past. Empathy involves a deeper personal engagement with the movie, it is based on shared emotions, and it is possible thanks to the recognition of the other as a peer. This personal involvement begins with the film but its long-time effects are independent of the film length.

Empathy is likely to influence children's present and future life in the way they approach others and the society in a more permanent way, given the young age when they are exposed to this kind of reading. The sense of peer-ness associated to empathy is critical for young readers because at their age they start acquiring relational skills, especially towards peers,⁷⁸ so works that urge a specific attitude when approaching others is useful in helping and advising them on the best practices. Good historical fiction has the potential to convey some basilar historical information about the Holocaust and to influence children's ethical

⁷⁷ Encouraging a kind of identification that places child readers in the characters' life-threatening position to make them 'understand' the Holocaust seems unethical because at the basis there is the idea that, unless one lived it through, the individual cannot 'understand' what it was like. Thus, privileging this identification so as to maintain Holocaust memory seems to 'condemn' children, rather than enabling a dialogue. The Holocaust cannot be fully 'understood' because contemporary individuals lack the first-hand experiential part (see ch. 2.3); the nearest approach one could aim to is to 'feel' it on an emotional level in addition to the cognitive knowledge of historical details. Landsberg's idea of "experiential sites" (*Prosthetic 2*) should be understood as related to emotions – including her own personal experience at the USHMM (see note 70).

⁷⁸ For example, see "Social and Emotional Development" (accessed 15.06.2021) and Trentacosta and Izard (accessed 15.06.2021).

growth through an empathic stance towards the characters; therefore, child readers may acquire a cognitive as well as a more personal and active memory.

In “Introduction: Cultural Memory and its Dynamics”, Erll and Rigney note that there has been a shift within Memory Studies towards an understanding of cultural memory “in more dynamic terms” (“Introduction” 2). The individual is collocated in a more relevant position in relation to the past and to the collectivity, since cultural memory is now understood “as an ongoing process of remembrance and forgetting in which individuals and groups continue to reconfigure their relationship to the past and hence reposition themselves in relation to established and emergent memory sites” (*ibidem*). Therefore, memory is based on “an active engagement with the past, [which is] performative rather than [...] reproductive. It is as much a matter of acting out a *relationship* to the past from a particular point in the present as it is a matter of preserving and retrieving earlier stories” (*ibidem*; my emphasis).

The individual’s active, engaged relationship with the past is central in this renewed concept of cultural memory because it enables the preservation of “canonical ‘memory sites’” (*ibidem*), since these can “only continue to operate as such as long as people continue to re-invest in them and use them as a point of reference” (*ibidem*). The individual’s relationship should be performed recurrently through “stories about the past” by “talking, reading, viewing, or commemorative rituals, [or the stories] ultimately die out in cultural terms, becoming obsolete or ‘inert’” (*ibidem*). However, these stories are not supposed to stay the same, as “they may be replaced or ‘over-written’ by new stories that speak more directly to latter-day concerns and are more relevant to latter-day identity formations” (*ibidem*; see also Rigney 345-56).

Thus, in this concept of cultural memory the individual’s own historical period is present through his or her personal-emotional component, which is always part of his or her active interaction with the past. What is performed is a kind of dialogue between the past and the present to which both elements contribute and neither of them usurps the place of the other. The ‘new stories’ to which Erll and Rigney refer are not to be intended as ‘replacements’ of already agreed historical truths, but as new ways of feeling history at a personal level. Therefore, empathy is possible thanks to these stories that connect contemporary individuals to the past. This is especially evident in literature, since “the textual medium is used to shape remembrance by paying attention to certain things rather than others, to structure information in certain ways, and to encourage readers to reflect on their own position in relation to the events presented” (Rigney 346). Through literature, readers are expected and invited to critically and emotionally engage with the represented past without

placing themselves in the characters' position: they maintain their own place in the present and the characters act in the remediated past. The relationship between the two derives from the sense of peer-ness.

In Erll and Rigney's view, unless there is the individual's active engagement, there cannot be cultural memory. Their claim could be re-elaborated by saying that to maintain the memory of the past, individuals must acquire an active kind of memory, which engages them both at the cognitive and the personal level. Individuals interacting actively and personally – at a personal level and from a personal point of view – with the past form an essential part of the triangular relationship comprising the past (history) and the media. Therefore, to preserve Holocaust memory it is necessary a personal engagement of the individual with the past and this interaction must be active – “performative” (Erll and Rigney, “Introduction” 2) – and it must take into consideration the individual's present.

Despite the fact that Erll and Rigney do not make reference to emotions, it is reasonable to think that they are comprised in their concept of active engagement with the past and, thus, in active memory. Since they are part of the individual, they are included in his or her personal component that engages with the represented past. It could be inferred that active memory implies and fosters a dialogical interaction with the past, while a cognitive-like memory can be more easily associated to a monologue.

When children are considered, it is even more necessary that memory be based on an active relationship that engages them also at the emotional level, and that a dialogue between their present and the past be sought. To make children ‘feel’ the past at the personal level, the engagement with it should go beyond the cognitive sphere of historical details in non-fiction works like textbooks⁷⁹ and it should make reference to situations of their present so as to enable them to productively interact and better ‘understand’ history. This means that they can dialogue with it and bridge the temporal distance by establishing connections between their own present and the remediated past.

The dialogue is enabled by media, like films and novels,⁸⁰ that, as discussed, act as mediators in the individual's interaction with the past. However, media “are more than merely passive and transparent conveyors of information [as they] play an active role in shaping our understanding of the past” (*ibidem* 3; see also Leavy, Kindle edition, ch. One); it is therefore

⁷⁹ The cognitive kind of memory could be seen as ‘passive’: it involves a personal effort in learning ‘cognitively’ dates and happenings of history, but not necessarily the individual's involvement on the emotional level. The presence of an emotional component is fundamental to maintain memory, and Hirsch's concept of postmemory will make this even clearer (see later in the chapter and ch. 2).

⁸⁰ For the relevance of literature in terms of maintaining cultural memory, see Rigney (345-56).

fundamental to acknowledge the potentials of different kinds of media, as well as to foresee possible strategies to remedy their specific limits. Regarding historical fiction about the Holocaust, advantages and disadvantages will be discussed in Part Two.

Landsberg's prosthetic memories are an example of active engagement with the past as well as Michael Rothberg's concept of multidirectional memory, since he attempts to link historical traumas by establishing a productive dialogue between different cultures (see ch. 2.1). Both prosthetic memory and multidirectional memory imply a conversation between seemingly apart realities,⁸¹ therefore these theories are instrumental in connecting Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory to the kind of active memory implied by attitudinal postmemory.

Postmemory can be seen in terms of active engagement with the past at the emotional level, not only for descendants (where the personal and emotional engagement is embedded in the kinship they have), but also for non-related people who interact with Holocaust memory. Hirsch progressively developed the concept of postmemory over two decades: she first used the term in a 1992 analysis of Art Spiegelman's *Maus*⁸² (see "An Interview", accessed 08.05.2021) and then she proposed her theory in a series of papers,⁸³ until she published the monograph *The Generation of Postmemory* in 2012.

Postmemory is part of the theories developed from the 1990s along the first of the two research lines proposed earlier, that is, the one focusing on the specific kind of Holocaust memory that descendants have. Two generations of descendants can be recognized so far, and the Holocaust memory they have differ from one another, for example in terms of perceptions and recurring themes. Henri Raczymow defined the second generation's memory as "memoire trouée" and as a "memory shot through with holes" (qtd. in Hirsch, "Mourning" 417), which hint at "the indirect and fragmentary nature of second-generation memory" (Hirsch, "Mourning" 417) and that is at the basis of Hirsch's definition of photographs as "leftovers, the fragmentary sources and building blocks, shot through with holes, of the work of postmemory" (*ibidem*). The second generation "grew up with the survivors and struggled against another world directly bequeathed to them in the ubiquitous shadow of the Holocaust" (Aarons and Berger 15).

⁸¹ In prosthetic memory, the dialogue is between the individual's present and the remediated past; in multidirectional memory, there is a dialogue between differing cultures.

⁸² The analysis is in "Family Pictures: *Maus*, Mourning, and Post-Memory" (1992).

⁸³ For example, see Hirsch's "Surviving Images: Holocaust Photographs and the Work of Postmemory" (2001).

Victoria Aarons and Alan L. Berger claim that third-generation descendants “must navigate with an inexact, approximate map, a broken narrative” (4) because they must ‘reassemble’ the past, meaning that they must connect what is left by crossing the “periphery of their consciousnesses” where “stories of the Holocaust have existed [...] as an outline casting remote shadows around the margins of their lives” (*ibidem*). Contrarily to the second generation, where the “shadow” (*ibidem* 15) of the Holocaust was clearly present over them, the witnesses’ grandchildren feel the presence of that shadow, but it is located more remotely. Theirs is “an attempt to capture memory and fill the ever-widening gap between those who directly suffered the events of the Holocaust and lived to recount their experiences and those for whom that particular history can only be imaginatively reconstructed from an approximation of that time and place, events excavated from the ‘shards’ of memories [...]” (*ibidem* 4). They are “witnesses by adoption” (Hartman qtd. in *ibidem* 15) and “act as literary detectives” because they “must go in active search of the stories from the past and the challenges to personal agency that they present” (*ibidem* 15), so their “bearing witness is a conscious, deliberately enacted choice” (*ibidem*). What they want to find out is their family history, but the reconstruction of its past is far from easy and linear as they “retriev[e] information mediated through their parents or other family members or must resort to research” (*ibidem* 17), so the information they get is always ‘filtered’ (see *ibidem* 15-34). At the same time, though, they want “to avoid the Holocaust and its victims from becoming abstractions, representative figures of suffering at an unbridgeable remove, [so they look] for specifics, for the particulars of experience” (*ibidem* 19).

Both generations are formed by “nonwitnesses” (*ibidem* 42) because, in Gary Weissman’s words, they are “haunted not by the traumatic impact of the Holocaust, but by its absence” (Weissman qtd. in *ibidem* 45), therefore their trauma “extends [...] in the absence of conscious or unconscious perception of the reality of the experience” (Aarons and Berger 45). Despite the specificities of each generation’s memory, witnesses’ descendants all share the uncomfortable position to “carry the burden of Holocaust history [and] write from a memory vacuum, from the liminal space constituted by the conscious awareness of a history from which one has been materially but not *culturally* excluded” (*ibidem*; my emphasis).⁸⁴

⁸⁴ An ‘in-between’ generation, called the 1.5 generation by Suleiman, comprises “child survivors of the Holocaust” (Suleiman 277) and it is apart from the others because their “shared experience is that of premature bewilderment and helplessness” (*ibidem*) as they were not old enough to experience the situation with an adult understanding, so their trauma has specific characteristics that differ from the generation of older witnesses; for example, “their ‘premature bewilderment’ was often accompanied by premature aging, having to act as an adult while still a child” (*ibidem*).

Nonetheless, postmemory crosses the borders given by the cultural link and the direct kinship, since Hirsch brings together both descendants and other individuals belonging to the same age-generation. Of course, there are basilar, unalienable differences between the latter's postmemory and the one inherited by descendants, to whom Hirsch refers as the "*literal second generation*" (Hirsch, *Generation* 34; emphasis in original). However, the main point of interest of the concept is that it encompasses both people with a direct relationship to the witnesses and individuals who do not have this link. They all make part of the postgeneration that is defined as the "generation after" (*ibidem* 4), whose postmemory is the "relationship that [it] bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before" (*ibidem*). As a consequence, there is a situation opposed to what was claimed back in the 1980s, when scholars contended that only witnesses could remember and talk about the Holocaust. Apart from the characteristics of one or the other group's postmemory, Hirsch implies that the main difference to acknowledge lies between the witnesses' and the postgeneration(s)'s memory of the Holocaust.⁸⁵ This is fundamental because it means that, regardless of the second and third generation's link based on a familial tie, the basic relationship that allows individuals to have Holocaust postmemory is a personal one based on emotions.⁸⁶

As it has been discussed, it is possible to talk about the individual's active engagement with the past if he or she is involved at the personal level and if his or her own present is in dialogue with the remediated and represented past. Postmemory could seem a kind of passive approach to history because Hirsch developed the concept by reflecting on the traumatic memory that the generation(s) born after the Holocaust inherit from their parents or in other ways. Precisely because the experiences that they remember "were transmitted to them" through "the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up" (*ibidem*), one may have the impression that postmemory only implies a passive acquisition of notions and 'family history knowledge'.

Even though there is a reception of memories, occurring in different modes for descendants and non-related people, postmemory is not inherently passive. As Landsberg claims, the individual is never a "passive consumer" (Landsberg, "Prosthetic" 150):

⁸⁵ Hirsch states that the concept of postmemory can be considered in relation to other historical traumas as "it may usefully describe other second-generation memories of cultural or collective traumatic events and experiences" ("Mourning" 54).

⁸⁶ For a more detailed discussion on the role of emotions in postmemory, see chapter 3.

Stuart Hall, John Fiske and others have emphasised the point that meaning-making occurs at two moments in the mass communication process – both at production and reception, at moments of ‘encoding’ and ‘decoding’.¹⁸ Hall, in particular, emphasises that there are always several possible readings of a given cultural text [...].¹⁹ [R]eception is conditioned by and mediated through the cultural, political and social worlds of the consumers. (*ibidem* 150-51)

In postmemory, too, there is always a form of engagement at the personal level. This is implied in the same definition provided by Hirsch: the scholar describes postmemory as a relationship, thus it can be considered as a “connection to the past” (“An Interview”, accessed 08.05.2021) that, in Hirsch’s definition, “is mediated not by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation” (*ibidem*). In other words, postmemory is the specific kind of relational memory retained by postgenerations, a memory with which they interact and that they re-elaborate through “imaginative investment” (Hirsch, *Generation 4*).

Imaginative investment, projection, and creation are forms of active engagements with the inherited or acquired traumatic memories because “[p]ostmemorial work [...] strives to reactivate and re-embody more distant political and cultural memorial structures by reinvesting them with resonant individual and familial forms of mediation and aesthetic expression” (*ibidem* 33). According to Hirsch, the Holocaust has severed the usual structure of embodied memory transmission, traditionally passed on by elder generations to younger ones within the community or the family. The traumatic losses of the Holocaust have made this impossible. Thus, the main point of postmemory ‘to reactivate and re-embody’ can be understood as to give new means of expression and ‘life’ to memories by making them alive in postgenerations. To make these memories alive – ‘resonant’ – it could be claimed that they must dialogue with the postgeneration’s present, especially in the case of non-related people. Otherwise, they will remain acquired memories without being really ‘felt’ by the individuals.

Following the above reflections, one may say that as far as the descendants are concerned, the active involvement with inherited memory is evident in the artistic works they have produced: there, family past and their own contribution are blended together. The personal engagement – the “imaginative investment” to which Hirsch refers (Hirsch, *Generation 4*) – consists of their re-elaboration of the inherited memory. For non-related individuals, the personal engagement is the imaginative and emotional investment they use (for example, empathy) to integrate that memory into the ones they already have and, thus, into their lives.

Since postmemory’s “connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation” (Hirsch, “Mourning” 54) and it presupposes an “affective link to the past” (Hirsch, *Generation 33*), in Hirsch’s

perspective the concept is opposed to history, which lacks this “deep personal connection” (Hirsch, “Mourning” 54). It could also be added that it is different from a merely cognitive memory based on recollection of data and historically accurate details. Moreover, mass culture mediators of memory can be accepted as a means of postmemory transmission since Hirsch claims that postmemory “is powerfully mediated by technologies like literature, photography, and testimony” (Hirsch, *Generation* 33).

In Hirsch’s view, the family as structure and in particular the “familial gaze” (*ibidem* 35) enable the re-activation and re-embodiment of memories through photographs, both in descendants and non-related people. While discussing *Maus*, the scholar claims that “the language of family can literally reactivate and re-embody an archival image whose subjects are, to most viewers, anonymous” (*ibidem* 34) and that

[the author’s] “adoption” of public, anonymous images into the family photo album finds its counterpart in the pervasive use of private, familial images and objects in institutions of public display—museums and memorials like the Tower of Faces in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum or certain exhibits in the Museum of Jewish Heritage in New York—which thus construct every visitor as a familial subject. This fluidity [...] is made possible by the power of the idea of family, by the pervasiveness of the familial gaze, and by the forms of mutual recognition that define family images and narratives. (*ibidem* 34-35)

Therefore, public and private are blended thanks to the concept of family. An approach based on ‘familial gaze’ is possible not only to descendants: it is a mode of seeing, of approaching Holocaust memory, based on affect. Thus, in more general terms, it could be said that the relationship between postmemorial individuals and the past is based on emotions.

This view deletes cultural, ethnic, and religious differentiations as well as generational distance: since private images at the USHMM “construct every visitor as a familial subject” (*ibidem* 35), non-related people are ‘adopted’ into the narrative told in the museum. From another perspective, visitors are urged to recognize that the photos in the museum portray human beings like their own relatives, or themselves, in their photo albums.⁸⁷ This process of crossing borders and temporal distances is possible only if the personal-emotional component is called upon. Once again, it is evident that postmemory involves a kind of active engagement with the past. As it will be further discussed in the following chapters, historical fiction about the Holocaust functions in the same way because it is based on shared emotions between characters and child readers, regardless of their specific historical-temporal, socio-cultural, ethnical, or religious belonging.

⁸⁷ For a discussion of Hirsch’s concept of postmemory in relation to emotions and an inclusive idea of memory, see ch. 3.

What is common between the descendants' and the non-related people's postmemory is the affiliative, emotional, and personal component that constitutes an active engagement with the past they have access to, either by a familial or an acquired personal relationship. Thus, active engagement with the past and the central role of emotions are the recurring characteristics in the theories about memory formulated by Landsberg, Erll and Rigney, Rothberg, and Hirsch. The presence of an active stance and an emotional involvement implies that the individual develops some kind of personal relationship with the past, which is what historical fiction for children about the Holocaust should aim to construct through attitudinal postmemory (see ch. 3). However, before focusing on this kind of literary production, there are a number of issues to discuss or examine more in depth: for example, what the term Holocaust refers to; positionality and appropriation; 'right' to represent and abuse. It is necessary to delve into these concepts to better understand the inherent (or perceived) restrictions that are at work when non-related authors write novels of historical fiction about the Holocaust, while issues of simplification and genre expectations will be discussed in Part Two.

Chapter 2

Key Issues in Holocaust Representation: Terminology, Forms and Genres, Authorship

The progressive diffusion of information about the Holocaust was – and still is – aimed at expanding knowledge as well as remembrance among the wider society. Today, public commemoration practices are backed up by national governments: 34 countries have been accepted as members in the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA),⁸⁸ whose membership presupposes applicant countries to meet a series of requirements; among these, the local government must ensure that “[a] Holocaust Memorial Day (on January 27, or another date chosen by the applicant country), will be established” (“Membership”, accessed 04.10.2021). Holocaust teaching in secondary schools is compulsory in various states: for example, in the UK it has been mandatory since 1991, in conjunction with the introduction of the first National Curriculum (see Foster et al. 7); in the USA, in 2020, 16 states had Holocaust education mandatory in schools (California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Rhode Island, Texas, Virginia), while Pennsylvania and Washington were “[s]tates [e]ncouraging Holocaust Education” (“U.S. States”, accessed 04.10.2021). In Australia, Holocaust teaching has become compulsory in 2020 for students aged 14-16 in the state of Victoria (see “Holocaust education”, accessed 30.10.2021; see also “Studying the Holocaust”, accessed 30.10.2021). Despite the fact that public commemoration and Holocaust education are positive advancements for both acknowledging and remembrance, today the diffusion of this subject has also brought serious criticism for a negative trend which might be called an ‘obsession’ with the Holocaust, and which is evidenced by the manifold cultural products related to it, sometimes kitsch and disrespectful.⁸⁹

As anticipated, following the Eichmann’s trial, the media have been part of the opening process since its beginnings; in particular, the TV series *Holocaust* (1978) is generally acknowledged as the starting point of such a diffusion, as well as decisive in

⁸⁸ Formerly known as Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research (ITF), the IHRA’s goal is “to uphold the commitments to the 2000 Stockholm Declaration” (“About Us”, accessed 04.10.2021) by “unit[ing] governments and experts to strengthen, advance and promote Holocaust education, research and remembrance. [...] Today the IHRA’s membership consists of 34 member countries, each of whom recognizes that international political coordination is imperative to strengthen the moral commitment of societies and to combat growing Holocaust denial and antisemitism” (*ibidem*). The IHRA’s areas of intervention are both national and international, since through data and knowledge of its experts it “supports policymakers and educational multipliers in their efforts to develop effective curricula, and it informs government officials and NGOs active in global initiatives for genocide prevention” (*ibidem*).

⁸⁹ For a discussion of this kind of production, see for example Finkelstein’s monograph *The Holocaust Industry* (2000).

promoting the use of the term *Holocaust* to refer to the Nazi genocide (see Foster et al. 9). Literary scholarship about the Holocaust and its artistic re-elaborations, particularly in the literary area, have addressed the problem of the naming of the historical fact.⁹⁰ Undoubtedly, naming is just one of many issues deriving from the increasing number of people involved in debating, producing, and sharing of knowledge about the Holocaust, an inevitable consequence of the dissemination and ‘massification’ process. In this dissertation, in addition to naming (how to refer to the Holocaust), specific attention will be given to two more key issues: who can represent the Holocaust in artistic form as well as who can remember it; and how to represent the Holocaust in terms of forms and genres. These questions will be discussed in the following paragraphs, starting from naming and defining the Holocaust.

2.1 How to Refer to the Holocaust

While reading scholarly criticism about Holocaust Studies or Holocaust literature, it is very likely to bump into the complexity of how to refer to the Holocaust at the linguistic level. There are four terms usually discussed as more or less apt to ‘define’ this historical fact. These are *Shoah*, *Churban*, Event, and, of course, Holocaust. They have been and are used by scholars according to their own personal considerations regarding the Nazi genocide, in relation to the uniqueness of the Holocaust tragedy in history, its victims’ point of view, and its collocation within Jewish history.

In the years immediately following World War II, there was not a specific term of common usage among the larger society to refer to the genocide of which Jewish people had been victims. In Western countries, what is now called Holocaust or *Shoah* was referred to through circumlocutions such as “the ‘catastrophe’ or the ‘disaster’ experienced by the Jews of Europe under Nazism” (Foster et al. 9; see also Young 83-89) by Jewish writers during the 1940s, where ‘catastrophe’ and ‘disaster’ could be considered as the English translation of *Churban* and *Shoah*. Despite having similar meanings, *Churban* is a Yiddish term originally referring to the historical destruction of the First and the Second temple, therefore it has a precisely defined semantics; on the contrary, *Shoah* is a Hebrew word with a more general meaning, which will be further discussed later in this chapter.

As James E. Young points out,

⁹⁰ For example, see Lang’s *Writing and the Holocaust* (1988), Young’s *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust* (1988), and Kokkola’s *Representing the Holocaust in Children’s Literature* (2009).

unlike English or Armenian cultural lexicons, [...] Jewish tradition already contained not only a set of possible precedents and terms like *churban* or *sho'ah* by which to know the latest destruction, but also ritual days of lament, during which all catastrophes—past, present, and future—are recalled at once. [...] Upon sharing the same name, each event is automatically grasped in light of its namesake. (85)

Therefore, the use of *Churban* to refer to what was going on in Europe in the 1940s placed the European context into a history of destructions and community grief, in relation to which the Nazi genocide could be ‘framed’ and ‘understood’ (*ibidem* 83-89).

However, Labor Zionists did not approve the use of *Churban* to refer to the mass killing, even in the form “third *churban*” (*ibidem* 86). Two main reasons supported their opposition: firstly, they believed that the situation and the facts unfolding in Europe were unprecedented and, therefore, incomparable; secondly, they were critical of the word’s original semantics specifically referring to religious matters. Because of its etymology, the term could be placed in “the divine scheme of sin and retribution that explained every *churban*” (*ibidem*) also when referring to the European mass killing, because the use of the very same word directly posed it within a series of previous historical events defined in the same way. Following this reasoning, the use of *Churban* could sound disrespectful towards the sufferers, since it might seem that there was a sort of cause-and-effect process at stake, and its use risked to “level [Holocaust] significance and to deny its historical and political uniqueness” (*ibidem*), which was precisely the opposite of what writers wanted to highlight by writing about it in the 1940s.

Instead of *Churban*, then, Labor Zionists preferred the word *Shoah*. In 1942, a conference of four hundred rabbis stated that “‘the Sho'ah that European Jewry was undergoing was without precedent in history’” (qtd. in Young 86) and many others used the same term to denounce the mass killing and the persecutions in Europe.⁹¹ Although *Shoah* had implicit religious references like *Churban*, specifically to “the Deuteronomic concepts of divine retribution and judgment” (Young 86), it was “a figure that would mark events as part of Jewish history even as it avoided comparisons with specific precedents created in such a trope” (*ibidem*).⁹² This is especially due to Israelian scholars who studied and emphasized “its

⁹¹ Young proposes the following examples: “Uriel Tal has thus cited a collection of eyewitness reports on the mass killings published in Hebrew under the title *Sho'at Yehudei Polin* (*sho'ah* of Polish Jews) in 1940. Other early references to *sho'ah* in this context include that by poet Shaul Tchernikowsky in his paper ‘The Command of the Horrible *Sho'ah* That Is Coming over Us,’ delivered at a conference of Hebrew writers and poets gathered in the Jewish Agency offices in Jerusalem in 1942 expressly to address the European catastrophe. [...] And in 1943, the historian Benzion Dinur ‘stated that the *Sho'ah* . . . symbolized the uniqueness of the history of the Jewish people among the nations’” (Young 86).

⁹² Young adds: “For these early writers, the Hebrew term *sho'ah* thus reverberated both the destruction of Israel by surrounding nations (Isa. 6:11, 10:3, 47:11 and Zeph. 1:15) and the humiliation of Babylon, echoes

roots of desolation and metaphysical doubt” (*ibidem*) rather than its connections to sin. In other words, since *Shoah* had a more generic meaning like “wasteland” (Kokkola, *Representing* 5), it allowed space for new meanings and could be more easily ‘adapted’ to refer to what was going on in Europe than *Churban* (see Young 86). Today, *Shoah* is the second most common term to refer to the Nazi genocide, the first being Holocaust (see Kokkola, *Representing* 5), and it is the preferred term in some socio-cultural contexts, such as the Francophone world (see Foster et al. 10).⁹³

Another word to refer to the Nazi genocide, used by first-hand witness Elie Wiesel, is Event (with capital letter). As David G. Roskies recalls: “[t]he universality of the Holocaust,’ writes Wiesel in his oracular mode, ‘lies in its uniqueness: the Event is essentially Jewish, yet its interpretation is universal” (188).⁹⁴ Event is a noun that, in its common meaning of “a thing that happens, especially something important” (“event”, accessed 15.04.2021), reiterates the factual nature of the Nazi genocide, whose magnitude and severity is visually conveyed by the capital letter, very much like what happens with the term Holocaust. Unlike *Churban* and *Shoah*, however, it avoids any etymologically problematic religious references and potential misinterpretations linked to moral. Despite this, it is not widely used. A reason might be that it is a common, generic name, thus it might be hard to discern what the speaker is referring to without a further contextualization, especially for non-Jewish individuals. Moreover, this problem is intensified if the debate is an oral rather than a written one, since in the latter case the capital letter gives a fundamental hint to understand its referent. In addition to this, *event* is used in the entertainment world today, so the absence of a clear reference to the capital letter might disrespectfully downgrade the Holocaust to this sphere.

From the 1950s until the end of the 1970s, *Churban* and *Shoah* were often used to refer to the Nazi genocide. Outside the Jewish tradition, though, at the end of the war there was not an already existing word in English that could be borrowed and specifically used to refer to it. As Young notes, “English-speaking writers and historians who perceived these events separately from their World War II context were moved to adopt a name by which events would be known in their particularity” (87). The term Holocaust was introduced only at the end of the 1950s, between 1957 and 1959 (see *ibidem*), and today it is the most widely used term at the international level.

consistent with the Zionists' view of both the Jews' general situation in the *galut* and their specific circumstances during the war” (86).

⁹³ Knowing this, it comes as no surprise that Claude Lanzmann entitled his nine-hour documentary *Shoah*.

⁹⁴ This term is also adopted by Roskies himself when stating that “[f]or Wiesel, all prior writing on the Holocaust, presumably including his own, merely underscored the mystery, the unknowability, of the Event” (Roskies 188).

However, its widespread use began only around the end of the 1970s (Foster et al. 7-11; see also Young 83-89). This happened not by chance: as anticipated, it was in that period that the TV series *Holocaust* was released (1978), a fact that brought the Holocaust into the domestic space of the wider society once again, after the 1961 radio and television broadcasting of the infamous Eichmann's trial. Unsurprisingly, the TV series offered an additional incentive to make the term accepted internationally,⁹⁵ after it had been included in the subject catalogue at the Library of Congress in the form 'Holocaust, Jewish (1939–1945)' a few years before (see Roskies 158).⁹⁶

Despite its common use and acceptance, there are still many issues that complicate the usage of the term Holocaust, for example regarding its etymology, its misuse in other contexts, and the victims it refers to. As Lydia Kokkola explains, the term Holocaust has two possible origins. On the one hand, it may come from the Septuagint in the Old Testament in its ancient Greek version, where *holokaustoma* can be understood as meaning "totally consumed by fire" (Kokkola, *Representing* 4) since it is a compound name made of *holos*, 'whole', and *caustos*, 'burnt'. On the other hand, the English word may come from the translation into Greek of the Hebrew word *olah*, "which refers to the type of ritual sacrifice that was totally burned" (*ibidem*). Alvin Rosenfeld explains that "the addition of the definite article to the term emphasizes the event and, more importantly, an epoch that is determined by the event" (*ibidem*). The capital letter has the double purpose of distinguishing the Nazi

⁹⁵ At least, in the Western world. See for example Foster, et al.: "In the generation since [the TV series], the term 'the Holocaust' has become ubiquitous in contemporary British society and, indeed, throughout much of the English speaking (sic) world" (9). According to Roskies, it took one more decade before the term Holocaust became widely diffused: for him, the collapse of the Soviet Union was a necessary step that allowed the 1990s to be the decade when "all public memory of the mass murder of the Jews consolidated around a single loan-word, 'Holocaust'" (Roskies 195).

⁹⁶ In 1968, the wording 'Holocaust, Jewish (1939–1945)' was used to refer to works about the subject matter, but in 1995, after questions about "both the specific time span of the Holocaust and the use of the qualifier 'Jewish'" (Roskies 157), there was a public survey regarding whether option would be the best heading for the books. The USHMM was among the respondents, and it organized a conference to discuss the eight options available. These were Holocaust, Jewish (1939–1945); Holocaust, 1939–1945; Holocaust, 1933–1945; Holocaust; Holocaust (Nazi genocide); Jewish Holocaust, 1939–1945; Jewish Holocaust, 1933–1945; Jewish Holocaust. As Roskies continues: "The first question debated was the accuracy and even necessity of the dates. Although historians have argued that the Holocaust 'began' with the Nazi seizure of power on January 30, 1933, when Adolf Hitler was sworn in as chancellor of the German Republic, options [Holocaust, 1933–1945] and [Jewish Holocaust, 1933–1945] were challenged because the events of the period 1933–1939 were the antecedents of the Holocaust, not the Holocaust itself. Appending any dates, one respondent objected, implied that there could be other 'Jewish holocausts.' Did not the very qualifier 'Jewish' obviate the need for a chronology? No, it did not, for insofar as 'Holocaust, Jewish' was an 'event' heading and a subset of the broader term 'World War,' it required that dates be provided; it followed, therefore, that the corresponding dates of the Second World War were the most logical choice. The second point of contention was the use of a qualifier. [...] There were compelling arguments [...] in favor of retaining the qualifier 'Jewish.' It was likely that, in the future, 'holocaust,' whether upper or lower case, would be applied more broadly to describe atrocities against other ethnic groups. 'Jewish' clearly identified the heading for the general public. In the final analysis, the seven alternative headings were rejected and the original subject heading, 'Holocaust, Jewish (1939–1945)' was upheld as being at once the most inclusive, because universally recognized, and the most exclusive" (157-58).

genocide from other contexts of use of the term (without the capital letter), and of respecting the magnitude and severity of the historical fact, as happens with Event.

According to Holocaust scholar Berel Lang, the English term Holocaust had a shift in meaning, moving from “literally referring to a religious burnt offering to becoming a metaphor for sacrifice generally, although the association with fire remained” (*ibidem*). Therefore, the word shares an inherently religious etymological origin together with *Shoah* and *Churban*, although these lack the original meaning of ‘sacrifice’, which indeed makes the term Holocaust ““potentially disturbing”” (Lawson qtd. in Foster et al. 9). This is because it may “evoke a sense of holiness, of good coming from atrocity, of meaning and of value in the systematic destruction of specific groups of people” (Kokkola, *Representing* 4-5); consequently, its etymological semantics make the word problematic because it might be interpreted with a similar meaning even today – a perspective totally untrue and unethical.

The use of the term Holocaust is potentially downgrading, too, since it is used also in other contexts in a trivialized form, for instance to describe a sport defeat (see *ibidem* 4). Clearly, using the word without the capital letter mines the severity of meaning it has when associated to the Nazi genocide. Holocaust witness Elie Wiesel strongly influenced the wider acceptance of the word Holocaust to refer to the historical fact, but later on he regretted its common usage in a banal way (see *ibidem*). These linguistic issues signal and add to the difficulties of talking and writing about the Holocaust, because the potential of a language to represent reality is often perceived as insufficient, ambiguous, or predetermined (see *ibidem* 15-46).

Apart from the problems deriving from its etymology and contexts of use, the third major issue concerning the term Holocaust refers to its socio-semantic level: What is precisely being referred to when the term Holocaust is used? In particular, the question is “whether [Holocaust] should apply only to the genocide of the Jews or more widely to include other Nazi victims” (Foster et al. 9). Young reports a difference in usage and perception of the word depending on the community of users, which is particularly interesting within the context of this dissertation, given that it will focus on authors who are not directly related to the Holocaust. The word Holocaust and, consequently, its appropriateness, has been perceived as problematic both by Jewish and non-Jewish historians, for different reasons. On the one hand, some Jewish scholars prefer avoiding this term because its religious etymology might lead to associate the destruction of European Jewry to a spiritual ‘meaning’, that is, to a

meaning framework in which the destruction is coupled with a ‘reason’ or ‘scope’.⁹⁷ This, of course, would be disrespectful towards the victims and witnesses, to say the least, and highly unethical. For example, Berel Lang prefers using ‘Nazi genocide’, which is highly accurate by referring “to the deliberate extermination of a people on the basis of their membership in that group” (Kokkola, *Representing* 4).⁹⁸ On the other hand, some non-Jewish historians have hesitated in using the word Holocaust because this would imply “to distinguish between the Jews killed ‘in the war’ and the other ‘war victims.’ [...] Because they did not perceive the difference between kinds of victims, [they] were unwilling to grant these events the independent ‘selfhood’ their own name [Holocaust] would give them” (Young 87) since, after the war, it was adopted to specifically define the mass killing of European Jewry.

Two perspectives are at stake here, the first inclusive and the latter exclusive. The inclusive definition considers the term as referring to Jewish victims as well as other victims of Nazi policies and persecution,⁹⁹ whereas in the exclusive viewpoint the term must specifically refer to the murder of Jewish people in Europe. This issue is not simply a matter of linguistic use, since the two contrasting perspectives are intensely felt and debated outside academia, where the discussion is highly politicised (see Foster et al. 9). On the contrary, within the academic environment scholars generally agree in using the term exclusively to refer to “‘the genocide of the Jews alone’” (Niewyk & Nicosia qtd. in Foster et al. 9).¹⁰⁰

The discussions going on outside the academic context are strictly linked to the issue of “uniqueness, universality and comparability of different victim group experiences under Nazism” (Foster et al. 9). This seems to be related to the wider audience’s common

⁹⁷ See for example Young: “Wary of the archaic Christian notion of a Jewish calvary in the Holocaust, many Jewish writers and theologians continue to resist this term altogether” (87).

⁹⁸ For references to Agamben and Steiner, see also Foster et al. 9. Kokkola, though, does not agree with Lang’s preference: given that the works she considers do not all focus on the Nazi genocide, it would be “inaccurate” (Kokkola, *Representing* 5) to refer to them as being about it. Also, see Roskies when discussing the wording to be used at the Library: “The first question debated was the accuracy and even necessity of the dates. [...] The second point of contention was the use of a qualifier. There was general consensus that to define the Holocaust as ‘Nazi genocide’ [...] was both confusing and offensive, for it could be read as suggesting that Nazis, not Jews, were the victims” (158). Apparently, Lang’s view is in contrast with these ones.

⁹⁹ As for Jewish people defined as such by Nazi policies, Michael Berenbaum explains that “[b]ecause the laws contained criminal provisions for noncompliance, the bureaucrats had the urgent task of spelling out what the words meant. Two basic Jewish categories were established. A full Jew was anyone with three Jewish grandparents. That definition was fairly simple. Defining part-Jews—Mischlinge (‘mongrels’)—was more difficult, but they were eventually divided into two classes. First-degree Mischlinge were people who had two Jewish grandparents but did not practice Judaism and did not have a Jewish spouse. Second-degree Mischlinge were those who had only one Jewish grandparent” (“Nürnberg Laws”, accessed 16.04.2021). Other victim groups were “Gypsies, Soviet citizens, Soviet refugees, Poles, other Slavs, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Catholic priests, homosexuals, handicapped, and Blacks” (Kokkola, *Representing* 5-6).

¹⁰⁰ As reported by Rosenfeld, “there is some ‘debate’ between ‘those who reserve the term ‘Holocaust’ specifically and exclusively for the Jewish victims of Nazism and those who opt for much wider inclusion of victim populations’” (Rosenfeld qtd. in Foster et al. 9).

perception of what the word Holocaust refers to. According to the UCL Centre for Holocaust Education 2009 research involving Holocaust teaching in UK secondary schools, the prevalent idea among teachers is that, when talking about the Holocaust, this refers not only to the persecution and murder of Jewish people, but also to the other victim groups targeted by the Nazis.¹⁰¹ This widespread interpretation is in open contrast with the widely accepted definition within academia as well as the explanations offered by the Imperial War Museum¹⁰² and the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust (see *ibidem* 10).¹⁰³

The first institution defines the Holocaust as follows:

Under the cover of the Second World War, for the sake of their ‘New Order’, the Nazis sought to destroy all the Jews of Europe. For the first time in history, industrial methods were used for the mass extermination of a whole people. Six million people were murdered, including 1,500,000 children. This event is called the Holocaust.

The Nazis enslaved and murdered millions of other people as well. Gypsies, people with physical and mental disabilities, Poles, Soviet Prisoners of War, trade unionists, political opponents, prisoners of conscience, homosexuals, and others were killed in vast numbers. (*ibidem* 10)

Similarly, the Trust provides this definition:

Between 1941 and 1945, the Nazis attempted to annihilate all of Europe’s Jews. This systematic and planned attempt to murder European Jewry is known as the Holocaust (The *Shoah* in Hebrew).

From the time they assumed power in 1933, the Nazis used propaganda, persecution, and legislation to deny human and civil rights to Jews. They used centuries of antisemitism as their foundation. By the end of the Holocaust, six million Jewish men, women and children had perished in ghettos, mass-shootings, in concentration camps and extermination camps. (*ibidem*)

Even though the first description acknowledges the presence of other victims, the main point to note here is that both clearly associate the Holocaust – as a planned mass killing – to European Jewish people only. Therefore, UK secondary school teachers’ commonly perceived idea of the term Holocaust as including other victims is in contrast with the official definitions offered by accredited and reliable institutions.

¹⁰¹ See Foster et al.: “the most commonly shared understanding of the Holocaust among teachers included, ‘the persecution and murder of a range of victims’” (10).

¹⁰² Opened in 2000, the Imperial War Museum in London, UK, has a permanent exhibition dedicated to the Holocaust (see “The Holocaust Galleries”, accessed 16.04.2021).

¹⁰³ It is responsible for organising the Memorial Day in the UK annually. According to Foster et al., The Imperial War Museum and the Trust offer the “institutional definitions of the Holocaust currently most significant within British society” (10), therefore it seems reasonable to propose them here, too.

This apparently paradoxical situation is not peculiar to the UK only, because there are general claims to widen the definition of the term Holocaust so as to include the other victims of the Nazi regime even though official entities posit the same idea of scholars and the above institutions. This means that, beyond UK borders, there are museums and other institutions responsible for spreading knowledge and understanding of the Holocaust that propose an exclusive definition, and at the same time they try to make people aware of the other victims' suffering (*ibidem* 11).

As for today, no consensus has been reached on a common definition,¹⁰⁴ thus each institution offers a personal variation of the exclusive definition of the term Holocaust, and such definition highly depends on the country's geopolitical situation, its role during the war, and its language. As a result, slight differences can be found as for the "framing of the perpetrators, the language used to describe their actions (including the separation of persecution from murder) and the time-frame these acts are posited within" (*ibidem* 10). What is sure, however, is that the 34 countries that are members of the IHRA must have agreed the Stockholm Declaration (2000) before being part of the organisation (see "Membership", accessed 04.10.2021).¹⁰⁵ This Declaration undoubtedly poses the terms Holocaust and *Shoah* as synonyms in stating that "[t]he Holocaust (*Shoah*) fundamentally challenged the foundations of civilization [and] [t]he unprecedented character of the Holocaust will always hold universal meaning" (the IHRA qtd. in Foster et al. 10). Thus, the IHRA too understands the term Holocaust in an exclusive way, given that *Shoah* is the Hebrew word preferred by Jewish exponents to refer to the mass killing of European Jewry.

After discussing the most common terms used to refer to the Nazi genocide and their relevant issues, it is important to remember that the wide use of the word Holocaust does not imply that this is the only term available at the international level to define it (see *ibidem*). It could be said that, since English is the language of international communication, the term Holocaust can be widely and quite easily 'recognized' by non-English speakers, but there are also country-specific terms to refer to the same historical facts and the historical period, each of which "tells us as much about the particular understanding of this period by the namers as it does about the events themselves" (Young 87). This might be especially true for extra-

¹⁰⁴ See Foster et al.: "despite supranational organisations like the European Union, United Nations and the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working [...] this has not resulted in a singular, one-size-fits-all definition of the Holocaust" (10).

¹⁰⁵ The UK and the USA joined in 1998, Italy in 1999, Ireland in 2011, Australia in 2019. For more information about the requirements that countries should meet to become members, see "Membership" (accessed 04.10.2021).

European countries, but there are also examples among European ones. For example, Russia commonly uses ‘Patriotic War’, the USA ‘World War II’, the Francophone world, as already noted, prefers *Shoah*, whereas in Germany it is common ‘Hitlertime’ (see *ibidem*) as well as¹⁰⁶ *Judenpolitik* (Nazi ‘Jewish policy’) and *Vernichtungspolitik* (‘policy/policies of annihilation’).

According to Monique Eckmann, the term Holocaust “‘cannot be easily transposed to other languages and other socio-historical contexts’” (Eckmann qtd. in Foster et al. 10). David G. Roskies seems to complain about the wide acceptance of the term because it is a loan from another language, and wonders why it was not opted for “an equivalent term from within the existing lexicon, such as Martyrdom, Destruction, Catastrophe, or even the Event” (Roskies 195). According to Roskies, using the same word in various cultural and linguistic contexts might bring about spelling difficulties, such as in the case of Russian, as well as the acceptance of a term that is not loaded with previous culturally specific meanings and that sounds “utterly foreign, ineffable, untouchable, exceptional” (*ibidem*), as in the case of Central and Eastern Europe.¹⁰⁷

The naming question remains a central one since, as Young states:

The differences among names also explain the great gulfs in understanding between different nations and people, reflecting disparate experiences of the period as well as the different shapes respective national mythologies and ideologies necessarily confer on events. *Every language’s name thus molds events in the image of its culture’s particular understanding of events*. Naming these events is thus inevitably to conceive of them, to constrain as well as to create conditions for acting on events. (87-88; my emphasis)

Therefore, two reflections can be foregrounded, each one being the other side of the same coin. Indeed, the country-specific terms in other languages can be seen as positive additions not only to the corpus of words to refer to the Holocaust, but also to the body of specific national (meaning cultural) views on the subject. Nonetheless, the same practice might be seen as a downside because, without careful thinking, naming what happened to the European Jewry during World War II could mean to position oneself in a superior place, as if judging and classifying the historical fact from a patronising pedestal. This might easily drift to improper appropriation of the Holocaust and, as a consequence, of the witnesses’ experiences,

¹⁰⁶ The following terms and translations into English are taken from Foster et al. 10.

¹⁰⁷ See Roskies: “Consider the challenge of spelling ‘holocaust’ in the Cyrillic alphabet: there is no Russian equivalent for the letter h; [...] yet here the h is rendered kh, which is both acceptable to the Russian ear and which echoes another Jewish loan-word, *khanukah*. More subtly, the diphthong au, equally impossible in Russian, is flattened into yet another o. [...] In many an East European capital, there would eventually be a museum dedicated to the HOLLOW-COST” (195).

of their memory, and of Holocaust knowledge.¹⁰⁸ Of course, this risk is a major topic within Holocaust Studies and Holocaust literature, because the appropriation of the Holocaust in an unethical process, which can manifest in many ramifications.

In the case of the Holocaust, appropriation can be considered a form of silencing imposed on those who are directly related to the historical fact.¹⁰⁹ There are many ways of silencing: one example is ‘romanticising’ historical truths in literary narratives, for instance by hinging the plot on a love story while historical facts are distorted, or moved aside, for the sake of romance.¹¹⁰ Another example is abusing the subject matter and its memory, for instance by proposing narratives that only make a side reference to the Holocaust without offering proper contextualization and more information to readers.¹¹¹ Another form of appropriation and abuse is the one embodied by Benjamin Wilkomirski’s and Mischa Defonseca’s fake memoirs,¹¹² which were presented as authentic ones at first and their authors

¹⁰⁸ Meaning, a respectful perspective that acknowledges Jewish victims and their suffering as well as the fact that there were other victims as well.

¹⁰⁹ That is, witnesses and their descendants.

¹¹⁰ For example, the novel *The Tattooist of Auschwitz* (2018) by Heather Morris, which is based on real people’s lives but, according to Jane Housham, it “glosses over the horrors of the concentration camps with sugary romance” (Housham, accessed 30.10.2021). The novel’s many historical inaccuracies and errors, like the use of penicillin, Dr Mengele’s cruel and vicious experiments, and a sexual relationship between a Nazi and a Jewish woman, have been presented by Wanda Witek-Malicka, who works at the Auschwitz Memorial Research Centre, in a broadside (see Flood, “Tattooist”, accessed 16.04.2021).

¹¹¹ As it will be seen in Part Two, Michael Morpurgo’s *Waiting for Anya* (1990) is a case in point.

¹¹² Benjamin Wilkomirski’s *Bruchstücke. Aus einer Kindheit 1939-48* (1995) was translated into English as *Fragments: Memories of a Wartime Childhood* in 1996 and it was believed to tell the story of its author’s traumatic childhood, since he claimed to be “born in Latvia [and that his] family was slaughtered in a massacre in Riga” (“Fragments”, accessed 01.09.2021), and that he was able to survive in the concentration camps. The memoir was an international success: it was “translated into 12 languages [and it] won the National Jewish Book Award in the US, the Jewish Quarterly Literary Prize in the UK, and the Prix de Mémoire de la Shoah in France” (*ibidem*). After being “hailed as a classic of Holocaust literature” (*ibidem*), in 1999 a journalist proved that it was a false account and that the author was Bruno Dössekker, who was born in 1941 near Berne, where his mother abandoned him at an orphanage. Then, he was adopted by the Dössekker family “and went to live in a relatively prosperous home in Zurich” (*ibidem*) where he “lived in comparative comfort [...] throughout the war” (*ibidem*). Some claim that it was the maternal abandonment that traumatized Bruno Dössekker as a child; allegedly, “he made up another even more tragic history to fill the one he had lost” (*ibidem*). A similar scandal involved Misha Defonseca’s false memoir *Misha: A Mémoire of the Holocaust Years* (1997) that was thought to be the autobiographical story of a six-year-old girl whose “Jewish parents were taken from their home by the Nazis, and [who] set off across Belgium, Germany and Poland to find them on foot, living on stolen scraps of food until she was adopted by a pack of wolves” (Flood, “Author”, accessed 30.10.2021). The work “was a huge bestseller” (*ibidem*), but in 2008 it was discovered that the author was Monique De Wael. Like Wilkomirski, she was not Jewish and her memoir had been “fabricated” (*ibidem*). These were not the first examples of fictional accounts or of scandals concerning literary works ‘about’ the Holocaust. Jerzy Kosinski’s *The Painted Bird*, a novel published in 1965, “was one of the first Holocaust stories to be first celebrated and then attacked as fictional” (Kirsch, accessed 30.10.2021) and it is claimed to have “set the pattern for the fake Holocaust story in several ways” (*ibidem*). Even though Kosinski “and his publisher deliberately blurred the line between [novel and autobiography], cultivating the idea that the experiences of the book’s unnamed child narrator were really Kosinski’s own” (*ibidem*), the Wilkomirski and Defonseca scandals hinged also upon the fact that both authors did not reveal that they were not Jewish to their publishers (see Vice 161). Wilkomirski continued to claim the truthfulness of his forged identity even after much evidence proved the opposite, while Kosinski “always insisted *The Painted Bird* was a novel, not an autobiography” (Kirsch, accessed 30.10.2021). Therefore, Wilkomirski’s and Defonseca’s false memoirs caused so much criticism also because the authors seemingly looted historical

claimed to be Holocaust witnesses. The most extreme form of appropriation and silencing is constituted by denial claims, which are obviously an assault on historical truth, witnesses, and their descendants.

These are only some forms that the appropriating process in relation to the Holocaust may acquire. The main focus of this dissertation will not be on denial forms, because there are other instances of appropriation that are interestingly linked to another major issue within Holocaust Studies, that is, authorship. In other words, who can remember the Holocaust? Who can write and speak about it? Even though these queries will be the focus of chapter 2.3, it is necessary to discuss them also in relation to naming, appropriation, and silencing.

Within and following the considerations regarding pros and cons of the terms used to refer to the Holocaust, one could say that two general forms of appropriation could be envisaged: the first one is at the level of nations and cultures, whereas the second one involves individual human beings and their position in relation to the Holocaust. As far as nations and cultures are concerned, an appropriating process is what might take place in Western countries with respect to the Holocaust, if this term is understood in the exclusive way, as previously discussed. Historically, the first words used – *Churban* and *Shoah* – to refer to what was unfolding in Europe during World War II were proposed by Jewish writers and then they became common within the Jewish culture and community. Therefore, one might claim that if Western societies use the term *Shoah*, it could be considered as an appropriation of the Jewish perspective,¹¹³ since *Shoah* defines the historical mass killing adopting the victims' point of view.¹¹⁴ In other words, Western cultures could be accused of appropriating a viewpoint they cannot really know and partake in, precisely because *Shoah* collocates the Nazi genocide within Jewish cultural history.¹¹⁵

truth to gain popularity and raise sales, although their behaviour might suggest that they are psychologically traumatized individuals for reasons other than the Holocaust (see "Fragments", accessed 01.09.2021; see also Flood, "Author", accessed 30.10.2021). Another similar case is Helen Darville's 1994 novel *The Hand that Signed the Paper* (see Vice 140-59).

¹¹³ See Young: "For as problematic as the theological implications underpinning *sho'ah* or *churban* may be, they are still more consonant with Jewish tradition than the resonances of sacrifice and burnt offering in 'holocaust.' The salient point here is that unlike the English term 'holocaust,' the terms *sho'ah* and *churban* figure these events in uniquely Jewish ways, which simultaneously preserve and create specifically Jewish understanding and memory of this period. And as the names for this period reflect what was already known about events, even before they happened, they will continue to create Jewish understanding and memory in future events as well" (87).

¹¹⁴ *Shoah* and *Churban* both "reject the notion of sacrifice, emphasise the Jewish victims, and also imply a sense of a turning point in history" (Kokkola, *Representing* 5), but they also focus only on the victims' point of view, failing to give an idea of what role the genocide had in the perverse aims of the perpetrators, as much as the term Holocaust (see *ibidem*).

¹¹⁵ On the use of different terms to think about and 'appropriate' the Holocaust in national terms, see for example Young, *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust* (83-89).

As a consequence, using *Shoah* might also be seen as an appropriation of an historical fact that is part of Jewish culture, by transferring it from this tradition into a more general Western historical culture. The main risks of this process are neglecting an essential contextualization within the Jewish culture, as well as a socio-historical framing into the European setting where it took place. Nonetheless, decontextualization and deterritorialization of the Holocaust are very common in contemporary society, as thoroughly demonstrate by Jeffrey C. Alexander's study on the uses and abuses of the mass killing within Western societies, also in establishing human rights.¹¹⁶ As the scholar contends in his sociological study, the Holocaust has become the symbol of radical evil, but in assuming this status, it "[has] been transformed into a less nationally bound, less temporally specific, and more universal drama" (Alexander, *Trauma* 62).

The previous reflections on the pros and cons of the main terms used to refer to the Holocaust could bring about a paradoxical situation and envisage a division of the society into Jewish and non-Jewish people and the terms they are supposed to use, depending on their culture and their perspective with respect to the Holocaust.¹¹⁷ In other words, if we consider this partition, the first group could use *Churban* and *Shoah* because they are words taken from within Jewish culture, whereas the latter group should adopt different words so as not to appropriate the Jewish language and perspective. At the same time, though, non-Jewish people might fall into being disrespectful by adopting terms in another language, because they

¹¹⁶ See Alexander in *Trauma: A Social Theory*: "The project of renaming, dramatizing, reifying, and ritualizing the Holocaust contributed to a moral remaking of the (post) modern (Western) world. The Holocaust story has been told and retold in response not only to emotional need but also to moral ambition" (62). See also *ibidem*: "The Holocaust came to be seen as the singular representation of the darkness of the twentieth century, the humbling lesson on which was erected postmodern doubt. Yet, this humbling and tragic lesson also opened up the possibility for judging present and future humankind by a new, more universal moral standard" (100).

¹¹⁷ Young discusses the question of the 'grammar' of reference when proposing the issue of uniqueness and scholar Yehuda Bauer's thought: "It is neither completely unique nor entirely precedented, Bauer concludes. The problem then becomes both the writers' and the readers', who are dependent on language and its implicit continuities for the means to represent discontinuity and uniqueness. Though many have suggested that the Holocaust writer's task has been to reconcile experiences with traditional Jewish beliefs and paradigms, one wonders how deliberate such a reconciliation can ever be. For merely by living and perceiving events in 'the Jewish grammar,' through a reflexive application of Jewish tropes, precedents, and paradigms, the writer locates events in a Jewish continuum, understands them in Jewish ways. In fact, given the reflexivity of such knowledge and understanding generated in traditional forms and language, *the problem may not be how to reconcile the Holocaust with Jewish figures and traditions so much as it is to know events outside of a Jewish grammar of being*" (Young 88-89; my emphasis). This seems particularly important and relevant: the inherent discontinuity of the Holocaust is usually perceived through the lens of a Jewish 'grammar', but it seems even more difficult to reflect on it through an 'external grammar', that is, a 'non-Jewish' one, following the word used in the main text. In any case, both 'grammars' should be deemed as methods to foster the memory of the Holocaust, even though this means mining a bit the distinctiveness of the historical fact when using words already existent prior to it, and thus charged with previous, different meanings. The opposite possibility, though, is much more troublesome: not speaking about the Holocaust because of a shortage of 'correct' terms, or words void of previous meanings, would imply a higher risk of forgetting.

would propose another perspective and, potentially, more problematics due to the words' etymology.¹¹⁸

Discussions about the most 'correct' term to use to refer to the Holocaust depending on the cultural context are at odds with the aim of expanding and promoting Holocaust knowledge and memory internationally and transculturally. This kind of debate seems to aim to distinguish terms allowed to Jewish people and other words allowed to non-Jewish people, even though the above aims consider Holocaust memory not only as part of Jewish cultural history, but also as 'belonging' to other nations as well. Daniel Levy and Natan Sznajder talk about a global memory of the Holocaust within the frame of what they call 'cosmopolitan memory':

Alongside nationally bounded memories a new form of memory emerges which we call 'cosmopolitan memory'. The study of collective memory usually considers these memory structures as being bound by tight social and political groups like the 'nation' or 'ethnos' [...]. What happens when an increasing number of people in Western mass-consumer societies no longer define themselves (exclusively) through the nation or their ethnic belonging? Can we imagine collective memories that transcend national and ethnic boundaries? [...]

We suggest that shared memories of the Holocaust [...] provide the foundations for a new cosmopolitan memory, a memory transcending ethnic and national boundaries.¹¹⁹ (87-88)

As it is known, Holocaust memory is pursued in many countries, by international organisations (the ONU and the IHRA come to mind),¹²⁰ and at an intergenerational and transnational level, so as to foster remembrance of what happened and, at the same time, promote human rights.¹²¹

Although Levy and Sznajder's cosmopolitan memory of the Holocaust has raised scepticism among some scholars,¹²² what seems most urgent to highlight here is the fact that focussing only on the 'belonging' of a word to a certain culture is in contrast with the supranational character that knowledge and memory of the historical fact has gradually assumed since the late 1970s. Moreover, even though the Holocaust will always be an anguishing and painful part of Jewish cultural history, it must be acknowledged that now it is

¹¹⁸ As it happens with the word *Holocaust*.

¹¹⁹ It is to be noted that both scholars consider the Holocaust as "the term used to describe the destruction of European Jewry by Nazi Germany between 1941 and 1945 [...]" (Levy and Sznajder 88).

¹²⁰ International organizations like the IHRA want to give "the memory of the Holocaust the format of a standardized transnational memory with a specific political agenda" (A. Assmann qtd. in Foster et al. 10).

¹²¹ Jeffrey C. Alexander dwells extensively on the use and abuse of the Holocaust by Western countries to theorise human rights (see Alexander, *Trauma* 6-96).

¹²² See Goldberg and Hazan, "Preface" x-xv: these scholars do not share Levy and Sznajder's idea of a cosmopolitan memory of the Holocaust, claiming that its memory is not really global, rather, it is still Western-centred. Peter Novick, one of the contributors to Goldberg and Hazan's volume, goes further in saying that a global memory of the Holocaust is "chimerical" (Novick, "The Holocaust" 47).

‘part’ of an acquired knowledge and memory within other cultures, too. Then, it could be said that the Holocaust has always had at least two perspectives – Jewish and non-Jewish, as it were. As a consequence, it sounds unproductive to look for just one ‘right’ term in one language to refer to the Holocaust.

If a respectful and acknowledging dialogue is sought, the Holocaust retains its severity, magnitude, and its being an historically true assault on human dignity in each diverse context, even though the various socio-cultural and historical viewpoints that form the basis onto which the Nazi genocide has been added are inherently different. Words and perspectives might differ, but the present dissertation is based on the idea that Jewish and non-Jewish cultures both refer to the same historical fact and, in doing so, they share a common aim: promoting Holocaust memory.¹²³ Within this framing, it is no longer a matter of searching for the most correct term to refer to the Holocaust, as it should be clear that one term and one language are not enough to comprise and convey all that the Holocaust was.

Since this writing will be about individuals more than cultures, it is perhaps more interesting to focus on the second typology of appropriation proposed earlier, the one concerning individuals and their position towards the Holocaust, which partly overlaps with the considerations about cultures. The previous division of the society into Jewish and non-Jewish people¹²⁴ could be mirrored here by considering people directly related to the Holocaust¹²⁵ and people who do not have any kind of direct relationship to it. In much the same way, from cultural-linguistic perspectives it is easy to step into the issue of Holocaust ‘belonging’, meaning who is entitled to remember and thus speak and write about it.

Each one of the discussed terms highlights a specific perspective on the Holocaust: *Churban* and *Shoah*¹²⁶ adopt the witnesses’ perspective (see Young 83-89; see also Kokkola, *Representing* 5), while Holocaust is used in an exclusive way to refer to the specific victim group of Jewish individuals, but it might also be seen as a case of appropriation-silencing.

¹²³ This does not mean that all theories about Holocaust memory are equally well accepted: Marianne Hirsch’s postmemory is commonly considered a touchstone, whereas Michael Rothberg’s multidirectional memory is contested among scholars in Israel (see Feldman, “The Child in Time”, Q&A session). The main point being highlighted here is that both groups could enter in dialogue on the common premise of their willing to foster Holocaust memory.

¹²⁴ The division is to be considered only in its usefulness to explain the issue of whom the Holocaust ‘belongs’ to and the relevant problematics concerning etymology.

¹²⁵ That is, victims, witnesses, and their descendants.

¹²⁶ It could be considered within this same reasoning also Event, since it has been proposed by a Holocaust witness.

Therefore, the question is: What is the most suitable term to be used by non-related individuals so as to appropriate neither the Jewish perspective nor the historical fact?¹²⁷

Following the pros and cons previously enunciated, it could be stated that non-related individuals should not use *Churban* and *Shoah* because they are from another language, they inherently express the point of view of direct witnesses, and they belong to another culture. However, if non-related individuals use the word *Shoah*¹²⁸ to refer to the mass killing, is this really an appropriation of the witnesses' viewpoint? Or is it a form of respect towards them and their perspective, since they opted for this term? If they used Holocaust, would this term be more offending, given its etymology, than a potential appropriation through the term *Shoah*? Which one is 'better'? Should they use another word altogether from their own language? What would be the risks about etymology and perspective, in this case? Certainly, the problem is not an easy one, and it could well be said that there is not just one correct answer.

Indeed, it is true that related individuals have a unique kind of access to the historical fact and, on these premises, it could be somewhat understandable to separate non-related individuals from them. However, when it comes to the linguistic use, it could be useful to stress that the supposed restrictions might be turned over by adopting a broader standpoint. *Churban* and *Shoah* will be taken as an example, but the same reasoning can be applied to a wider range of cases. These terms 'belong' to a specific language, but languages are mobile and intercultural connections bring about a constant renovation of semantics and pragmatics, also through linguistic borrowings. *Churban* and *Shoah* may originally 'belong' to a different culture as well but, much like linguistic borrowings, there are also cultural overlaps and adoptions, especially in a cosmopolitan world as it is now. Cultures, particularly Western ones, are no longer monolithic today: they are object of continuous and multiple cultural exchanges.¹²⁹ Also, *Churban* and *Shoah* express witnesses' point of view; however, if non-related individuals use them, it does not necessarily mean that they are improperly appropriating their perspective, nor that they want to silence them.

Appropriation and silencing might remind literary scholars of postcolonial literature studies, since the former colonies of the British Empire suffered an appropriation and

¹²⁷ Depending on the culture considered, there is always a 'foreign' perspective on a word whose origin belongs to a context different from the user's one.

¹²⁸ Or Event.

¹²⁹ Especially in Western and developed countries.

silencing process at the geo-political and socio-literary level.¹³⁰ Authors from these countries had the chance to reclaim and regain their voice only after decolonization, after being oppressed by the colonizer's one for decades or even centuries. Postcolonial studies assume a three-phased process to explain the development of postcolonial literature. For the purpose of this discussion, it might prove useful to briefly reconsider these three stages of literary production – copy, rejection (taboo), and totem, as outlined by Silvia Albertazzi in *La Letteratura post-coloniale. Dall'Impero alla World Literature*. In the copy phase, colonized people produce derivative works, highly based on the Western canon; then, the same models are totally rejected and become like the Freudian taboo (Albertazzi 45-53). In the third phase, the Western literary canon is seen as a totem, thus it is “divorato, assimilato, totalmente assorbito e rimodellato [...] attraverso una sorta di *antropofagia culturale*” (“devoured, assimilated, completely absorbed and remodelled [...] through a kind of *cultural anthropophagy*”, my trans., *ibidem* 45; emphasis in original).

The notion of cultural anthropophagy is interesting in this context as it helps understand the idea of appropriation from another perspective. Initially presented by the Brazilian poet Oswald de Andrade in his *Manifesto Antropófago* (Anthropophagic Manifesto) in 1928, cultural anthropophagy could be said to represent a kind of ‘positive’ appropriation, since colonized people ‘digested’ the colonizers’ literary and cultural archetypes in order to give birth to a new literary production, where native and acquired themes and characteristics mingle in a unique way.¹³¹

Despite the fact that the contexts of reference are quite diverse, it is possible to distinguish between an improper appropriation and a ‘positive’ appropriating process also in the case of the Holocaust. The first is the act of silencing related individuals by seizing their perspective and voice, while the latter is the process that enables non-related individuals to feel engaged at the emotional and cognitive level when reading, speaking, or talking about the

¹³⁰ See Albertazzi 45: “Fin dai tempi di Colombo, in ogni loro manifestazione testuale, gli europei usano le parole come un ‘sistema chiuso, chiuso in maniera tale da ridurre al silenzio coloro la cui obiezione potrebbe essere contestata’” (“Since Columbus’s time, in each and every literary text, the Europeans have always used ‘the words are a closed system, closed in such a way as to silence those whose objection might challenge or negate the proclamation which formally, but only formally, envisages the possibility of contradiction’”, my translation of Albertazzi’s words and Greenblatt’s words from the original Greenblatt 59-60). Michael Rothberg already poses Postcolonial Studies and Holocaust Studies in a ‘positive comparison’ when proposing multidirectional memory, because a productive conversation between postcolonial remembrance and the Holocaust is sought rather than a comparing practice that might produce a hierarchy of grief or, as Rothberg says, “a competition of victims” (Rothberg, *Multidirectional* 2). However, he does not speak about the naming issue in postcolonial terms.

¹³¹ The appeal to cultural anthropophagy is to be understood only within the frame of explaining the difference between ‘positive’ and improper appropriation. Parallelisms between colonizers and colonized on the one hand, and non-related and related individuals on the other are not sought, supposed, or hinted at in any form and in any combination.

Holocaust by drawing on their personal and cultural experiences as means through which to better ‘understand’ it, given that they lack first-hand memories. ‘Positive’ appropriation is not taking advantage of others, of Jewish perspective and culture: it is the necessary relation that must be established in order for the Holocaust to ‘enter’ the non-related individual’s mind and life. By studying, reading, listening to testimonies, meeting witnesses, watching documentaries and films, discussing with others, each non-related individual ‘appropriates’ the Holocaust in some form. ‘Positive’ appropriation, then, does not crush, silence, or seize related individuals’ standpoint: it acknowledges it by acquiring knowledge, engaging a conversation with the acquired knowledge, and sharing a personal view on it.

‘Positive’ appropriation is not excluding: in this sense, it is at the opposite pole of Walter Benn Michaels’ idea that if there is a museum dedicated to the Holocaust, there is not space for remembrance of slavery (see Rothberg, *Multidirectional* 1-2).¹³² ‘Positive’ appropriation does not exclude related individuals nor their standpoint: on the contrary, it is a means through which non-related individuals can engage with them in a productive conversation about the Holocaust so as to promote its memory. Therefore, it could be further stated that appropriation is ‘positive’ or negative depending on its aim: if it encourages dialogue, knowledge, and memory, then it is as much ‘positive’ as necessary.

Considering ‘positive’ appropriation means that etymological and ‘cultural belonging’ issues are moved to the background. They are not erased, but they are no longer a primary issue when discussing the basis of a productive and ongoing dialogue about the Holocaust and Holocaust memory. On the contrary, if the aforementioned division of society and perspectives is privileged, this could bring about negative consequences. The dichotomy between related and non-related people, and the issue of the best term for the first and the latter, might bring to serious misunderstanding. On the one hand, related individuals might feel expropriated of a historical fact that is part of their lives (and culture) if non-related people use terms with their perspective, or if they talk and write about the Holocaust as if they had a similar relationship with it; in a few words, if non-related individuals improperly appropriate the Holocaust. On the other hand, if non-related individuals are prevented from

¹³² According to Rothberg, competitive memory is what Walter Benn Michaels implies when discussing the presence of the USHMM in Washington, D.C. along with the lack of remembrance of American slavery in the same context. Considering Michaels’ reasoning, Rothberg states that his thinking seems to imply that “collective memory obeys a logic of scarcity: if a Holocaust Museum sits on the Mall in Washington [...], then Holocaust memory must literally be crowding the memory of African American history out of the public space of American collective consciousness” (*Multidirectional* 2). On the contrary, Rothberg states that when memories of slavery and colonialism meet Holocaust memory in today’s multicultural societies, it should be acknowledged the possibility that these memories do not compete one over the other; rather, it would be productive if they enter a dialogue so as to enhance each own’s memory (and awareness) within the larger society.

using the most common terms to refer to the Holocaust, they might feel foreigner to the historical fact, that is, too distant to be able to productively and respectfully talk and write about it.¹³³ Their engagement and discussing cannot have the same characteristics of related people's, of course, but they are indeed receivers and holders of a certain kind of postmemory. If they feel distant, disconnected, not involved at any level with the historical fact, this could be considered a negative consequence of focussing on etymology and the potential divisive aspects of linguistic forms, rather than what can be pursued by accepting a common ground.¹³⁴ Etymology is important and cannot be forgotten; however, as it has been discussed, at present there is not a 'flawless' word. Paying attention only to the differences pertaining to one or the other perspective mines the aim of fostering Holocaust memory in the future, and does not allow to see that both related and non-related individuals share the aim of remembrance.

Following these considerations on 'positive' appropriation and the use of personal and cultural experiences as a means to better 'understand' the Holocaust, it could be said that there is a potential for a global memory of Holocaust, in the sense proposed by Levy and Sznajder. A global memory is possible only provided that it is accepted, by all the parts involved, that Holocaust knowledge and remembrance are 'positively' appropriated by foreign cultures. In the productive, and indeed possible, dialogue that is envisaged between related and non-related individuals, as well as between different cases of victimization and silencing,¹³⁵ it could be said that Jeffrey C. Alexander's idea that the Holocaust 'contaminates' because it is "engorged" (Alexander, *Trauma* 77)¹³⁶ is reversed in a positive way, or at least mitigated. There is a two-way process of positive 'contamination' at stake,

¹³³ It would be interesting to discuss if this might be the reason, or one of the reasons, of the lack of 'external' criticism Kokkola complains about: "I struggled with questions of the right to speak. However, I came to see that the voice of the outsider whose knowledge was wholly acquired through reading was not only relevant, it was sadly lacking. I cannot provide the personal insights and a lifetime of experience as can Kertzer. Nor can I cast judgments on whole generations of Germans as Bosmajian can. What I can offer, I hope, is something closer to the perspective of many contemporary child readers who, like me, must learn about the Holocaust through texts alone. We who have nothing but the texts to guide us must be very sensitive to the quality of the information they contain. *In stating how Holocaust literature for children communicates with a person like me, there may still be time for those with other forms of knowledge to correct misunderstandings*" (Kokkola, *Representing* 3-4; my emphasis). It is noteworthy that she does not suppose an either-or relationship between an 'external' and the 'internal' perspective but envisages space for both, and a productive dialogue between them – where each one contributes their own qualities to the common aim of communicating the Holocaust to children readers, in the case she presents.

¹³⁴ For example, regarding the term Holocaust Kokkola states: "The term's associations with sacrifice are, in my opinion, offset by its acceptance in general usage. When discussing the events with nonspecialists (sic), the term 'Holocaust' is immediately understood. The association with sacrifice comes only from those who have studied the subject in more detail" (*Representing* 5).

¹³⁵ Such as the one proposed by Rothberg between the Holocaust and colonized people.

¹³⁶ Alexander uses the word "pollute" (*Trauma* 77).

because Holocaust knowledge and remembrance enter in contact with and become part of non-related individuals' local culture; at the same time, these people interpret and perceive the Holocaust on the basis of local cultural history, practices, tropes they have grown up with.¹³⁷ It is not (only) a globalization-like process that drives the spread of Holocaust remembrance, one that does not safeguard its origins and characteristics, nor those of the receiving culture: there must be also a dialogue between the Holocaust and each national cultural context, between related and non-related individuals, where each part gains from the interaction while acknowledging others' suffering and their being fellow human beings.¹³⁸

These reflections about perspectives and common aims between related and non-related individuals are not to be intended as contesting the fact that the Holocaust was a murderous plan to kill Jewish people in particular. Neither do they claim that a cultural difference between the position of the Holocaust within Jewish cultural history and its contextualization into the culture of non-related individuals is absent.¹³⁹ These considerations are supposed to call for the recognition of cultural differences and specificities while acknowledging the need to establish a dialogue between the two positions, which must be based on trust and openness in order to foster Holocaust memory through multiple perspectives and languages. The perspective of non-related individuals is not in conflict with, or in substitution of, the viewpoint and the literary production of related individuals: it is an addition to them; therefore, it should be granted some space. The dialogue between the two standpoints seems to be necessary nowadays, in a highly interconnected world, to continue

¹³⁷ Local cultural history, practices, and tropes provide the non-related individual with some means to 'understand' the Holocaust. In *Poetics of Relation*, in introducing the part on Relation, Édouard Glissant states: "The thing recused in every generalization of an absolute, even and especially some absolute secreted within this imaginary construct of Relation: that is, the possibility for each one at every moment to be both solidary and solitary there" (Wing 131). Glissant's words, within this context, could be understood as stating that each one can be supportive – 'solidary' – towards the Other, and at the same time solitary, meaning fully understanding their own suffering.

¹³⁸ As already said, Rothberg proposes a constructive 'comparison' between colonized populations and the Holocaust, claiming that Holocaust remembrance and the memories of other mass killings as well as cases of victimizing are not necessarily to be approached with a *contrastive* comparison and a hierarchy of suffering in mind. Rather, their dialoguing is to be conceived as a *constructive* comparison, which also acknowledges peculiarities and specificities. See also Jeffrey C. Alexander on the social construction of traumas and their social relevance: "Obviously, non-Western nations cannot 'remember' the Holocaust, but in the context of cultural globalization they certainly have become gradually aware of its symbolic meaning and social significance. It might also be the case that non-Western nations can develop trauma-dramas that are functional equivalents to the Holocaust [...]. It has been the thesis of this chapter that moral universalism rests on social processes that construct and channel cultural trauma. If this is indeed the case, then globalization will have to involve a very different kind of social process than the ones that students of this supranational development have talked about so far: East and West, North and South must learn to share the experiences of one another's traumas and to take vicarious responsibility for the other's afflictions" (Alexander, *Trauma* 96). Although the idea of 'taking vicarious responsibility' might be debatable, what is important to note here is the need to get to know and acknowledge the Other's suffering. This does not necessarily mean improperly appropriation, or flattening of the Other's past, but a dialogue is necessarily implied.

¹³⁹ The claim is not for a flattening of cultural differences like globalization does.

promoting Holocaust memory within present and future generations, as they are at the same purpose-level.¹⁴⁰

In recent decades, some non-related authors have written literary narratives for children referring more or less directly to the Nazi genocide. These works could be seen as a tentative contribution to the dialogue as well as to the Holocaust memory¹⁴¹ thanks to the hypothesized kind of memory called ‘attitudinal postmemory’, which will be discussed in chapter 3. As for now, non-related authors’ contribution could be seen through the lens of Édouard Glissant’s concepts of *comprendre* (‘grasp’) and *donner-avec* (‘giving-on-and-with’).¹⁴² *Comprendre* is a subjugation of the other, it indicates appropriating and silencing, whereas *donner-avec* is a positive communicating process of connection between individuals that are at the same level, that is, there is not an unequal power position implied. With

¹⁴⁰ The idea of a dialogue between different perspectives relates to Michael Rothberg’s idea of comparing postcolonialism and Holocaust memory (see Rothberg, *Multidirectional* 1-31): Rothberg theorises that the two histories of victimization, as he calls them, can productively talk to each other instead of bringing about a “competition of victims” (Rothberg, *Multidirectional* 2). Non-related individuals do not necessarily offer other forms of historical victimization when meeting Holocaust memory. However, the idea of a productive dialogue, of a stimulating conversation between their own postmemory and the memory offered by first-hand witnesses and victims, as well as their descendants’ postmemory, is based on the same aim of promoting Holocaust memory – not divisions through appropriation and creation of hierarchies of suffering. Avoiding a ‘hierarchy of memory’ does not mean that witnesses’ memory is less important than the non-related individuals’ one, nor that the latter is of the same kind of first-hand testimonies. Of course witnesses have a unique perspective on the historical fact, as much as their descendants have another unique standpoint on it. Non-related individuals’ postmemory cannot equal them. However, it is indeed true that they have a kind of postmemory and what is claimed here is that a productive dialogue between these three kinds of memory is possible and necessary, and it should be taken into consideration when discussing the promotion of Holocaust memory in the future.

¹⁴¹ It must be noted that not all literary works can properly be said to offer a positive contribution: of course, there are good as well as more debatable examples (see notes 110 and 112). Nonetheless, the presence of these works, whether promoting memory or being criticized for not doing so, must be acknowledged. Controversial works can indeed prove useful when the reasons that make them debatable are discussed.

¹⁴² Betsy Wing, in the Introduction to Glissant’s *Poetics of Relation*, explains the author’s concepts in relation to her translation: “Another word complex, the verbal phrase: *donner-avec*, relays the concept of understanding into the world of Relation, translating, contesting, then reconstituting its elements in a new order. The French word for understanding, *comprendre*, like its English cognate, is formed on the basis of the Latin word, *comprehendere*, ‘to seize,’ which is formed from the roots: *con-* (with) and *prendre* (to take). Glissant contrasts this form of understanding–appropriative, almost rapacious–with the understanding upon which Relation must be based: *donner-avec*. *Donner* (to give) is meant as a generosity of perception. (In French *donner* can mean ‘to look out toward.’) There is also the possible sense of yielding, as a tree might ‘give’ in a storm in order to remain standing. *Avec* both reflects back on the *com-* of *comprendre* and defines the underlying principle of Relation” (Wing, xiv). In relation to Glissant’s passage stating that “[t]he duality of self-perception (one is citizen or foreigner) has repercussions on one’s idea of the Other (one is visitor or visited; one goes or stays; one conquers or is conquered). Thought of the Other cannot escape its own dualism until the time when differences become acknowledged. From that point on thought of the Other ‘comprehends’ multiplicity, but mechanically and still taking the subtle hierarchies of a generalizing universal as its basis” (*ibidem* 17), Wing also says: “Here Glissant uses the verb *comprendre* in the mechanical sense of including within a system, and *comprehends* is the best translation. In other cases, however, he stresses an almost rapacious quality of the word, its division into two parts based on its Latin roots (i.e. *comprendre*: to take with, which I have translated as ‘grasps’). He contrasts this with a neologistic phrase: *donner-avec*, which would constitute understanding in Relation. Because, in doing so, he means *donner* both in the sense of generosity and in the sense of ‘looking out toward’ [...], and because our combining the words *give* and *with* constitutes less a notion of sharing than one of yielding [...], which–though not dominant–is not totally absent from Glissant’s usage, *donner-avec* will be translated as ‘gives-on-and-with’” (*ibidem* 212).

reference to the Holocaust, *comprendre* occurs when non-related individuals improperly and disrespectfully appropriate related people's position. This might happen by silencing them and making only their own voice heard, or when there is no recognition of the witnesses' voice in some way.¹⁴³ non-related individuals' standpoint crushes the other one, instead of siding it. On the contrary, in case of giving-on-and-with, non-related people offer their own postmemorial perspective after a 'positive' appropriation and a constructive dialogue is sought, urged, and enhanced. Without a 'positive' appropriation, empathy is impossible. Without empathy, dialogue is hindered. Without sharing and discussing, memory limps.

Evidently, each of the terms herein discussed have a few downsides, depending on etymology, the perspective inherent in them, or the user's standpoint. Nonetheless, it is necessary to agree on some common premises to be able to discuss in a productive way the issues of fostering Holocaust memory.¹⁴⁴ Considering the above reflections, it could be said that none of the words conveys an unambiguous and complete definition of the Nazi genocide. What's more, they cannot convey 'full' knowledge of what happened: this only belongs to witnesses and victims, or only to 'drowned' victims, as Levi wrote.¹⁴⁵ There seems to be the need to adopt an including rather than an excluding method when it comes to considering perspectives on, belonging, and promotion of Holocaust memory. Therefore, despite the undoubted differences between the kind of relationship that related and non-related individuals have with the Holocaust, it is of utmost importance to weave them into a productive dialogue, as Rothberg's multidirectional memory, or Glissant's 'give-on-and-with', imply.

As Lawrence Langer stated, "language alone cannot give meaning to Auschwitz ... The depth and uncontained scope of Nazi ruthlessness poisoned both Jewish and Christian precedents and left millions of victims without potent metaphors to imagine, not to say justify, their fate'" (Langer qtd. in Kokkola, *Representing* 6). Since the historical fact itself goes

¹⁴³ Here, 'in some way' refers to paratexts, "*framed silences*" (Kokkola, *Representing* 25; emphasis in original), distancing techniques that place the reader at a safe distance from the facts narrated and highlight the impossibility of entering and understanding that reality (see L. Myers, "What" 32-39), and other narratological and stylistic devices.

¹⁴⁴ See Young: "Short of creating an entirely new word, without any previous meanings, associations, assonances, or even rhymes, naming events must inevitably deprive them of their ontological particularity. For until they are named, compared, or interpreted, they continue to exist outside existing traditions" (89). Using 'imperfect' words to refer to the Holocaust nonetheless fosters Holocaust memory, even though this means mining a bit its distinctiveness, because words existent prior to the historical fact are charged with previous, different meanings. The opposite possibility, though, is much more troublesome: not speaking about the Holocaust because of a shortage of 'correct' terms, or words void of prior meanings, would imply a higher risk of forgetting.

¹⁴⁵ The reference is to Levi's work *The Drowned and the Saved*.

beyond the linguistic potential to refer to the real world,¹⁴⁶ it could be inferred that one language – or medium – is not enough, as stated above. In other words, instead of giving up to linguistic limits and differentiations, it could be accepted the fact that one term in just one language is not enough to ‘contain’ the Holocaust and provide the audience with a complete representation of it as an all-encompassing linguistic referent. Therefore, only a combination of linguistic potentials and representations provided by multiple cultural products and perspectives might enable the contemporary audience to have a greater understanding of the Nazi genocide, albeit always incomplete.¹⁴⁷

Among these perspectives, this dissertation will focus on non-related individuals’ viewpoint, and in doing so the terms that will be used are primarily Holocaust and *Shoah*, but also word compounds such as Nazi genocide and mass killing will be present. Despite their weaknesses and different etymological and semantic origins, the first two terms are indeed commonly used and understood by non-experts as synonyms in referring to the murder of Jewish people in Europe during World War II. In particular, I agree with Kokkola’s view that “the term ‘Holocaust’ is immediately understood [and] the association with sacrifice comes only from those who have studied the subject in more detail” (*Representing* 5). Therefore, one of the main drawbacks of this term can be considered as of secondary relevance within this context because it is outweighed by its wide use and its common understanding (see *ibidem*).¹⁴⁸

When used by a non-related individual, *Shoah* could be problematic both because it might be perceived as an appropriation of Jewish perspective and because at the same time “it emphasizes the destruction of the Jews at the expense of the other groups who were also persecuted” (Kokkola, *Representing* 5), as Kokkola notes.¹⁴⁹ I agree with her on the fact that the Nazi genocide specifically involved Jewish people and yet it would be disrespectful not to recognise the other groups victimized and persecuted in various forms, some of which overlap

¹⁴⁶ See Kokkola: “we are left in an insoluble controversy: most of our knowledge of the Holocaust comes to us through writing and yet language itself seems inadequate to the task of containing the events” (*Representing* 6; see also *ibidem*, 15-46).

¹⁴⁷ Because, apart from witnesses, they lack first-hand knowledge. In particular, if adults cannot really grasp the Holocaust despite their advanced cognitive and social skills, and wider knowledge, it is even more so for children. Then, offering children readers several different sources is advisable, from first-hand accounts to non-related authors’ historical novels.

¹⁴⁸ See also Foster et al.: “despite the phrase remaining inherently unsatisfactory, there is a broad recognition among scholars that the prevalence of ‘the Holocaust’ makes it a practical and pragmatic term to use” (9).

¹⁴⁹ “‘Shoah’ I find more problematic because it emphasizes the destruction of the Jews at the expense of the other groups who were also persecuted. In stating that I find this problematic, I do not wish to deny that the primary aim of the death camps was the annihilation (sic) of the Jews. Nevertheless, I find it unacceptable to dismiss the deaths of five to six million ‘others’—Gypsies, Soviet citizens, Soviet refugees, Poles, other Slavs, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Catholic priests, homosexuals, handicapped, and Blacks—to a mere postscript. I would find the constant use of terms that only refer to Jewish victims inappropriate” (Kokkola, *Representing* 5-6).

with those Jewish people suffered from because of Nazi evil. Given that the novels that this dissertation will discuss are all about the persecution of Jewish characters,¹⁵⁰ it seems useful to borrow the term *Shoah* in the context of a ‘positive’ appropriation, which is what Kokkola seems to do, too.¹⁵¹ Nonetheless, it must be clear that the use of Holocaust, *Shoah*, or word compounds herein does not wish to dim or obliterate in any way the historical presence – and the suffering – of other group victims within those people targeted by Nazi ideology. Their perspective must certainly be included in the constructive dialogue on the period.

It is necessary to consider the position of the UCL Centre for Holocaust Education (see Foster et al. 11) regarding this matter. According to the Centre, Holocaust education must take into consideration all victim groups persecuted by Nazis, although the specific term Holocaust should be intended in the aforementioned exclusive manner as referring to the persecution and mass killing of Jewish people. Both Nazi crimes (against other victims) and the Holocaust (against Jewish people) form part of Holocaust education, and they are conceived as historical facts to be known by students to prevent future crimes against humanity. Thus, despite the exclusive definition of the term Holocaust, a dialogue is envisaged between the persecution of Jewish people, other victim groups during World War II, and other victims of “man-made atrocity” (*ibidem*). The reasoning presented by the Centre in stating that “[s]ubsuming each of these distinct crimes under the vague heading of ‘the Holocaust’ may appear inclusive, but it runs the risk that the distinctiveness of each is lost” (*ibidem*) makes sense. However, as its own research shows, secondary school teachers perceive the word Holocaust as referring to a variety of victims of Nazi policies (see *ibidem*). In the compound *Holocaust education*, the term Holocaust seems to be considered as referring to an act of persecution against people and a misrecognition of the Other as a human being. It does not (primarily) refer to the killing of Jewish people, but to the abuse of power and persecution of human beings on the basis of a set of characteristics delineated by perpetrators, according to which the victims do not comply, politically and genetically, with the perpetrators’ supposed ‘ideal’. There might be a slight contradiction, then, by considering the word Holocaust as referring only to the murder of Jewish people, whereas the same word together with ‘education’ comprehends acts of racism, persecution, and several kinds of violence against human beings so as to inform students of man-made evil.

¹⁵⁰ Kokkola complains about the scarcity of works about the other victims (see *Representing* 5).

¹⁵¹ See: “Non-Jewish victims are rare in Holocaust literature for children, making Shoah an appropriate term on occasion” (Kokkola, *Representing* 5).

A word joining all victim groups of Nazi policies is still needed. However, considering the previous reflections on Glissant's concepts, it should be clear that this dissertation does not follow an exclusion-based thinking pattern. Given the kind of postmemory here proposed and the lack of a word referring both to the murder of Jewish people and the persecution of other victims, I would like to consider the term Holocaust in an inclusive way, on the ethical level.

2.2 How to Represent the Holocaust: The Need to Represent

There has been much discussion about philosopher Theodor W. Adorno's famous dictum 'To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric' that it would seem redundant to reflect upon it again. However, a few words could be useful to introduce the issues about the forms, genres, and registers to (re)present the Holocaust. Even before wondering what the best ways to convey the Holocaust are, the question 'Is the Holocaust to be represented?' should not be taken for granted.

The number of cultural products related to the Nazi genocide¹⁵² that has become available since the 1990s – from documentaries to picture books – surely is enough on its own to state that the Holocaust has been widely and constantly represented in various forms. However, without a critical evaluation, this wide range of products does not offer any explanations about the reasons why the Holocaust is to be represented.

Considering Franco Moretti's concept of distant reading,¹⁵³ it could be said that in the latest three decades there has been a continuous publishing of critical volumes related to Holocaust and Memory Studies, as well as literary works, which have contributed to maintaining it at the centre of public and scholarly attention. Despite this, the debate about

¹⁵² For example, see Williams: "An online subject search of the U.S. Library of Congress (www.catalog.loc.gov) concerning the Holocaust and another popular period (the French Revolution) reveals an annual average of 203 nonfiction books in English published on the former during 2005-2007 while only an annual average of 27.3 nonfiction books in English published on the French Revolution. [...] A significant number of articles can be found in specialized journals as well" ("Varying" 111).

¹⁵³ "What do literary maps do . . . First, they are a good way to prepare a text for analysis. You choose a unit—walks, lawsuits, luxury goods, whatever—find its occurrences, place them in space . . . or in other words: you reduce the text to a few elements, and abstract them, and construct a new, artificial object. A model. And at this point you start working at a 'secondary' level, removed from the text [...]. Distant reading, I have called this work elsewhere; where distance is however not an obstacle, but a specific form of knowledge: fewer elements, hence a sharper sense of their overall interconnection. Shapes, relations, structures. Patterns" (Moretti, "Graphs – 2" 96). The distant reading approach in relation to the number of scholarly works about the Holocaust and Holocaust memory simply allows to acknowledge that there have been a high number of published scholarly articles, monographs, edited volumes and so on concerning 'the Holocaust' and 'Holocaust memory', if one takes the latter as the "element[s]" (Moretti, "Graphs – 1" 70) to consider to draw a graph of academic literature on these subjects in the latest decades. This same approach can be used for novels and picture books concerning the Holocaust, but it does not reveal anything about the content of these works, nor it helps in understanding their relevance in promoting Holocaust postmemory.

how to represent the Holocaust has not quietened. On the contrary, there are recent studies that propose interesting viewpoints contrary to what was generally accepted during the late 1980s (see Henderson and Lange, “Introduction” 3-16).¹⁵⁴ Therefore, it is still necessary to reflect on why and how the Holocaust must be represented.

The main reason is indirectly provided by Adorno’s words themselves. As it is discussed by Holocaust Studies, his famous statement must be considered together with the rest of his reasoning rather than taking it as a decontextualized sentence (see Howe 178-79). In “Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft” (1949),¹⁵⁵ Adorno wrote that writing poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric because it means to

“squeeze aesthetic pleasure out of artistic representation of the naked bodily pain of those who have been knocked down by the rifle butts. . . . Through aesthetic principles or stylization . . . the unimaginable ordeal still appears as if it had some ulterior purpose. It is transfigured and stripped of some of its horror, and with this, injustice is already done to the victims”. (Adorno qtd. in Howe 179)

In an attempt to clarify Adorno’s position, Irving Howe reports Tsaytlin’s idea – though not conceived as an explanation of Adorno’s words – that even the divinity would maintain silence in front of such an appalling historical fact, which Howe sees as “[anticipating] the frequently asserted, but as frequently ignored, claim that all responses to the Holocaust are inadequate, including, and perhaps especially, those made with the most exalted sentiments and language” (Howe 178).

According to Howe,

Adorno [...] probably meant to focus upon the sheer difficulty—the literary risk, the moral peril—of dealing with the Holocaust in literature. It was as if he were saying, Given the absence of usable norms through which to grasp the meaning (if there is one) of the scientific extermination of millions, given the intolerable gap between the aesthetic conventions and the loathsome realities of the Holocaust, and given the improbability of coming up with images and symbols that might serve as “objective correlatives” for events that the imagination can hardly take in, writers in the post-Holocaust era might be wise to be silent. (179-80)

Howe’s claim is that authors should not agree with the view that “literature somehow has an obligation to encompass [...] all areas of human experience, no matter how extreme or impenetrable they might be” (*ibidem* 180) and they should acknowledge “the corruptions of the mass medium that would suppose itself equipped to master upon demand any theme or

¹⁵⁴ Among the most important volumes, see Lang’s *Writing and the Holocaust* (1988) and Young’s *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust* (1988).

¹⁵⁵ For the story of the quotation, see Hofmann (182-94).

subject” (*ibidem*). Therefore, Howe thinks that literature does not have the skills, nor the obligation, to represent the Holocaust, precisely because it is a flawed means that would never be able to render the Nazi genocide ‘as it really was’; although he does not call for silence about the Holocaust, Howe implies that it can only be broken by witnesses’ accounts.

If literary works do represent the Holocaust despite their foreseeable failure, they risk being harmful rather than useful to convey it and its memory to the wider readership. As Howe apparently implies, this happens because ‘conveying’ the Holocaust would mean to ‘master’ it in some form. As a consequence, its severity and magnitude would be partly ‘reduced’, which is indeed disrespectful towards victims and witnesses. Howe thinks that Adorno wanted to avoid the risk that “the representation of a horrible event, especially if in drawing upon literary skills it achieves a certain graphic power, could serve to domesticate it, rendering it familiar and in some sense even tolerable, and thereby shearing away part of the horror” (*ibidem*). Even worse than domestication, in Howe’s view Adorno was making reference to the fact that literary representation might also serve as a means for establishing an “insidious relation” (*ibidem*) between the Holocaust as it is represented on the page and the reader, whom he acutely calls “the spectator” (*ibidem*) as if the literary representation was a film: the reading risks to turn into a form of “voyeuristic sadomasochism” (*ibidem* 181), where the individual could “gain the pleasure, or catharsis, that is customarily associated with the aesthetic transaction [...]” (*ibidem*). The possibility of this “illicit pleasure” (*ibidem*) would be enabled by the use of aesthetic means to tell the Nazi genocide, so the idea is that literary devices cannot be associated with a respectful Holocaust representation.

However, Howe does not claim that literary works about the Holocaust cannot exist. He defends memoirs because “[i]nsofar as [the writer] remains a memoirist, he is not obliged to interpret what he remembers. But the novelist, even if he supposes he is merely ‘telling a story,’ must—precisely in order to tell a story— ‘make sense’ of his materials, either through explicit theory or, what is usually better, absorbed assumptions” (*ibidem* 188). Thus, in memoirs the writer does not use literary means to ‘master’ the Holocaust, but to convey the experiences as he lived them, with minimal work of chronology and “reportorial (sic) selectivity” (*ibidem*). For this reason, Howe seems to imply that memoirs are one of the few genres that can present the Holocaust without disrespecting it.

On the contrary, fiction cannot really ‘add’ anything to what memoirists have written (see *ibidem* 187-89). Fiction “can rehearse, but neither enlarge nor escape: it can describe happenings, but not endow them with the autonomy and freedom of a complex fiction” (*ibidem* 188). Fiction may reorganize the material the witnesses tell, but there is a

fundamental “helplessness of the mind” (*ibidem* 182) as well as “helplessness of the imagination” (*ibidem*) before such a kind of evil that “cannot quite be imagined [nor] quite be understood” (*ibidem*). Therefore, imagination is “intimidated, overwhelmed” (*ibidem* 188) and, eventually, as Howe implies, useless. If fiction cannot handle the evil it is supposed to represent, what purpose does it serve? If the novelist must “‘make sense’ of his materials” (*ibidem*) and, as a consequence, must find a ‘sense’ to the Holocaust by partly ‘domesticating’ its horror and its suffering, by potentially undermining its relevance, why writing fiction if the result would be blasphemous? Better is to place “so high a value on the memoir, a kind of writing in which the author has no obligation to do anything but, in accurate and sober terms, tell what he experienced and witnessed” (*ibidem* 182).

It is undoubtedly true that non-related individuals cannot ‘add’ anything to what witnesses can tell us in terms of direct experience, historical accuracy, and authenticity of what happened.¹⁵⁶ However, apart from memoirs, manifold genres and forms have been used by Jewish writers during and after the historical fact to tell their experience. Roskies offers a comprehensive view of these modes, spanning from songs to poetry, from plays to novels, and to his question “How should Holocaust literature be read?”¹⁵⁷ (Roskies 203) he replies “[i]n its original languages. In all genres. From the beginning” (*ibidem*).

Howe’s observations are important because they highlight how easily one could think that, considering the commonly accepted imperative to remember the Holocaust, any kind of representation is justified – which could also be seen as ‘representation at any cost’. Of course, if there is an area where this concept cannot be applied to, it is indeed the Holocaust. Nonetheless, Howe’s reflections at the end of the 1980s clash with the preoccupations of fostering Holocaust memory after the disappearance of witnesses, a central issue in related debates after more than thirty years since Howe’s words. Therefore, it is useful to reflect upon the peculiarities of other forms, like fiction, that could be considered additional tools to approach and tell the Holocaust, rather than a way to substitute or obscure memoirs, in the context of the common labor to foster Holocaust memory.

Given that it is highly difficult to maintain memory if a participative discussion is not envisaged, one can easily agree on the fact that it is still necessary to talk about the Holocaust, no matter how much flawed linguistic, aesthetic, and other communicative means may be. It

¹⁵⁶ See Vice (161) and later in the chapter as for the concepts of accuracy and authenticity.

¹⁵⁷ Considering Roskies’ examples, it is evident that in his view Holocaust literature comprehends only works written by Jewish authors.

is generally thought that Adorno himself retracted his famous words in 1965,¹⁵⁸ although they still often resonate in discussions about Holocaust representations. Whether or not Adorno's words were misinterpreted, they are useful to recall two central ideas, also implied in Howe's reasonings: the difficult balance between the need to talk, write, and produce cultural works about the Holocaust, and the risk of 'aesthetic pleasure' hidden in the same artistic objects. Undoubtedly, the absence of debate upon the Nazi genocide might lead to forgetting, but this does not mean that every possible representation about the Holocaust should be accepted: works that do not comply with historical truth and are disrespectful towards victims and witnesses must be denounced as inappropriate and, possibly, as a form of abuse.

Indeed, silence is a highly effective means to convey the harsh truths of the Holocaust, the most striking example of which is offered by the testimony of witness Bomba, who fell silent and then fainted during his interrogation in the Eichmann trial (see Roberts Baer 378-79). In children's literature representing the Holocaust, Lydia Kokkola identifies 'gaps' of information as the main and ethically appropriate characteristic of these narratives: these gaps, corresponding to narratorial silence, are framed by other information that allow children to imply what the written text lacks. As Raul Hilberg states, "there cannot be silence without speech. Silence can only be introduced between words, sometimes with words" (23). Thus, silence is not omission of information, but a highly relevant carrier: in the first example, it helps to convey personal emotions and trauma, both verbally and physically; in the latter case, it is an aid to understand the difficult historical context and what happens in the plot without imposing too much suffering and gruesome details onto child readers in a direct way. Therefore, the issue is not about whether silence is preferable to words, or the opposite, when telling the Holocaust: both are equally necessary, as much as their respective extremes are potentially harmful. Total silence is not advisable because it may easily cause oblivion, whereas an 'excess of words' can be understood as a constant cultural production on the Holocaust that lacks real interest in the subject and exploits it as a topic that helps to raise sales. Both possibilities are equally harmful, as they do not aim to maintain memory alive.

Grounded in Adorno's dictum, the belief that language is unable to convey the reality of the Holocaust, especially literary language, makes one believe that every attempt to write a literary work about the Nazi genocide should be avoided because it would result in a failure. However, it has just been agreed upon the necessity of a dialogue to foster memory. Is it possible to envisage a 'silent' conversation? Adorno's words do not call for silence in general:

¹⁵⁸ Nonetheless, some believe that his later statements were misunderstood and should be considered not as a retraction, but as a reaffirmation of his previous idea, albeit in different form (see Kaufman 99-102).

they condemn the fact that artistic works about indescribable pain and suffering, violence and death might be a source of ‘aesthetic pleasure’ for the audience. In this case, in Adorno’s view, silence is preferable. Indeed, there is perversity and some sadism in being pleased at reading of other people’s sufferings and pain such as those that real people experienced during the Holocaust. Therefore, the issue does not concern only the ‘right’ words to be used, but also the ‘relatedness’ of the authors (and, possibly, of readers as well, if voyeurism is considered) to the Holocaust. The question implied in Howe’s reflections is: Why people other than memoirists – thus, the first-hand generation – should write about the Holocaust?

Within the context of this writing, the risk of ‘aesthetic pleasure’ and the problem of relatedness could be linked to two considerations: the need to separate between ‘aesthetic pleasure’ and personal involvement, and the necessity to focus on the scope of cultural products. As it will be discussed in chapter 3, readers must develop some kind of personal link with the narrative in order to maintain memory afterwards. Feeling involved, that is, interacting cognitively as well as emotionally while reading a work about the Holocaust does not necessarily mean that the reader is feeling ‘aesthetic pleasure’ in reading about suffering and torture. Therefore, it is necessary to separate ‘aesthetic pleasure’ from involvement, even though literary means are used by the author to help the reader become involved. If aesthetic pleasure is the clear narrative aim, then the work is to be denounced because it is an abuse of the subject matter.¹⁵⁹ If it is not, then the scope may well be fostering memory, which is achieved by enabling a personal link also via the literary skills and means used by the author.

It might be claimed that the subject and the historical facts should be ‘enough’ to involve readers, and that literary devices must be scarce or even ‘absent’,¹⁶⁰ as the previous reflections on memoirs seem to imply. However, young generations are far removed from the Holocaust, and luckily enough they live in countries where they do not risk to undergo a similar experience: when they are in front of a narration of facts that are indeed real, they might perceive them as such, but too distant from their life precisely because they have had no similar experience. Detailed information about the factuality of the Holocaust is useful to highlight its being real, but might not be enough to develop some form of ‘involvement’ at a personal level, which is fundamental in ‘active’ kind of memory and remembrance (see ch. 3). Therefore, literary devices could be used to urge the involvement, without overshadowing the factuality of the Holocaust. If they are an aid, and not the scope of the writer, then readers are

¹⁵⁹ For example, in case of narratives with an excessive emphasis on ‘moving’ descriptions, or which have violence in graphic detail without a clear purpose (see Vice 44).

¹⁶⁰ It is indeed difficult to conceive a literary work without any literary devices, because, as narratology tells us, specific genres always imply some ‘traditional’ structure (see Howe 175-95).

not taking part in an unethical reading aimed at ‘aesthetic pleasure’ or showcasing the author’s aesthetic skills, but they are helped in their approach to the subject matter.

The second consideration previously proposed was the necessity to focus on the scope of cultural products. Adorno’s famous statement could be understood as to back up the idea that only certain kind of literary works should be ‘accepted’, namely, those written by witnesses, precisely because they are written by first-hand writers. Their works are based on their own experiences and precisely because they experienced the Holocaust first-hand, they are considered the only reliable and historically accurate works. There is a coincidence between accuracy, direct experience, and right to write and talk about the Holocaust that envisages a ‘closed circuit’ where authors, content, and form – namely, witnesses, the historical fact, and literary works – are engaged in a seemingly closed dialogue.¹⁶¹

Authors who are not directly linked to the subject matter should not write or produce any kind of cultural product about it precisely because they lack the primary, essential connection to the Holocaust that enables and gives them the right to engage with it. Since one may wonder why people who did not experience the Holocaust would want to write about it, it is commonly thought that their representations are a kind of abuse; therefore, Adorno’s silence would be the best option for them. In this view, only witnesses and the forms they use can be ethically accepted because their direct link to the Holocaust ensures that their scope¹⁶² is widening knowledge and fostering memory. In contrast to this, other writers who lack this link could easily be driven to represent the Holocaust following ‘aesthetic’ principles or, more plainly, they could be motivated by economic reasons. As a consequence, the Holocaust could be trivialized in their works.

It is understandable that someone who does not have any direct relationship with the subject matter could be seen as an impostor and his writings as an abuse and exploitation for trivial, even unethical, reasons. However, considering only witnesses accounts and testimonies as acceptable representations of the Holocaust poses a problem with the persistence of memory: once the first generation is not present anymore, no one else would have the right and means to tell the Holocaust and foster its memory, therefore future generations will only be able to rely on previous testimonies.¹⁶³ One may wonder if this view is useful to preserve memory in the long term, taking into consideration the inevitable social

¹⁶¹ With ‘closed dialogue’ it is meant a conversation that does not seem open to external contributions.

¹⁶² However, this view does not take into consideration descendants: they do not have first-hand experience, but they indeed have a very tight relationship with the Holocaust ‘via’ their relatives (see Hirsch, *Generation 27-54*).

¹⁶³ Witnesses can tell the Holocaust, all the others, including descendants and their postmemory, can tell a perspective on the Holocaust.

changes of the society as well as new advancements in technology and scholarly research. Although witnesses and their works are and will be the centre of Holocaust memory, it is unlikely that memory can be secured by relying only on the availability of their accounts in the future. Therefore, it could be said that other works and other authors should be granted 'access' to literary representations of the Holocaust, depending on the scope of their writing. By saying 'other authors', non-related writers are included. If their aim is to contribute to foster memory, then it is here claimed that their works should be accepted as part of the range of Holocaust representations already available, because abuse of the subject matter, including 'aesthetic pleasure' as intended by Adorno, and memory are mutually exclusive.

Separation of form, content, and author is highly difficult when the Holocaust is the narrative subject: Williams claims that "established authors with any hint of an ambiguous past tinged with accommodation, collaboration, or complicity, can expect prying into their youthful indiscretions, real and imagined" (Williams, "Epilogue" 237) because "recent controversies suggest that future authors will persist in adopting a perpetrator's or a fictional victim's perspective" (*ibidem*). The term 'non-related' used above refers to those individuals who are not witnesses nor witnesses' descendants and who do not bear other kinds of direct relationship with the historical fact; consequently, 'related' encompasses witnesses and their descendants. Instead, non-related authors and non-related young generations will be at the centre of this study. As Sue Vice notes, quite often criticisms of Holocaust-related narratives are about literary matters but at the same time they are also ethical evaluations, mainly regarding the relationship between the author's biography and the narrative contents. However, as she masterfully proves in her study about Holocaust fiction, it is possible to distinguish between literary and ethical issues and, by doing so, she claims that fiction has specific, positive characteristics that must be evaluated as such, and they make fiction a further, acceptable "approach" (see Vice 5-8) to the subject matter.¹⁶⁴

It was likely that, as time passed, also non-related individuals would propose their own literary works about the Holocaust, because they can be both receivers of postmemory and 'producers' of an 'active' kind of memory. As a possible answer to the previous question

¹⁶⁴ In *Holocaust Fiction*, Vice reports Wiesel's statement that the Holocaust cannot be a "Literary Inspiration" (Vice 5) because this is "contradiction in terms" (*ibidem*) and she discusses that "[i]t is easy to agree with Wiesel if the matter of Holocaust fiction is approached from the standpoint of a survivor (although Wiesel himself is the author of novels as well as testimony about the Holocaust)" (*ibidem*). However, she also foregrounds another perspective, according to which "fiction is just one of several generic representations of the subject, not, despite Wiesel's eloquently expressed fears, its final resting place" (*ibidem*); therefore, she thinks that "we cannot dismiss or outlaw Holocaust fiction, since *it is simply a different genre from survivor testimony. It approaches the subject in its own way, rather than aiming to 'add' to or 'go beyond' the survivor record*" (*ibidem* 8; my emphasis).

about the reasons why non-related people would write about the Holocaust, a strategy could be to take into consideration the scope and intent of each narrative. The emergence of literary narratives by non-related writers has been evident in novels for adult readers. In the latest decades, this process has been taking place also within children's literature. Therefore, more than an issue of who can or cannot remember and share their writings, it is a matter of what and how each individual can remember. Given that each one of us can remember an event, at a practical level (see Markowitsch 275-84), the content and type of memory differs according to the kind of personal relationship with the Holocaust, which is nonetheless possible also for non-related individuals.

2.3 How to Represent the Holocaust: The 'Right to' and the 'Right Way to' Represent

After stating the need to represent the Holocaust, it is necessary to dwell more specifically on 'acceptable' forms, genres, and registers to represent it. In *The Future of the Holocaust* (1999), Berel Lang worries that the memory of the Holocaust could change. His position is understandable: considering the proliferation of cultural products about the Holocaust, it seems that the focus has shifted from the real centre of memory, the historical fact and its victims and witnesses, to the uncontrolled production of works.¹⁶⁵ Nonetheless, foreseeing a future for Holocaust memory is positive because it means that it will be part of future generations.

Lang's preoccupations seem to derive from equating changes in modes to convey Holocaust memory and 'changes' in its historical factuality, as if the first could imply or bring about a 'change' of what happened and of what the Holocaust was. This, too, is a worry that can be easily understood, especially at a time when there are only few witnesses. However, it should be clear that changes – meaning innovations – in modes that are respectful of what happened do not go against the historical facts. On the contrary, they are tools to 'tell', or at least give an idea of what happened. Forms and genres per se do not challenge historical truth; issues may arise due to some works that purport to 'change' what happened because they use a specific form or genre with a revisionist aim. These works must be denounced.

Witnesses' works will not be substituted or supplanted by new modes, if there is a constant labor to make them available to future generations (for example, by reissuing them)¹⁶⁶ and they are 'pointed at'¹⁶⁷ by new cultural works, also written by non-related

¹⁶⁵ As Finkelstein's monograph *The Holocaust Industry* (2000) highlights.

¹⁶⁶ See Williams: "[...] projects like the joint one between the French Fondation pour la Mémoire de la Shoah and the publisher Le Manuscrit, the 'Holocaust Testimonies' series at Vallentine-Mitchell, and the proliferation

authors. Therefore, it is not the same denouncing claims of ‘changes’ to the historical fact and accepting new works trying to convey the same historical fact via different modes, or different kinds of respectful memory. In the first case, revisionist works must be denounced, whereas in the latter, it is important not to limit new forms of approaching the subject matter.

For Lang, foreseeing a future for Holocaust memory equals saying that something will change from the forms and knowledge that have been offered and defended so far. Admittedly, the present forms conveying Holocaust memory are different from the ones available in the past, but they do not necessarily cause harm to the subject. For example, innovations such as the digitalization of materials, social media platforms for museums, or holograms (Manca, “Digital” 1-17; see also Kansteiner, “Transnational” 305-43) were not possible nor envisaged three decades ago: they are an upgrade of traditional methods to make the same materials accessible by an even wider number of people and they are an attempt to make Holocaust memory constantly nearer to the contemporary society despite the increasingly wide temporal gap. The use of digitals means does not mean that all current technological devices are advisable in the same way: converting audio-visual accounts into holograms (Kansteiner, “Transnational” 305-43) partially remedies the increasing impossibility of a direct interaction between young generations and the witnesses, but it is debatable that video-games can be a respectful tool to reduce the young audience’s distance from the Holocaust, even though some think otherwise.¹⁶⁸ Indeed, reading documents online and accessing the material version is different, but the point made here is that the drive that

of inexpensive, online self-publishing companies like Author House and Xlibris demonstrate continual interest and support for victims’ testimonies” (“Epilogue” 237).

¹⁶⁷ According to Hirsch, “[t]he term ‘point’ is both spatial—such as a point on a map—and temporal—a moment in time—and it thus highlights the intersection of spatiality and temporality in the workings of personal and cultural memory. The sharpness of a point pierces or punctures: like Barthes’s *punctum*, points of memory puncture through layers of oblivion, interpellating those who seek to know about the past. A point is also small, a detail, and thus it can convey the fragmentariness of the vestiges of the past that come down to us in the present—small rectangular pieces of paper we invest with enormous power. In addition, such remnants are useful for *purposes of remembrance—in order to help generate recall*—another meaning of the term ‘point’” (*Generation* 61-62; my emphasis). In this dissertation, the use of the verb ‘point at’ is inspired by the latter meaning that Hirsch envisages for the term *point*: new or upgraded modes to tell the Holocaust, including contemporary historical fiction for children, can be understood as means that ‘help generate recall’ and can be valuable ‘for purposes of remembrance’ because they help develop interest in the subject and they can point at witnesses’ accounts, textbooks, archives and other material providing a more comprehensive knowledge of the Holocaust.

¹⁶⁸ Kansteiner’s discussion of the advantages of video-games does not seem convincing (“Transnational” 305-43). Video-games seem to maintain a precarious balance – if ever – between the potential to bring users nearer to the Holocaust and trivialization. One must have previous knowledge so as not to understand the video-game just as an ‘adventure’ and, as previously said, it is quite debatable the idea to move young generations ‘into’ the reality of that time, even if only through a game. Another good point against video-games is that, as it is known, survival was due to chance and did not depend upon one’s decisions, whereas players can actually make decisions.

led to digitalization and to the use of technology was supposedly a positive one, aimed to foster knowledge and memory, so should we refuse it because it is a new mode?

Undoubtedly, innovations must be used with judgement and awareness, as well as in a respectful way. However, refusal to consider, and eventually accept, other forms to ‘defend’ traditional ones might cause missing potentially useful means to foster memory. Moreover, renouncing to the works of contemporary authors engaged in writing about the Holocaust might contribute to widening the gap between current and future generations and the historical fact, at the historical and literary levels. Therefore, it is not a matter of ‘change’ the memory of the Holocaust – what Lang fears – but of adopting other means in addition to the traditional ones to foster its memory. This is what Vice does by accepting fiction as a viable genre to tell the Holocaust and by highlighting its positive characteristics as well as its disadvantages.

Societies as well as individuals are mobile subjects, therefore Holocaust memory should ‘adapt’ to this mobility and constant evolution in order to be secured. ‘Adapt’, in this dissertation, implies a collaboration between old and new forms that work for the same scope and, in this sense, it is not possible to presuppose a strict definition of ‘canon’, in accordance with what Sara Horowitz states while recalling a conversation to plan a common list of works for a Holocaust Literature seminar:

[...] I was—and remain—anti-list, at least with regard to Holocaust literature. Of course, I have developed lists. Each course, book, article, finally reduces to something defined and finite. But we were talking not list, but List. To put it differently, we were talking canon. And I have a fundamental resistance to fixing the canon of Holocaust literature. [...]

[T]his resistance comes out of my sense of the ethical work of the literary forms that respond to, represent, and mediate the events, implications, and aftermath of the Nazi genocide. Particularly as I envision the future of Holocaust studies, in a world in which those events are no longer within living memory, leaving open the question of “best” or “necessary” or “definitive” novels, memoirs, poems, films, plays, analytic approaches, or theoretical frameworks reminds us of what we do not know, amid all that we have come to understand. Shuffling our readings, shifting our lenses, encompassing lesser known works and *new ways of reading*, does more than keep our perspectives fresh and original [...]. [...]

In lieu of canon, then, *the capacity to think broadly, sensitively, creatively*. (vii-viii; my emphasis)

As it is known, the Holocaust has become a subject within academia and, as a consequence, manifold research enquiries have been developed by scholars, starting from the late 1980s with the interrelation between the Holocaust, memory, and written and visual representation, thanks to works such as *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust* (1988) by James E. Young, and *Writing and the Holocaust* (1988) edited by Berel Lang (see Kluge and Williams,

“Introduction” xii). As Kluge and Williams state, “works by Dominick LaCapra, Lawrence L. Langer, and Sara Horowitz have set the conceptual framework of analytical study of Holocaust literature and highlighted the ‘problematic’ thereof” (“Introduction” xii). As if responding to Horowitz’s call for thinking ‘broadly, sensitively, creatively’, the editors highlight the fact that recent areas of development of Holocaust Studies dwell on specific genres, including literature about the Holocaust for child readers and a further group “more pedagogical in nature” (*ibidem* xiii).

The many areas of scholarly research make it clear that interest in the subject is high and that perspectives may vary, given the various areas of enquiry, but these multiple viewpoints on the historical subject, its representations, and its memory do not undermine what Lang refers to. On the contrary, they propose other perspectives that enable a respectful dialogue on the Holocaust. A parallel may be drawn between academic studies and the genres that authors can use to represent the Holocaust: these writers do not intend to destabilize or weaken previous knowledge and memory, or the witnesses’ accounts; rather, their works should be considered as an addition to what is already available, or means through which contemporary authors ‘point at’ the Holocaust as historical fact. Among these recent additions, children’s literature is a particularly relevant case because it counts picture books and novels that have gained prestigious awards, like the Newbery Medal.

‘Thinking creatively’ does not necessarily mean being disrespectful or to ‘represent at any costs’: as Andrew Leak and George Paizis noted, “any representation of the Holocaust looks both backwards and forwards” (Leak and Paizis qtd. in Kluge and Williams, “Introduction” xv), so being open to other forms may prove beneficial to diffuse Holocaust memory within the greater society, and especially within young generations, who are divided by more than three quarters of a century from the historical fact. A broader view does not necessarily imply a “hierarchy of suffering” or a “competition of victims” (Rothberg, *Multidirectional* 9, 2).¹⁶⁹ These concepts all point, with different words, to the same issue: competition rather than dialogue, exclusive rather than constructive comparison.

A reference to the previous discussion about the ‘right’ terms to refer to the Holocaust could be useful: it has been said that all available words have some downsides, but instead of limiting the use of certain terms to a specific cultural group, it has more advantages to accept the wider usage of ‘Holocaust’ on the basis that this enhances dialogue. In other words, the term Holocaust is flawed because its etymological semantics means ‘sacrifice’, but its

¹⁶⁹ Or, in Stone’s words, “hierarchies of victimization or competition for ethnic validation through suffering” (138).

common usage also among non-specialists makes it one of the best options available for the purpose of an immediate understanding. Similarly, each form or genre, even though inherently imperfect and flawed, could be a way to talk about the Holocaust – provided that it is done with memory in mind and in a considerate way. The availability of more forms and genres means that there are multiple ways for young people to get in contact with and being ‘pointed at’ the Holocaust. This step is fundamental as it is the first thing needed to make memory possible.

Lang’s idea of the future of Holocaust memory led to a reflection on the necessary distinction between changing the historical fact, and adding new modes to tell it. Since it is claimed here that other modes are useful in fostering Holocaust memory, what are – if any – these literary modes? Are there really ‘other’, new literary forms? In other words – is it useful, or possible, to separate the most common genres and literary forms into two groups, one for related authors and the other one for non-Jewish people?

It could be said that if the scope and intent are considered, it is not a matter of what genres ‘belong’ to which group: both related and non-related authors, with their own specific relationship with the Holocaust and their cultural background, share the aim of fostering Holocaust memory in literary form, they are human beings offering different approaches to the historical fact in order to allow young generations to get nearer to it.¹⁷⁰ This common scope presupposes a constructive dialogue between the two based on a rhizomatic approach to relationships.

Fiction is not a genre ‘belonging’ to non-related authors, since also first-hand witnesses have used it (see Vice 5). Given the abundance of examples offered by Roskies, it is clear that Jewish authors have proposed works in almost all forms and genres. Considering non-related authors, it could be easily said that autobiographies telling the Holocaust, or any first-hand accounts, are not possible in the sense that these authors cannot relate their personal, direct experience of the Holocaust. However, other literary genres, including fiction, should not be considered ‘inaccessible’ to non-related individuals for the reasons stated above. Instead of dividing genres and ‘assigning’ them to related or non-related individuals, it seems more useful that forms and genres can be shared by all, since their

¹⁷⁰ Not all non-related writers try to foster memory, of course. Here it is made reference to the authors who are really interested in contributing to Holocaust memory.

number is finite and despite difficulties in ascribing a literary work to one single form (see Vice).¹⁷¹

However, Roskies focuses only on Jewish authors. Going beyond the division into Jewish and non-Jewish people when it comes to fostering memory, Lawrence Langer wonders: “To whom shall we entrust the custody of the public memory of the Holocaust? To the historian? To the survivor? To the critic? To the poet, novelist, dramatist? All of them recreate the details and images of the event through written texts, and in so doing remind us that we are dealing with *represented* rather than unmediated reality” (Langer, “Interpreting” 26; emphasis in original). For Langer, many people can contribute to fostering Holocaust memory – including novelists. He does not specify whether he intends related or non-related (Jewish and non-Jewish) novelists, but the fact that he acknowledges the mediated (Erll and Rigney, “Introduction” 1-10) nature of each kind of Holocaust representation may be considered as leaving space also for non-related authors’ literary works, as he apparently disjoins the commonly perceived coincidence between witnesses and narrative content.

Terrence Des Pres also envisages a wider perspective on ‘allowed’ genres, forms, and registers to represent the Holocaust: while not dividing between related and non-related authors, he claims that laughter, on occasion, may be useful in representations of the Holocaust as a ‘remedy’ for human beings’ ‘helplessness’ in front of the Holocaust, also identified by Howe. Des Pres’s reasoning is that

laughter’s medicinal power has been recognized [centuries ago], and most of us would agree that humour heals. [...] [H]umour counts most in precisely those situations where more decisive remedies fail. The situation, in this case, is our helplessness facing our knowledge of the Holocaust. The question is whether or not, on occasion, laughter can be helpful. We know the ready answer because we know what has been said, namely, that toward matters of the Holocaust the comic attitude is irreverent, a mode that belittles or cheapens the moral severity of its subject. At the same time, no one disputes its survival value. In dark times, laughter lightens the burden. [...]

Displacement is the goal of any story, in degree; all fiction aims to usurp the real world with a world that is imagined. [...] [R]ealistic fiction so often fails [because] [i]n its homage to fact, high seriousness is governed by a compulsion to reproduce, by the need to create a convincing likeness that never quite succeeds [...]. (218-19)

¹⁷¹ Literary forms are finite but the mode of accessing them is evolving: nowadays, of particular interest is the digitalization process of documents and testimonies. It is also to be acknowledged the addition of new modes of accessing information and cultural products about the Holocaust: for example, the spread of e-book editions, usually cheaper than paperbacks; the availability of documentaries and films shown on television as well as ‘on demand’ on the Internet, which also applies to newspaper articles readable online. On the difficulty of ascribing literary works to just one form, see for example Vice’s monograph *Holocaust Fiction* (2000).

Therefore, Des Pres states that laughter, if used wisely as by the authors he proposes, may be useful when writing literary works about the Holocaust.¹⁷²

Sharing the same perspective, Mitschke defends the use of two genres she calls ‘Holocaust Cabaret’ and balagan in order to contrast “Holocaust fatigue” (Mitschke 452) among US and British audiences. Although she refers only to theatrical performances, she acknowledges the risks concerning the use of these genres, but in the US and UK contexts they could be used “in terms of combatting [‘Holocaust fatigue’ and ‘empty empathy’], of teaching, of allowing the past to break through, and of actively promoting the step from ‘empty empathy’ into engagement” (*ibidem*).¹⁷³ Despite the inherent potential issues, “Holocaust cabaret and balagan might just stand poised as one of the most effective weapons of all” (*ibidem*). The scholar’s view is clear: the use of an unusual genre is not to be conceived as a way to exploit the subject matter or to defend “little more than cheap, offensive gags” (*ibidem*),¹⁷⁴ but it can oppose the appearance of ‘Holocaust fatigue’ that may eventually distance the audience from the historical fact and the witnesses, on a cognitive and emotional level. By breaching the “prescribed boundaries” (*ibidem* 434) of what Des Pres defines ‘Holocaust etiquette’ (Des Pres 218), these forms are allowed only because the scope is to foster Holocaust memory and empathy while avoiding the simplifying reduction of all Holocaust narratives into just a single one.

Indeed, the non-relatedness poses an issue. If related authors use comedy, irony, laughter, it is clear that they wrote with discouragement at the basis, but if laughter is used by non-related authors, it is more easily perceived as highly offensive. Certainly, given the subject matter, it is advisable that non-related individuals do not use some registers like comedy, unless their works are very clear and with almost no space to be misunderstood. However, it is indeed true that there is always a minimum possibility of misunderstanding that does not depend on the words used, or the register, but on the readers – for example, inattention, a quick reading, or the use of the text for aims different from the ones envisaged.¹⁷⁵ Therefore, given the severity of the subject matter and its ‘recent’ happening,

¹⁷² Similar issues also concern the representation of play in literary works about the Holocaust (see Feldman 360-80).

¹⁷³ Mitschke defines ‘empty empathy’ as “spectatorial awareness of the historical circumstances of the events being portrayed, but a lack of true emotional presence or connection with those events” (438). ‘Holocaust fatigue’, in the scholar’s discussion, “encompasses the reluctance of many people to engage further with the Holocaust beyond a basic comprehension, primarily due to a perceived saturation of Holocaust films, television programmes and literature (that consequently cause spectators to feel that exposure to just one of these constitutes an adequate encounter)” (*ibidem* 440).

¹⁷⁴ Mitschke admits that these plays would be highly negative if “taken out of context” (452).

¹⁷⁵ For some reading aims, see Rosenblatt (22-47).

writers have an ethical responsibility in not providing inputs to blur historical truth, cause misunderstandings, or that could be used in revisionist claims. Writing a literary work that easily or purposely cause misunderstanding is in contrast with the scope of fostering memory.

What should be clear is that it is not a matter of establishing a ‘hierarchy of genres’ that follows the division between related and non-related people. The main problem is not ascribing some forms to related authors and other forms to non-related authors: as it has been seen, literary forms are finite and they should be ‘accessible’ to all writers, apart those clearly impossible to be written by non-related authors due to their lack of first-hand experience. It is non-related authors’ ‘unrelatedness’ the basic problem at the centre of Vice’s ‘accuracy’ and ‘authenticity’.¹⁷⁶

Inevitably, non-related people cannot write memoirs, nor autobiographies on the Holocaust. To give ‘historical accuracy’ to their works, they can make reference to witnesses’ accounts and first-hand sources by including excerpts within their works of fiction (see Vice 2). As a result, what they commonly rely on, and their texts are characterized by, is intertextuality (see *ibidem*). However, the paradox is that, even if they try to ‘authenticate’ their narratives in terms of historical accuracy, they may be criticized for plagiarism if they rely too much on historical or first-hand sources, or for being too fictional if they do not sufficiently quote from them (see *ibidem* 161). Therefore, it seems that the central problem of non-related authors is their absence of relation, more than their literary skills or practices, as Vice notes.

By claiming that non-related authors’ works should be considered together with the related authors’ ones to foster memory, the tighter relationship of the first generation with the Holocaust is not contested, nor the ‘unique’¹⁷⁷ kind of relationship that descendants have with it is challenged. Reflecting upon whether their works, from a literary point of view, outdo those of non-related authors sounds not only inappropriate, but also a risky standpoint that may bring about more rancor than constructive dialogue. There are not real advantages in comparing and contrasting works by related and non-related authors in order to establish a ‘literary hierarchy’ when discussing the kind of memory they offer. Inevitably, there are both related and non-related writers that do write more remarkable literary works; foregrounding literary advantages and disadvantages depending on the kind of relationship to the Holocaust

¹⁷⁶ For Vice’s definitions of ‘accuracy’ and ‘authenticity’, see note 201.

¹⁷⁷ Unique is in inverted commas because, considering the reflections above, it could be said that there is a chance that second- and third-generations related to other mass killings may share similar views or the same type of memory with them.

could be a way to further separate the two groups rather than finding commonalities. The aim of this dissertation is to reflect upon the kind of memory that non-related authors for children offer in their novels. The focus, then, is on the possibility for non-related authors to write about the Holocaust to answer the questions: Must they write? In what way(s) do they write?

It could be said that there are three key concepts when discussing forms and authors representing the Holocaust in literary works. Firstly, the Holocaust must be represented, as it was shown at the beginning of this chapter. Secondly, it is widely accepted that the Holocaust must be told according to a specific and traditional 'canon' of Holocaust representation: first-hand accounts and the relevant genres are considered the best and 'right' way to tell the Holocaust. Eventually, it is also commonly accepted that only some must or, better said, can represent the Holocaust, because they have a direct relationship with the subject matter. On the contrary, other authors should not have 'access' to the Holocaust as narrative subject because they are not related to it. A direct link is established between the writer and the content: since the author 'coincides' with the subject matter, and the content of his works is the subject, a direct relationship is established: the content is authentic – like the Holocaust from a historical perspective – because the author is telling his own experience of the facts. On the other hand, if the authors were non-related, the content cannot relate about real experiences and so it risks to be perceived as 'inauthentic'. Given the equation between author, content, and historical fact, if the content is 'inauthentic' it might be applied the same perspective to the historical fact. This is a possibility that cannot be accepted even in the slightest form, and it is supposedly the main problem of historical fiction written by non-related people.

The issue regarding the ways to remember the Holocaust is still a much debated one and it does not only concern forms and genres because, as said above, the separation of form, author, and content is quite difficult. Both Holocaust memory passed on and forms used are strictly related to the authors proposing them. As Loew states,

[t]he central, still much discussed and mostly unresolved issue of debate in the field of Holocaust Studies over the past few decades is the concern for the appropriate way, form or genre, in which an event as extreme as the Holocaust can be represented without arriving at a facile reduction or an aesthetic domestication of human pain and suffering. (216)

As it has been said, the number of literary and critical works published in the latest three decades are an evident proof that discussions and cultural productions concerning many aspects of the Holocaust have been going on, in many artistic areas. As far as literature and

the cinema are concerned, the question of using the ‘right’ genres and registers when telling and representing the Holocaust is strictly embedded in the concept of authorship, since the rendering of such pain, suffering, violence and murder has usually been deemed as impossible because the Holocaust, in its essence, is unrepresentable.

In order to discuss the ‘right way to’ represent the Holocaust, it seems necessary to dwell into two related topics. The first one, uniqueness, refers to the contrasting views of the representation of the Holocaust as a unique historical fact and that can be considered at the basis of a more open or a more ‘exclusivist’¹⁷⁸ view of Holocaust memory. The second topic to be tackled is appropriation, which has already been referred to in the previous part. Here, it is seen in relation to the concepts of accuracy and authenticity, both proposed by Vice in her study on Holocaust fiction.¹⁷⁹ Appropriation, in particular, is strictly related to the ‘right’ to represent the Holocaust, as it will be shown.

Despite not being specific to literary studies, it is important to reflect upon the ways in which the Holocaust is seen, conceived, and understood in relation with other instances of genocides in order to better understand how it is represented in literary works. The uniqueness issue is quite easily explicable, although it is not so easy to find a common ground. The Holocaust has traditionally been conceived as unique, meaning that it has been thought of as an historical event that is separated from other genocides, and in some cases the very term Holocaust “is considered to be a separate category altogether from ‘genocide’” (Stone 128). This view couples with the idea that the Holocaust is ‘outside of history’: this means that it is indeed a historical fact, meaning that it is factual, that it happened, but at the same time it is so destabilizing and inexplicable that it represents a “‘hiatus’” (Lanzmann qtd. in Howe 178), an “‘abyss’” (Lanzmann qtd. in *ibidem*),¹⁸⁰ a fracture in the texture of linear history as it is conceived in Western countries. The idea of the uniqueness of the Holocaust, as a fact “above or below or apart from history” (Des Pres 217), has scholars agreeing with it on the basis of “metaphysical” and “historical” reasons (Stone 128), as Stone calls them. Despite the differences ascribable to the one or the other group, such as the idea that the Holocaust is unique because it was a “challenge to Western values” (*ibidem* 131), or that ‘historical’

¹⁷⁸ The term must not be considered with a negative meaning, it is used here in the same sense previously discussed in relation to the use of the term Holocaust as encompassing all victims of Nazi policies, or specifically referring to the Jewish victims.

¹⁷⁹ Vice’s concepts of accuracy and authenticity are discussed in note 201.

¹⁸⁰ See Lanzmann quoted in Howe’s chapter: “‘The destruction of Europe’s Jews,’ Claude Lanzmann has written, ‘cannot be logically deduced from any . . . system of presuppositions. . . . Between the conditions that permitted extermination and the extermination itself—the *fact* of the extermination—there is a break in continuity, a hiatus, an abyss’” (Lanzmann qtd. in Howe 178).

reasons are referred to identity politics, the common point is that the historical fact is seen as much unique as separate from history and other mass killings.

Elie Wiesel said that “‘Auschwitz cannot be explained’ because ‘the Holocaust transcends history’” (Wiesel qtd. in Stone 128). Many scholars agree with this position, such as Nora Levin, who thinks that “‘[o]rdinary human beings simply cannot rethink themselves into such a world and ordinary ways to achieve empathy fail, for all of the recognizable attributes of human reaction are balked at the Nazi divide. The world of Auschwitz was, in truth, a new planet’” (Levin qtd. in Stone 128). This latter reference to ‘planet Auschwitz’ might remind of the well-known statement that the concentration camps formed a “‘concentrationary universe’” (Rousset qtd. in Feldman, “Reading” 4) where rules, habits, and rational thinking of everyday life were not even thinkable or valid.

According to Stone, Levin’s “position is represented by many scholars, mainly though not entirely Jewish, and the cultural mainstream within Jewish communities” (Stone 128).¹⁸¹ Thus, the idea of the Holocaust as ‘something apart’ is widespread among individuals who have a direct relationship to it – or, at least, who are part of the same group targeted by Nazi policies – and it seems important also for non-related individuals when they approach the Holocaust. It could be said that this view poses Holocaust specificity and ‘uniqueness’ as essential ideas that non-related people should be aware of, but at the same time the historical fact must be strictly collocated ‘apart’ from their group because they do not have a direct link to it. This is because primary importance is given to Holocaust incomprehensibility and unmanageability, which make it ‘outside of history’: If related people can hardly find an ‘explanation’ or the words to tell it, how can non-related individuals handle a subject matter that is beyond human mind capacities?

Irving Howe seems to agree with the uniqueness viewpoint in writing:

We may read the Holocaust as the central event of this century; we may register the pain of its unhealed wounds; but finally we must acknowledge that it leaves us intellectually disarmed, staring helplessly at the reality or, if you prefer, the mystery of mass extermination. [T]he Holocaust [...] forms a sequence of events without historical or moral precedent. [...] Whatever was unique took place in the death camps, forming a sequence of events radically different from all previous butcheries in the history of mankind. Revenge, enslavement, dispersion, large-scale slaughter of enemies, all are a commonplace of the past; but the physical elimination of a categorized segment of mankind was, both as idea and fact, new. (175-78)¹⁸²

¹⁸¹ Stone offers the following examples of scholars agreeing with the previous idea: Deborah Lipstadt, Leni Yahil, Lucy Dawidowicz, Eberhard Jäckel, Steven Katz, and Yehuda Bauer (see Stone 128).

¹⁸² See also Jäckel: “‘[...] the National-Socialist murder of the Jews was unique because never before had a nation with the authority of its leader decided and announced that it would kill off as completely as possible a

It is the fact that the Holocaust “resists the usual capacities of mind” (*ibidem* 175) that might be the key to understand the critics siding with the perspective that the Holocaust is ‘unique’: it is difficult – albeit not impossible – to find linguistic references to explain or describe it, since our ability to discuss things is based on a process of comparing unknown things to other, better-known things. Nonetheless, Howe highlights that “our bewilderment [is] how human beings, raised in the center of European civilization, could do such a thing” (*ibidem* 187), so he calls attention on another issue concerning the ‘uniqueness’ of the Holocaust. Stone defines it as the “implicit and paradoxical Eurocentrism which demands that the Holocaust stand apart from other genocides because it was committed ‘in the heart of civilized Europe’ rather than in the midst of (supposedly) primitive or barbaric societies” (Stone 133), a risk that Avishai Margalit calls “biased salience” (Margalit 80). For the philosopher, the risk is not only that of remembering more historical facts from the First World than similar occurrences in the Third World, but also the fact that “because they are likely to be better remembered, the atrocities of Europe will come to be perceived as morally more significant than atrocities elsewhere. As such, they claim false moral superiority” (*ibidem*). Of course, this potential view on the relationship between European genocides and others happened elsewhere is just a possibility that derives from the ‘uniqueness’ reading, it is not a perspective necessarily implied by scholars siding with the ‘unique’ view.

That is probably why Howe, while apparently defending Holocaust uniqueness, also concedes that

[t]he Holocaust is continuous with, indeed forms, a sequence of events *within* Western history, and *at the same time* it is a unique historical enterprise. To study its genesis within Western history may help us discover its roots in traditional anti-Semitism, fed in turn by Christian myth, German romanticism, and the breakdown of capitalism in twentieth-century Europe between the wars. But *it is a grave error to make, or “elevate”, the Holocaust into an occurrence outside of history*, [it would be to] tacitly absolve its human agents of their responsibility. To do so is a grave error *even if, so far and perhaps forever, we lack adequate categories for comprehending how such a sequence of events could occur.* (175; my emphasis)

As anticipated above, the problem of thinking the Holocaust as ‘unique’ or ‘as unique as many’ intersects with the problem of conceiving it inside or outside of history. As Stone notes, “while we must recognize different categories of ‘uniquists’, the problems which arise by virtue of defending that thesis are similar: they overlook the fact that other genocides have

particular group of humans, including old people, women, children, and infants and actually put this decision into practice, using all the means of governmental power at its disposal” (qtd. in Stone 129).

more in common with the Holocaust than they do differences” (132). Proof of the presence of similarities might be the detailed study by Woolf and Hulsizer who, by comparing various instances, provide a clear and logical sequence of phases that a totalitarian regime may follow to eventually carry out a mass killing. Their research on the psychosocial roots of genocides are not meant to undermine the importance of the Holocaust *per se* (or any other instance), but has a positive and ‘active’ aim: apart from gathering commonalities to trace a ‘path’ towards mass killing, they offer possible approaches of intervention and prevention based on the similarities highlighted.

Saying that the Holocaust is ‘unique’ and ‘similar’ at the same time to other mass killings is not a contradiction. Historical facts such as genocides, including the Holocaust, are ‘unique’ because each of them presents some specificities that are ‘unique’ – be they the socio-cultural context, the relevance of the geographical location, the political ‘reasons’, the importance of religious matters. While being unique in this sense, each genocide is an assault on mankind as well as personal and collective freedom. Regardless of the socio-cultural, economic, political, geographical, and historical variables, as a constant each mass killing is an extreme form of disrespect towards a group of people, who are not considered equal to the perpetrators for some specific ‘reasons’. These may be different, but the basis is always the misrecognition of a group of human beings – already established as such or ‘made up’ by perpetrators – as individuals and as peers, as it is well known in the case of the Holocaust.

Is considering the Holocaust in relation to other mass killing an instance of appropriation or of abuse? If the scope of the relationship established is considered – for example, preventing other mass killings – the answer should be no. However, some may say that ‘using’ the Holocaust or any other genocide with a prevention aim equals finding some ‘usefulness’ out of those mass killings. Undoubtedly, mass killings are not ‘useful’, on any level. The point, though, is not to conceive the proposed approach as finding some usefulness – rather, this way of thinking may be deemed as a new way of remembering and honouring what happened by preventing other similar instances. In other words, memory is performed by adopting a thinking pattern and behaviour that is contrary to what brought about these mass killings. This kind of ‘memory’ is only possible through establishing a relationship between different past facts, which are ‘unique’ and ‘similar’ at the same time, and between these facts and the present as well as future generations reading about them.

As a consequence, the broader view on the Holocaust as ‘unique as many’ might be extremely useful to foster a kind of ‘active’ memory as it has just been outlined. In an age where the Holocaust is ‘everywhere’ in cultural and memory discourse, there is not only the

risk claimed by Howe that literary works ‘downsize’ it, but also that there may be a dilution of its severity and importance as a result of its constant presence, despite the idea of ‘sacred’ entity proposed by the “Holocaust etiquette” (Des Pres 218).¹⁸³ Against this, a constructive comparison with other mass killings may help individuals to better understand Holocaust severity and the fact that they could be potential victims not because of a ‘hierarchy of suffering’, but because they may realize that genocides have happened in many places around the world, for different ‘reasons’, and targeting different groups of people who share the fact they were misrecognized as human beings.

Although Stone focuses on why, according to him, the idea of uniqueness has been put forward, it is beyond the scopes of this dissertation to discuss what the reasons may be for defending this perspective. What is being claimed is that the Holocaust is unique because, as Kokkola states, the individuals who were targeted were unique people, but at the same time it shares similarities with other mass killings. It is commonly accepted that each and every one of us is unique, and at the same time, they all are human beings: similarly, it cannot be said that even only two mass killings are the ‘same’ as the individual lives lost are ‘unique’, but at the same time they are two examples of human loss, generally speaking. This is true regardless of the political and military means used to perpetrate the genocide. As it was said for the use of terms to refer to the Holocaust, it might be more useful to focus on commonalities rather than differences. Talking about the Holocaust is possible only if common words are accepted, even though they are imperfect and flawed: similarly, an ‘active’ memory is possible if imperfect but constructive comparisons with other instances of mass killings are allowed, even though these are geographically defined and specific of an historical-political context. Consequently, ‘setting apart’ the Holocaust may ultimately obstacle the fostering of memory.

The ‘concentrationary universe’ perspective setting the Holocaust as a fact ‘apart’ from other events in one’s own life is right because, generally speaking, a genocide is something that one does not usually experience in their life as ‘everyday happening’. In this sense, the Holocaust is a fact apart from the everyday experience. It is not really possible to

¹⁸³ Alexander talks about ‘sacred-evil’: “[...] the German-Israeli historian Dan Diner observes that ‘well into the 1970s, wide-ranging portraits of the epoch would grant the Holocaust a modest (if any) mention.’ By contrast, ‘it now tends to fill the entire picture . . . The growing centrality of the Holocaust has altered the entire warp and woof of our sense of the passing century . . . The incriminated event has thus become the epoch’s marker, its final and inescapable wellspring’. The Jewish mass killings became what we might identify, in Durkheimian terms, as a sacred-evil, an evil that recalled a trauma of such enormity and horror that it had to be radically set apart from the world and all of its other traumatizing events. It became inexplicable in ordinary, rational terms. [...] As a sacred-evil, set apart from ordinary evil things, it had become mysterious and inexplicable” (*Trauma* 56-57).

fully understand the experience of a concentration camp, as it is something that can only be lived through. However, the view of the Holocaust as ‘apart from’ should not be a way of excluding other instances of genocides, also outside the European area. Similarly, conceiving the Holocaust as something apart from everyday life should not preclude the possibility of tentative narratives about it. Even though concentration camps are beyond the “usual capacities of mind” (Howe 175), literary imagination can indeed help readers who did not experience them to form a pale, blurred, imperfect idea of what it was like being there. Without the possibility, for present and future generations of non-related individuals, to get in contact with a plurality of means to approach the Holocaust, there is the risk that it will be progressively felt more distant and as a past fact with no connections to the present. On the contrary, a ‘personal’ link is essential for memory to be present, even in the form of ‘active’ memory delineated above for Woolf and Hulsizer.

The main problem arising from the idea of the outside-of-history uniqueness, according to Stone, is that it

brings even more confusion: either the Holocaust, since nothing can be compared to it, is irrelevant to understanding history or, if the Holocaust is defined as a ‘total destruction’, then ‘the Holocaust’ cannot be seen as ‘a Holocaust’ because the genocide of the Jews, though it did destroy Jewish civilization in Central and Eastern Europe, did not succeed in killing all the Jews. [...] This is what Jeffrey Alexander calls ‘the dilemma of uniqueness’. These kinds of argument [...] are distasteful and degrading, both to those who partake in them and to the memory of the victims. (132)

The potential consequences of supporting the idea of uniqueness proposed by Stone are significant, especially in the context of the need to form relationships with other instances of mass killings. Among the downsides of this idea there might also be the development of a dislike, or even rancor, towards the Holocaust as historical fact – and therefore towards its knowledge and memory. If the Holocaust cannot be related to other genocides and non-related people cannot really be ‘involved’ with it, this feeling might be caused by the fact that all the individuals making up the mass of other victims of genocides and of non-related people would be in a situation where they are asked to know the facts and dates – without really ‘know’ the Holocaust – and to remember it, but they would not be allowed to make this ‘cognitive knowledge’ as active part of their life because the Holocaust remains apart and ‘unique’.

Therefore, one of the main problems of the uniqueness position is that, while preserving the Holocaust by giving it a status above or apart from history, as something untouchable, it potentially makes it even more distant from people. That is to say, it might be

distant from future generations' active memory and this is a problem if it is hoped that Holocaust memory be part of future generations and not only within scholarly studies.

The fact that discussing about the Holocaust has often to do with words and meanings is supported by an additional linguistic issue between the terms 'unique' and 'unprecedented', although Stone states that "the 'unprecedentedness' thesis is only a more sophisticated version of the uniqueness thesis" (131). As the scholar notes,

Bauer's use of the term 'unprecedented' in his last book signals that the scholarly community is already aware of the awkwardness which ensues on the use of the term 'unique'.¹⁸⁴ At the Nuremberg Trials Justice Robert H. Jackson spoke of the Nazi crimes as 'unprecedented'. Since then, other scholars have offered criteria for using the term 'unprecedented' in preference to 'unique'. (*ibidem* 130-31)

In the Declaration of Stockholm (2000) it can be read that "[t]he unprecedented character of the Holocaust will always hold universal meaning" (qtd. in Foster et al. 10). If the Holocaust is conceived as outside of history, with no precedents and no similar facts afterwards, it is "a sequence of events" (Howe 175), to use Howe's words, for which one cannot ever use the words "such as", as the same Howe states (*ibidem* 180). It is true that the 'essence' of the Holocaust as extreme human experience cannot really be 'understood' because contemporary readers lack the experiential part, which equals the incontrovertible impossibility of reaching the essence of the individual suffering of witnesses that remains strictly personal and, for this reason, unique. However, if the Holocaust cannot be compared to any other genocide or episode of extreme racial violence in human history, it means that there is not even an attempt to 'understand' what it was like, given that human beings compare known concepts and things to unknown ones, as it has been said.¹⁸⁵ Therefore, unless the Holocaust can be compared in a constructive way, preserving it as something unique apart from history might also mean to maintain it apart from human beings – namely, apart from their knowledge and memory. The comparison with other instances of genocide would not be a way to urge an "ethnic competition" (Stone 127), or to draw a "hierarchy of suffering" (Rothberg, *Multidirectional* 9), but it would be a constructive parallel that would allow non-related people to approach it, as well as a way to establish a dialogue with other cultures that suffered similar facts. In addition to this, the parallel would also be a proper reply to the idea that other mass killings

¹⁸⁴ For example, when thinking about the mass killing of Native Americans, Aboriginals in Australia, or the Rwandan case.

¹⁸⁵ Also Marianne Hirsch refuses the 'uniqueness' thesis: "Clearly, at the beginning of the second decade of the twenty-first century, the Holocaust can no longer serve as the limit case in discussions of historical trauma, memory and forgetting" ("An Interview", accessed 08.05.2021).

are not 'suitable' to be compared to the Holocaust due to the "biased salience" (Margalit 80) perspective, which can only bring about to unstable and highly risky grounds. Without a dialogue between the various instances that avoids the formation of 'hierarchies of suffering', there may be an increase in mutual recrimination, because a 'closed' kind of memory places the Holocaust or any other mass killing on an island and does not take into account potential contacts with the other islands nearby. Therefore, it seems more useful to consider the Holocaust not as 'unique' – meaning the only example of such a historical fact, and placed 'apart from history' – or 'unprecedented' – meaning without similar instances along history – but 'as unique as many'.

It could be reasonably stated that the Holocaust is well known in the most powerful country of the Western world, the USA, and yet it does not really mean 'remembering' the Holocaust. Rather, for the USA, the Holocaust and its official and public remembrance have functioned as 'screen memory' (see Mitschke 431-41), that is, as a way to divert attention from other examples of mass killings that more directly involve the country, especially as perpetrator. The USA role in World War II was that of the "liberators" (Mitschke 431), or at least it is perceived so, so it is easier to focus on 'foreign' mass killings where evil is associated to another country rather than reflecting on its role in Vietnam or on its own past weighed by slavery (see Mitschke 431-41).

For non-related people, the question of uniqueness is central. Since they do not have any direct relationship with the fact, one could envision at least two scenarios. Firstly, it could be claimed that, precisely because they cannot 'know' the Holocaust and cannot count on any form of direct link to it, non-related people could agree with the uniqueness perspective, so as not to risk to be disrespectful towards related people. Therefore, they would be driven to side with this idea mainly because they believe they would be misunderstood unless they do, or even that they do not consider it with the due respect.

Secondly, they may see the Holocaust as 'unique as many', because the absence of direct relationship may be 'substituted' by a broader view on genocides, which includes the Holocaust as well as other genocides in the world. This wider perspective is positive only if it is not coupled with superficial knowledge, since this would imply that they might not understand the specificities of each genocide. By viewing each genocide as 'another one among many',¹⁸⁶ non-related people might overlook the importance of the Holocaust, as they

¹⁸⁶ This situation parallels the one defined as 'Holocaust fatigue' by Mischke (440): in this sense, it could be called 'genocide fatigue', meaning that superficial knowledge and vague awareness of their historical factuality, with no clear reference to the specific context, might lead to the idea that each mass killing is just 'the same',

would only be aware of the fact that there have been a number of genocides along history, somewhere in the world, and for some reason unknown to them: they would not have a real interest in engaging a dialogue with their memory, nor would these facts have anything to do with them.

Being directly related or non-related to the Holocaust does not hinder the promotion of its memory. As Stone's reasoning imply, mass killing is an act against human beings.¹⁸⁷ According to Levy and Sznajder, "[i]n a newly European 'cosmopolitan' memory, the Holocaust future (and not the past) is now considered in absolutely universal terms: it can happen to anyone, at anytime, and everyone is responsible" (101): even though the Holocaust was intended against Jewish people, the future of its memory should be of interest to anyone because the ideology at the basis of the mass killing should not be intended in exclusive terms, as if it might not persecute other social groups; Nazi persecution is but one form of the 'reasons' that perpetrators might make up against specific victims. Therefore, discussing about the uniqueness of the Holocaust, or any other genocide, might be acceptable up to a point in scholarly studies, but it is not enough *per se* to pass from what happened to a kind of memory that is 'active' and preventive. This is why knowledge of mass killings happened in Europe and elsewhere and their specific 'causes' or characteristics is not enough to establish a more just society. There must be a 'personal' link to the fact, which is possible also for non-related people (see ch. 3).

Against the uniqueness perspective are, for example, Vinay Lal and Aimé Césaire, both preoccupied that the acknowledging of the severity of the Holocaust might bring about a parallel process of 'obscuring' other mass killings that happened beyond European borders (see Stone 132). Their view recalls the "biased salience" (Margalit 80) perspective proposed by Margalit as well as postcolonial theory, which denounces the seek for a hierarchy when European-Western countries' ideas and lifestyle are spread across the colonies regardless of the local cultures and histories. Although much could be said about the differences (for example, Jewish people did not establish an Empire like European countries did), it is clear that the basic preoccupations of scholars against the idea of uniqueness is the idea of a hierarchy of suffering. In contrast with potential criteria to judge suffering, Stone privileges the search for solidarity between victims of mass killings. Solidarity is not based on

repeated over and over again in different countries. This debatable perspective is quite different from the one proposed by scholars like Woolf and Hulsizer while trying to find commonalities between diverse instances of genocide: the scholars draw parallels so as to propose an active stance of prevention and intervention towards them, whereas superficial knowledge and 'genocide fatigue' are grounded in scarce interest in each genocide, as well as in developing any personal link or active stance towards them.

¹⁸⁷ On this topic, see also Margalit's *The Ethics of Memory* (2004).

competition, but on the recognition of the other and the other's suffering – therefore, a relationship is sought and established with the other and it is intended to make a constructive comparison by sharing experiences and knowledge, which is what Rothberg calls for with his concept of multidirectional memory.

The misrecognition (or education to misrecognize) the other as a human being via prejudices, stereotypes (historically drawn and passed down, also), is a primary phase that implies a difference, a distance between people, rather than an approach through dialogue. Dialogue in this sense is at the opposite pole of misrecognition and stereotypes:¹⁸⁸ only by talking with the other one has the chance to know them, their culture, their beliefs, and eventually recognize the other as human being like them, similar and different at the same time. This is not a relation of imposition of one's identity and culture over the other, like during colonial (and postcolonial) times: it is a dialogue on the same level.¹⁸⁹

Solidarity¹⁹⁰ is a key concept for Stone in the study of genocides, including the Holocaust. It could be said that it does not undermine the Holocaust specific importance and severity, but is a lens through which to 'understand' it. It could be said that it is based on a constructive dialogue which encompasses various subjects: not only Holocaust victims and those of other genocides,¹⁹¹ or Holocaust scholars and specialists of other genocides, but also non-related people and these groups. Non-related people should participate in the relationship forged on solidarity since they should develop this approach, which is implied in the 'active memory' of the Holocaust that is claimed here. Otherwise, there is always the risk of hidden suspicions about the reasons why to engage with these themes, that echo Giglioli's reflections on victimization and a sort of 'trauma envy',¹⁹² which are not useful to anyone, from witnesses to current non-related generations.

¹⁸⁸ In the *Oxford Learner's Dictionary*, stereotype is "a fixed idea or image that many people have of a particular type of person or thing, but which is often not true in reality" ("stereotype", accessed 12.05.2021). 'Fixed' is contrary to the 'movement' presupposed by dialogue and entering in relation with the other, also according to Glissant's idea of 'Relation' in *Poetics of Relation* (translated by Betsy Wing, 1997 [1990]).

¹⁸⁹ The 'same level' is given by the fact that they all are human beings – despite the differences in the kind of memory depending on the relationship with the Holocaust (of the first-, second-, third-generation or that of non-related people).

¹⁹⁰ Stone states that more than "partaking in this kind of competition for ethnic suffering [...] the problem is surely to understand the conditions for and combat the occurrence of mass violence" (135). The central issue, therefore, is to establish a dialogue in order to improve mutual respect.

¹⁹¹ For a discussion of the Holocaust in relation to other genocides, see for example Stone (127-42).

¹⁹² According to Giglioli (10-11): "Oggi al contrario ci si trova stretti tra la precettistica del male minore che informa il pensiero politico liberale [...] e il *mysterium iniquitatis* che eleva a santo o martire chi è stato colpito, o lo desidererebbe, o lo pretende per legittimare il suo status. [...] Centrata sulla ripetizione del passato, la posizione vittimaria preclude ogni visione del futuro. Ci consideriamo tutti, scrive Christopher Lasch in *L'io minimo*, 'al tempo stesso dei sopravvissuti e delle vittime, o delle vittime potenziali. [...] È proprio questa la ferita più profonda inferta dalla vittimizzazione: si finisce per affrontare la vita non come soggetti etici attivi, ma solo come vittime passive, e la protesta politica degenera in un piagnucolio di autocommiserazione'" ("Today,

The non-related people's engagement in talking and writing about the Holocaust does not necessarily imply that they aim to domesticate or disrespect it. On the contrary, the process of making the Holocaust one's own is fundamental both to retain and foster Holocaust memory and develop a respectful attitude towards others based on it. In other words, getting nearer to the Holocaust implies acknowledging other people's suffering and recognizing them as human beings: in this sense, holders of this knowledge-memory can adopt a better attitude towards others based on Holocaust memory. The process of positive appropriation that enables this 'active' memory has nothing to do with hierarchies and exploitation of Holocaust memory, as it is more related to Glissant's idea of 'identity in relation' (see also Broszat and Friedländer 247).

Positive appropriation does not imply to undermine the importance of the Holocaust: it is a way to tackle the complexity of handling Holocaust knowledge and memory and it highlights why setting the Holocaust apart from history potentially has more disadvantages in terms of fostering its memory. If Holocaust memory is to be known and celebrated, but cannot be 'integrated' into one's personal life, memory is hindered. While calling for solidarity, Stone supports a new generation of scholars that "respects the horror that the victims witnessed, understands the specificities of modern German and Jewish history, yet also sees that understanding genocide requires a broader outlook" (138), because mass killings should go beyond "established narratives and paradigms" (*ibidem*) of national or ethnic background, and be understood as instances of violence that traverse human history. Within this stance, the Holocaust is "an extreme example of a widely recognized phenomenon, but [it is] not place[d] in a category all of its own [because only] this broader history of genocide [...] may take us beyond uniqueness and ethnic competition" (*ibidem* 138-39).

Finding similarities is useful to pursue prevention of other mass killings, as Woolf and Hulsizer have shown. By studying what happened with a 'rhizomatic' mind,¹⁹³ which is able

people are constrained between the precept of the 'the lesser evil' that informs the political liberal stance and the *mysterium iniquitatis* that promotes to the level of saint or martyr whom has suffered, or would like to have suffered, or demands it in order to legitimize their status. [...] Centered on the repetition of the past, the victim position impedes all possibilities for the future. People regard themselves, as Christopher Lasch writes in *The Minimal Self*, 'both as survivors and as victims or potential victims. [...] The experience of victimization, which justifies resistance, can also destroy the capacity for resistance by destroying the sense of personal responsibility. This is precisely the deepest injury inflicted by victimization: one finally learns to confront life not as a moral agent but solely as a passive victim, and political protest degenerates into a whine of self-pity scale'", my translation of Giglioli's words and Lasch's words from the original Lasch 66-77).

¹⁹³ See Wing: "Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari criticized notions of the root and, even perhaps, notions of being rooted. The root is unique, a stock taking all upon itself and killing all around it. In opposition to this they propose the rhizome, an enmeshed root system, a network spreading either in the ground or in the air, with no predatory rootstock taking over permanently. The notion of the rhizome maintains, therefore, the idea of

to see ‘uniqueness’ of each historical fact together with repetitive patterns, they enact an ‘active’ memory of those genocides: the scholars know and remember what happened on the cognitive level, but also try to make this knowledge available to the greater audience in a practical way so as to develop prevention. In this case, the ‘practical’ part is both the writing and sharing of their conclusions, and their proposals of preventive actions. In adopting an ‘active’ memory, it could be said that they respectfully remember the witnesses even though their scope is not that of disseminating ‘cognitive’ knowledge – namely, data, dates, archival information. They help to foster awareness as well as the ‘memory’ of genocides through the spread of a prevention proposal that can be adopted by readers. It is another kind of ‘memory’, but surely it is based on the acknowledgement of the factuality and historicity of the genocides, including the Holocaust.

Howe claims that

Grade’s story makes us realize that even the most dreadful event in history has brought little change in the thought of mankind. History may spring endless surprises, but our responses are very limited. In the years after the Holocaust, there was a certain amount of speculation that human consciousness could no longer be what it had previously been [...]. Exactly what it might mean to say that after the Holocaust consciousness has been transformed is very hard to say. (198)

Howe does not think that there is some “redemptive salvage” (*ibidem*), although it is “only human” (*ibidem*; see also Broszat and Friedländer 287) to hope so. Nonetheless, it seems unjust to put this hope aside and to give up attempts to establish a dialogue, even though we may lack ‘right’ words. If the Holocaust is inside history and inside a network of relations, it is necessary to talk about it and not be silent, regardless of the flawed means and words available.¹⁹⁴ Since it is unlikely to find the ‘perfect’ words to describe or define the Holocaust, it is better to agree upon some flawed terms to enable a dialogue on Holocaust memory focus as it is intended here, that is, human behaviour.

Woolf and Hulsizer’s considerations foreground the importance of the surrounding culture and the institutional education received by masses to explain why societies may allow mass killings, or forms of brutal violence and racism. If children are educated in a cultural-political environment where violence is accepted, when they are older they will not be able to distinguish what is ethical and what is against other human beings. Holocaust memory should be inserted into young generations’ learning with the double aim to promote knowledge of the

rootedness but challenges that of a totalitarian root. Rhizomatic thought is the principle behind what I call the Poetics of Relation, in which each and every identity is extended through a relationship with the Other” (11).

¹⁹⁴ Obviously, this does not mean talk in a disrespectful way, or negatively.

Nazi genocide and to urge a respectful behaviour between peers through the acquisition of an ‘active’ memory. Therefore, literature for children about the Holocaust should be on this kind of memory, deeply embedded into personal attitude and enabled by the development of a personal link with the subject matter.¹⁹⁵

As it was anticipated, when talking about the forms and genres to be used in representing the Holocaust, appropriation is another topic to be discussed. In addition to what has already been claimed in chapter 2.1, appropriation is now considered again because it is strictly linked to the debates about who can write about the Holocaust, and in what form. It is necessary to approach the theme from a double stance: in debating appropriation, a ‘collective’ perspective and a more ‘personal’ view may be adopted. The first refers to socio-political terms that study the ways in which the Holocaust and its memory have been object of a progressive expansion beyond national and European borders, until the fact has become a ‘universalized’ symbol of evil (see Alexander, “Social Construction” 5-85). The latter perspective, the more ‘personal’ view, is about individuals and their relationship with the Holocaust, it is linked to the differentiation between related and non-related people, and it is concerned with issues of accuracy and authenticity.

Starting from the socio-political level, Stone states that in order to understand genocide – and therefore, it can be implied, the Holocaust – there are three possible overlapping approaches that he calls world historical, nation-building, and anthropological. As far as the world historical and nation-building theoretical lenses are concerned, Stone explains that these are “variants” that “see genocide as a fundamental characteristic of world history[,] attempt to provide both a sociological typology of genocide and to provide a broad historical framework for this typology” (135).¹⁹⁶ In particular, Stone proposes Donald Bloxham’s study on Armenia to illustrate the nation-building approach: in his research, Bloxham does not agree with “mainstream historiography [in] trying to see the genocide of the Armenians in the light of a Holocaust paradigm” (*ibidem*) but “places [the mass killing] in a relation with the global politics of the day: the conflict between the European and American great powers, and the history of Christian–Muslim relations within the Ottoman world [because] the traditional nation-state framework is insufficient for understanding the evolution of genocide” (*ibidem*). The same need to embed the mass killing within the international

¹⁹⁵ Societies consciously pass on a traumatic legacy to young generations because it is part of an ‘ethic legacy’, and young people should grow in a culture that values this ethic legacy and makes them understand that it is an ethical duty to acquire it.

¹⁹⁶ As Stone makes clear, Charles Maier conceives the history of the twentieth century as fights aimed to conquer power over territory and in which genocide plays a crucial role.

context instead of limiting it to the national framework applies to the case of the Rwandan genocide (see *ibidem*). Mass killings, then, should not be deemed as ‘confined’ within the national borders of the country where they are perpetrated because they are deeply enmeshed with international relations present before, during and after them. Most importantly, Stone emphasizes the fact that “[t]his approach does not diminish the suffering of the victims; it does remove them from the realm of the ‘sacred’ and seek to explain how states arrive at genocide as a viable option” (136).

This is even more evident with the world-historical approach, since “it places more stress on structural or global economic factors” (*ibidem*) in relation to mass killings than the previous type. At its centre there is the development of the state system and globalization. For Mark Levene, “[t]he genocidal mentality [...] is closely linked with agendas aimed at accelerated or force-paced social and economic change in the interests of ‘catching up’ or alternatively avoiding, or circumventing, the rules of the system leaders” (Levene qtd. in Stone 136). Dirk Moses’s study links genocide to the ideas that spread between 1850 and 1950, concluding that it is “the outcome of the ‘racial century’ [where the] ‘most basic feature was competition between rival projects of nation-building and ‘people-making’ (that is, the fashioning of ethnically homogeneous populations domestically) that culminated in the Holocaust of European Jewry and other racial minorities in the 1940s” (Moses qtd. in Stone 136-37). This perspective conceives “imperialism [...] as integral to understanding the era of fascism” (Stone 137) and it is inspired by Arendt’s *Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951). Both Levene and Moses’ works “[take] for granted that the Holocaust needs to be studied in the context of racism, nationalism, colonialism and imperialism if genocide is to be a meaningful tool of historical understanding” (*ibidem*).

Eventually, the anthropological approach merges the previous characteristics while attempting “to find sociological explanations for the apparently contingent occurrence of mass violence, negotiating between ‘human nature’ and ‘social structure’” (*ibidem*). Therefore, a “human dimension” (*ibidem*) is sought in this perspective, such as Christopher Taylor’s research on the case of Rwanda, where “the extraordinarily ferocious sexual aspects of the genocide as outcomes of popular Rwandan beliefs in ‘blockages’ and ‘flows’: the Tutsis were, from the Hutu Power point of view, a ‘blockage’ preventing the realization of a stable society” (*ibidem*), which is why, in his reading, the Hutu made use of extreme physical violence.¹⁹⁷ While not being in contrast with the previous approaches, this seeks to collocate genocide in a

¹⁹⁷ Stone proposes also the example of the Cambodian genocide (see Stone 137).

global context together with “explaining the sociocultural dynamics that prevail in any given genocidal circumstance” (*ibidem*) because “[h]uman behaviour is both enabled and constrained by sociocultural structures. . . . Within an appropriate historical and sociocultural context, those who articulate genocidal ideologies often use these highly salient *cultural models* to motivate individuals to commit violent atrocities” (Hinton qtd. in Stone 137; my emphasis).

Therefore, the addition of a “human dimension” (Stone 137) to the study of genocide and the adoption of a broader view that crosses national borders imply that mass killings are the result also of specific human behaviour nurtured by ‘cultural models’. This is what also Woolf and Hulsizer claimed when focusing on the importance of the cultural context and of schooling (see Woolf and Hulsizer 101-28). The question, then, is to link Holocaust memory to this ‘human dimension’ and the ‘cultural models’ of a given society. Although these are the result of a multitude of factors, if Holocaust ‘active’ memory participates in shaping the ‘cultural models’ towards a more inclusive and less competitive society, then its development and promotion are not a form of abuse of the Holocaust, but a kind of respectful remembrance precisely because it helps to prevent the socio-cultural racist environment that surrounded the historical fact.

Stone approaches have to do with the collocation of genocide(s) on a socio-political level. Although being referred to mass killing in general, the anthropological perspective shares its focus on human dimension with the four modes of ‘universalizing’ the Holocaust that Levy and Sznajder have identified. These are conceived upon four different focuses, that is,

as far as the victims are concerned in the past (was it the Jews plus a supporting cast, or many different peoples who suffered?); as far as the victims are concerned in the future (is the lesson Never Again for the Jews, or Never Again for Anyone?); as far as the perpetrators are concerned in the past (were the Nazis uniquely evil, or were they only different in quantity from other mass murderers?); and as far as the subjects in the present are concerned (who remembers? i.e. who has the right to pronounce the truth of the Holocaust?). (Levy and Sznajder 101)

Therefore, if Stone’s approaches are based on conceiving the mass killings in a broad, globally-aware perspective, in their study Levy and Sznajder call for a detachment from the idea that the future of a collectivity is still determined by the certainties given by its national past. They claim that, in an age of uncertainty began after World War II, collective memory is no longer linked to the national pasts but to transnational symbols like the Holocaust, which

has acquired increasing relevance in connection with the paralleling decreasing importance of national pasts. Levy and Sznajder highlight that “memories of the Holocaust facilitate the formation of transnational memory cultures, which in turn, have the potential to become the cultural foundation for global human rights politics” (*ibidem* 88). Therefore, it is implied that the Holocaust cannot be conceived anymore in a ‘closed’ perspective, but must ‘breathe’ a global context of reception and entanglements.

Particular attention must be given to the fourth mode envisaged by the scholars, which is about individuals in the present and, as they wonder, “who remembers? i.e. who has the right to pronounce the truth of the Holocaust?” (*ibidem* 101). Although the words ‘truth of the Holocaust’ may be conceived as indicating the ‘definitive’ interpretation of the historical fact – which seems rather impossible to reach, as well as a bit patronizing – they can also be intended as making reference to the more general ‘right’ to remember the Holocaust. Is the Holocaust ‘belonging’ to everyone, or only to a defined group of individuals more directly related to it? The issue of the ‘right’ to remember the Holocaust and to foster memory is another way of debating about the ‘right’ of representing it.

According to Levy and Sznajder’s view, the Holocaust is now part of a cosmopolitan memory. This would imply that everyone is entitled and compelled to remember, no matter if the relationship with the subject matter is direct or of a different kind. The scholars

are not studying the historical event called the Holocaust, but rather how changing representations of this event have become a central political-cultural symbol facilitating the emergence of cosmopolitan memories. The choice of the Holocaust is not arbitrary. [...] [T]he mass murder of European Jews by the Nazis is not considered as a German–Jewish tragedy but as a tragedy of reason or of modernity itself. [...] [I]n an age of ideological uncertainty these memories have become a measure for humanist and universalist identifications. (Levy and Sznajder 88)

Memories of the Holocaust, in this view, impact the “cultural models” (Stone 137) Hinton refers to – thus there is the need to focus on what kind of Holocaust memory is imparted and in what ways, especially to young generations.

Even though the drive at the basis of Levy and Sznajder’s view is surely positive in their attempt to delineate a positive aspect of a universalized remembrance of the Holocaust, it must be noted that considering at the centre of their study Holocaust representations as a means towards a cosmopolitan memory might be perceived as a form of abuse of the historical fact. Paradoxically, widening Holocaust remembrance seems to parallel a decrease in the ‘importance’ of the Holocaust as historical fact, as it seems almost overshadowed by its

many representations.¹⁹⁸ Whether it would be better to have fewer representations trying to foster memory so as to focus again on the historical fact rather than the Holocaust as a symbol is up to debate.

Levy and Sznajder claim that Holocaust memory, apart from being the basis of a cosmopolitan memory, is at the centre of a shared European-memory making process. The fact that the Holocaust is a “watershed in European history” (Levy and Sznajder 88) is probably why it is central. Responding to the instability deriving from the decreasing importance of national pasts, the countries in the Western part of Europe conceived the Holocaust as a ‘founding’ symbol of European memory after the war, and later in the century it was inscribed into the memory of Eastern European countries too, when these countries began a process of distancing from their national pasts. Therefore, the Holocaust as a symbol is seen, in Levy and Sznajder’s view, as a founding memory as well as the glue of a perceived common European past.

Although this view of Holocaust memory might be perceived as an appropriation – the use of the Holocaust to ‘unify’ Europe by ‘building’ a common past – the relationship between Holocaust memory and Holocaust representations is more complicated than just politics. Going beyond national and international governments, societies are composed of individuals and it is their relationship with the Holocaust that is central in this dissertation.

Focusing on the issue of appropriation from the point of view of individuals, as anticipated above, means taking into consideration authors, readers, and literature, and how writers and readership are linked to the Holocaust. As it should be clear by now, there are many issues regarding the ‘right’ to represent the Holocaust, as well as the ‘right’ to use certain forms. It could be said that the issue of *appropriation* parallels the issue of *appropriateness*, since, as it has been anticipated above, the author’s link with the Holocaust is important when the historical fact is represented in literary form.

As it has been discussed, Stone, Sznajder, and Levy privilege an ‘inclusive’ approach where individuals have the ‘right to’ handle the Holocaust as historical fact and Holocaust memory regardless of the kind of relationship they have towards them. This approach does not place witnesses (or, generally speaking, Jewish people) in contrast with non-related individuals (or, non-Jewish people): witnesses are an invaluable and irreplaceable source of knowledge, and their telling of what they suffered is ‘unique’. However, their accounts can be

¹⁹⁸ The relevance of the Holocaust as symbol in the contemporary society, especially in Western countries, is what also Alexander focuses on in his study on the social construction of trauma (see Alexander, “Social Construction” 5-85), in addition to its use in many contexts from politics to human rights.

‘unique’ and juxtaposed by other literary works at the same time, without diminishing their importance nor undermining the relevance of the Holocaust, if these ‘other’ works share the scope of fostering memory.

In this part, appropriation is seen in a positive sense. ‘Positive’ appropriation is a way to establish a relationship between the Holocaust and other mass killings as well as it is tool to build a relationship between the historical fact and non-related current and future generations, between related and non-related individuals. Literary works about the Holocaust can thus be read through the lens of De Andrade’s cultural anthropophagy: non-related people should be granted the ‘right’ to tell something about the Holocaust – something that does not add any historical information, but that enables readers to get in contact with another kind of memory that is specific of non-related readers, and which will be called ‘attitudinal postmemory’.

As it is known, Art Spiegelman’s *Maus* was a watershed in literary representation of the Holocaust because the author was able to convey in a graphic novel the harsh reality of his father’s time as well as his own reality as a descendant, even though the genre was not among the ones considered suitable to tell the subject matter. Roberto Benigni’s film *La vita è bella* (1997) drew positive and negative criticisms at the same time because it was an attempt to use fairy-tale style and sensible laughter to represent the Holocaust. Critics were divided in its reception as they have recently been for Taika Waititi’s *Jojo Rabbit* (2019), loosely based on Christine Leunens’ novel *Caging Skies* (2004), because laughter is probably the last register that comes to mind when one thinks about the seriousness of the Holocaust.

Spiegelman and Benigni share the fact that they tried to represent the Holocaust and communicate it to the greater audience through what was considered an unusual means, to say the least. It would be quite easy to deem their forms as inappropriate without considering them more in detail. While being both innovators, there is a difference between the two, since Spiegelman is a second-generation descendant, whereas Benigni, “a non-Jew, was concerned with establishing biographical links with the Holocaust: [...] he [...] tried to validate his fable by evoking the memory of his father, a soldier and prisoner of war during World War II” (Loew 215-16).

Benigni felt he had to ‘justify’ his getting involved with the Holocaust through the presence of some kind of direct relationship with the subject matter. The presence of – or search for – a link of some form with the Holocaust in order to ‘validate’, as Loew puts it, the handling of the subject is one of the main issues concerning Holocaust literature and memory. Benigni’s looking for a form of relationship that could ‘justify’ – or even ‘defend’ – his ‘right’ to represent the Holocaust, especially through sensible laughter, is indicative of the

uneasiness of accepting Holocaust representations proposed by non-related people. The same is true regarding the use of some forms, genres, and registers by non-related people due to their positionality towards the subject matter.¹⁹⁹

These uncertain grounds probably derive from the severity of the Holocaust. As a consequence, “[o]ne of the particularities of artistic production based on the Holocaust is that critics tend to consider the biography of the artist to be particularly relevant. Thus Holocaust representations that are considered adequate and are culturally acceptable most frequently stem from Jewish artists” (*ibidem* 215). Considering the importance of the tight connection between the author’s biography and what they tell in relation to the Holocaust, it could be said that representing the Holocaust is bound to a constant double fear: the fear of not having the right to represent, speak or write about it, and the fear of ‘the right way’ to represent it.

The issue of establishing the right to represent the Holocaust is as much difficult as discussing the ‘right’ way to do it, that is, defining the right forms, genres, and registers to be used. Nowadays, the manifold cultural productions related to the Holocaust²⁰⁰ would allow to say almost all forms have been used. The television medium and literature were the first means to communicate the Holocaust to the greater audience, but one must remember that now the range of cultural productions encompasses cartoon documentaries, newspaper articles, sculptures, museal exhibitions, not to mention the millions of photos taken by the perpetrators waiting to be analyzed (see Hirsch, *Generation* 132-39), artistic works based on photo cropping and reproduction (see *ibidem* 67-72) and, of course, the invaluable meetings with witnesses in schools.

Vice identified two fundamental concepts in her detailed study on Holocaust fiction: authenticity and accuracy,²⁰¹ ideas strictly linked to the authors’ positionality or, briefly said,

¹⁹⁹ As Bos explains, positionality is a concept derived from feminist research and was first articulated by Linda Alcoff at the end of the 1980s (Bos 69). According to Bos, “[t]he configurations of each person’s subjectivity,’ as de Lauretis defines subject position, the patterns by which ‘experiential and emotional contents, feelings, images, and memories are organized to form one’s self-image’ [...] also affect the work we do, as identity and subjectivity create the background, the position, from which we construct meaning in our work” (52). Therefore, “positionality is a location from which we construct meaning” (*ibidem*). In relation to the Holocaust, the concept can be understood as referring to the position of individuals towards the Holocaust, also in terms of the reasons why they engage with it (see also Howe 181).

²⁰⁰ It is to be considered only the group of cultural productions that are supposed to be respectful, not those made with revisionist claims: it is not the same to discuss about works that proved unsuccessful in conveying a respectful contribution to Holocaust memory and works that are made with the clear intent of limiting or annulling the importance of Holocaust memory.

²⁰¹ In relation to Holocaust fiction, Vice states that authenticity “generally means [...] that the author must be writing in good faith, preferably about events they have experienced. However, as well as ‘real’ it can mean ‘real-seeming’; in the latter sense, it is a comment on effective style rather than accurate content” (Vice 77; emphasis in original). While discussing Keneally’s *Schindler’s List*, Vice notes that “accuracy must, apparently, include all details of a particular event including its context” (*ibidem* 89). However, as the scholar admits, “the philosophical issues of authenticity and accuracy” (*ibidem* 160) are “[t]he two issues which are most central to

to their related or non-related view. There seems to be a situation similar to the one discussed above about the ‘appropriateness’ of using some terms by Jewish or non-Jewish individuals: as narrative subject, the Holocaust is considered as ‘belonging’ to related people, whereas non-related people cannot have ‘access’ to it, in terms of indirect memory and as narrative topic, precisely because they do not and cannot know what it was like, or what it is like to inherit its trauma, even though there have been some criticisms also against the second generation.²⁰²

Focusing on Holocaust fiction, and in particular on novels written by non-related authors, Sue Vice adopts a broader perspective on the issue of what genres and forms should be allowed in Holocaust representation and of whom should be allowed to write about it. In her critical study, Vice defends fiction, although she admits that it does not outdo testimonies and accounts. However, the point is not to demonstrate the literary or historically accurate superiority of fiction over accounts. It is clear that the latter are superior in terms of authenticity, while fiction can only ‘imagine’ what it was like, or ‘fill in the gaps’. The same can be said of accuracy, but it is also true that even witnesses’ memories are not always depicting the ‘truth’ of what was really ‘there’, as Spiegelman showed in *Maus* by drawing his father’s memories that sometimes do not find an ‘objective’, historical counterpart because past details blend over time and are influenced by emotions, situations, and other aspects.²⁰³ In addition to this, it could be stated that the two genres – fiction and accounts – are not really comparable to each other in the case of mass killings and, most of all, to what purpose? Does a ‘hierarchy of genres’ eventually help in fostering memory? It is claimed here that it does not: while it is due to acknowledge the unparalleled importance of accounts, looking for similarities and differences or trying to establish a division like the one between related and non-related authors does not ultimately help in promoting ways to approach

the negative reception of much Holocaust fiction” (*ibidem*) and they cause inherent contradictions. On the one hand, “lack of perceived authenticity, and consequent suspicion of authorial motives, underlies the negative estimates of *Time’s Arrow*, *The Hand that Signed the Paper*, *The White Hotel*, *Sophie’s Choice* and *Schindler’s List* [...]” (*ibidem* 160-61); on the other hand, “charges of inaccuracy [are] unusual [...] where fiction is concerned. [...] Experimenting with form is treated as if it were inaccuracy; in other words, accusing the novel in this way is tantamount to accusing it of fictionality, and is a contradiction in terms. [...] Novelists are expected to keep to the facts, yet doing so too slavishly can be viewed as plagiarism; as novelists they are expected to invent material, yet doing so amounts to inaccuracy. Once more the establishment of this double bind indicates that critical opinion has a narrow view of what a Holocaust novel should be like, and who should write it” (*ibidem* 161). As remedy, Vice thinks that “[t]here are two ways out of this trap: either to signal very clearly where the historical material is taken from, or to blend it with the rest of the novelistic material” (*ibidem* 146).

²⁰² See Hirsch about authority and authenticity: “Virulent critiques of the work on the second generation, including my own, have been based on an assumption that children of survivors want to equate their suffering with that of their parents, appropriating it for their own identity purposes” (*Generation* 20).

²⁰³ This does not make those ‘blended’ memories less powerful or relevant. The same can be said of witnesses’ accounts with ‘aggrandized’ incidents (see note 211).

Holocaust memory. It is more important what Vice does in her study: defending other forms and genres to represent the Holocaust as well as ‘other’ authors who are not directly related to it.

Vice claims that Holocaust fiction is not an addition or a ‘surpassing’ of witnesses’ accounts, but is another approach to the subject matter (see Vice 8). Earlier in this writing it was claimed that fiction could be seen as an ‘addition’ to the modes that should be accepted in representing the subject matter, but this is not in contrast with Vice’s view. What Vice intends by saying that Holocaust fiction does not “ai[m] to ‘add’ to [...] the survivor record” (Vice 8), it is implied, is the fact that fiction (by non-related authors) cannot ‘add’ anything to what witnesses can write and say about the Holocaust (see Howe 175-99): non-related works cannot add information about the subject matter, they can only be another mode of approaching it. This is also consistent with the previous claim that Lang’s preoccupations with the future of the Holocaust are to be considered in the frame of accepting new modes of approaching the subject, which does not mean that these modes ‘change’ the subject from a historical point of view.

Writing should be aimed at widening memory, or, in generic terms, it should be aimed at reaching a constructive dialogue. Refusing literary works that do not foster memory in a way that is respectful of the historical fact and its witnesses is not the same of discarding fiction because it is a mix between fact and imaginary additions. It is not advisable to discard fiction because, according to Vice, it is a different approach to the subject matter that might be useful in allowing the wider society to get in contact with the Holocaust.

A brief parallel could be useful. Considering Steven Spielberg’s *Schindler’s List* and Claude Lanzmann’s documentary *Shoah* one could wonder ‘how much’ each of them is successful in telling the Holocaust, so as to implicitly beginning a sort of ‘hierarchy of representation’ (see Bratu Hansen 292-312).²⁰⁴ This dissertation claims that they should be seen from a different perspective and the same applies to non-related authors’ literary works. Instead of ‘how much’ successful they are, one may ask: do they convey Holocaust memory? If so, what kind of memory and how? Is there an exploitation of the subject matter, or are they another kind of approach?

²⁰⁴ According to Bratu Hansen, “the controversies over the film as symptomatic of larger issues, in particular the ongoing problematic Holocaust remembrance and the so-called Americanization of the Holocaust [...]. [T]hese issues [are] encapsulated in the pervasive polarization of critical argument into the opposition between *Schindler’s List* and Claude Lanzmann’s documentary *Shoah* (1985) as two mutually exclusive paradigms of cinematically representing or not-representing the Holocaust. This opposition [...] does not yield a productive way of dealing with either the films or the larger issues involved” (294).

This perspective does not imply that Spielberg's film is in some form 'better' than the second. It is not a matter of placing one over to the other, but of 'helping' the documentary with the film, as the latter could be seen as an 'aid' to approach the first one. If non-related authors' works convey a specific kind of memory, then a dialogue between related writers' works and these can be sought. If they do not convey memory, the dialogue is not possible because they do not share the basilar feature that makes communication possible with related authors' works. Non-related authors may be driven by a just ideal of contributing to memory by offering their own perspective and relationship with the subject matter, or they might be driven by disputable reasons, for example commercial ones. A dialogue is possible only between the works of related authors and the ones written by the first kind of non-related writers.

Witnesses have first-hand memories, the second and third generations share an "absent memory" (Aarons and Berger 47), and non-related people have a kind of memory that is "prosthetic" (Landsberg, *Prosthetic 2*) and 'media-driven' (see Leavy, Kindle edition, ch. One, par. Introduction). Regardless of the kind of memory, it is memory nonetheless. The four types of Holocaust memory differ between each other, but they share the common scope of making the Holocaust 'known' and to contribute to its remembrance. The first-generation's sharing of memory is intended to inform, spread the need of remembrance, and remember the ones who died. It could be said that at the basis there is the idea that information and remembrance are meant to avoid that it could happen something similar in the future. The second-generation authors, in telling their inheritance of their parents' trauma, try to convey a memory meant to reach the same objectives, as the writings by the third generation do.²⁰⁵ In proposing their own kind of Holocaust postmemory, some non-related authors try to contribute to the same intents. As a consequence, if works written by witnesses, their descendants, and non-related individuals share the same scope, it does not seem to make sense to divide between related and non-related, or Jewish-non-Jewish people. Sharing the aim of fostering memory does not mean that the kind of memory they bring forward and communicate is the same.

Since the term Holocaust is commonly intended among scholars in an exclusive sense, it is logical that in literary works about the Holocaust it is expected that the protagonist is Jewish. Nonetheless, as it has been said before, there were other groups of victims, too. Therefore, it is possible that there can be works where other victims are the protagonists,

²⁰⁵ For an analysis of the writings by third-generation descendants, see for example Aarons and Berger's study *Third-Generation Holocaust Representation* (2017).

despite low numbers of such works so far (see Kokkola, *Representing* 5). However, literary works concerning the Holocaust, especially novels written for an older readership, may present other disputable protagonists, such as perpetrators and non-Jewish people who do not belong to the other targeted groups (see Vice 161). According to Vice, in case of perpetrators it is necessary to reflect if it is right to include these works as part of Holocaust literature. Pettitt, in her study on this kind of fiction, uses the term ‘perpetrator fiction’ (see Pettitt, *Perpetrators*, Kindle edition, Introduction). As for other protagonists, it could be said that it should be evaluated the scope of the literary work and how the Holocaust is present in the plot, because there are a number of possibilities. Is the subject matter only briefly hinted at because ‘it must be referred to’? Are there only quick and superficial references to secure an easy editorial success? Is it presented in an indirect way because the non-related author cannot see ‘within’?

The above cases differ from each other. Undoubtedly, the first two possibilities concern works that must be denounced and, if not condemned, at least problematized. However, if the same is done with the third one, what is refused is an ‘approach’ of a different type. Despite the fact that non-related works may be seen as an ‘incursion’ or assault, it is claimed here that refusing fiction even when its scope is positive means depriving the readership of a further means to approach the Holocaust respectfully. This is why a more elaborate reflection on fiction, and on the scope of historical fiction in particular, is needed.

The first two cases can be grouped together as they are instances of abuse: an example could be the play *Perdition*, analyzed by Vice, because it is “‘a distortion of history based on a selective interpretation of the facts and the citation of actions and documents taken out of context’” (Cesarani qtd. in Vice 164). As a consequence, “*Perdition* is not a modulated investigation into painful facts, but the acting out of a predetermined view of the term ‘Zionist’ and of Jewish leadership in Europe under the Nazis. [...] *Perdition* is using the Holocaust as a cover for its real target: recent Israeli domestic and foreign policy” (Vice 166). In this work, the author uses sources referring to the Holocaust not to foster its memory, but to present his view to the audience about current politics by ‘covering’ it with references to the Holocaust. In this case, the aim is not fostering Holocaust memory and the author is abusing the subject matter. The scope of works citing the Holocaust just because ‘it must be cited’ is to increase editorial success. In this case, making reference to the subject matter is not due to a drive to promote memory, but a marketing reason that has an economic purpose.

In the case of fiction by non-related authors who maintain a distance from the Holocaust – and thus it is presented in an indirect way – the scope may be ethically-driven:

they aim to enhance remembrance and memory. For example, it could be said that the author might be hesitant to propose an ‘inner’ view of the concentration camps precisely because he lacks first-hand knowledge of them. Non-related authors cannot ‘go near’ the subject matter beyond a certain point: it is the point referred to by Isaac Rosenfeld when he says that writing memoirs “is to have the rare ‘courage . . . to stay near the thing itself and not to cast out for the usual reassurance’” (Rosenfeld qtd. in Howe 182). Witnesses have a kind of proximity that non-related authors will never be able to have. However, their different view and approach to the Holocaust can help Holocaust remembrance by sharing their own perspective. This is why it is important to take into consideration the scope of their literary work together with the other issues.

It is possible to tackle and getting nearer the narrative subject from various standpoints, depending on the personal relationship that authors have with the Holocaust. Of course, literary approaches are an incomplete and ‘flawed’ mode to tell the Holocaust, because all representations can only be partial.²⁰⁶ Non-related authors’ works are not to be conceived to ‘change’ the historical facts nor to ‘have their say’ on what was experienced: they tell what kind of memory their non-related authors have – a postmemory. Historical fiction for children is a kind of fiction that should be accepted as potentially relevant aids in fostering memory (see Part Two).

This chapter began with a question: Is the Holocaust to be represented? Even though the answer proposed is positive, as discussed literary genres used to do so are often influenced by the division between related and non-related people and a sort of literary ‘hierarchy’, in which literary merits, historical accuracy, and authenticity of what is narrated are taken as inextricably interwoven (see Vice 163-64). Traditionally, witnesses’ most known and used narrative genre is written accounts (for example in the form of memoir, autobiography, or diary). Given the relationship, which is almost a full correspondence, between author’s biography and narrative contents, it is clear that witnesses’ written testimonies are considered the highest form of Holocaust literature, because they are the ones who can really tell what happened to them and what the Holocaust was. Similarly, descendants’ literary works are ‘unique’ because they have a very specific point of view of the Holocaust, given that they inherit their parents’ (for the second-generation) or grandparents’ (for the third-generation) trauma and memories and have to elaborate them as a familial and personal burden.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁶ It might be useful to remind once more that ‘true’ witnesses, according to Levi, are only the ‘drowned’, as he states in his work *The Drowned and the Saved*.

²⁰⁷ On this topic, see Hirsch’s volume *The Generation of Postmemory* (2012).

As it has been seen, Howe clearly defends witnesses' memoirs because 'other' writers' mind and imagination are 'helpless' in front of such evil (see Howe 182). As it could be inferred by Isaac Rosenfeld's reflections, witnesses are the ones who can have the "'courage . . . to stay near the thing itself and not to cast out for the usual reassurance'" (Rosenfeld qtd. in Howe 182), since catharsis is usually an embedded scope of literature (see Howe 175-99). Witnesses accounts, thus, are the genre that best tells the Holocaust because they do not envision any unnecessary literary, aesthetic, or stylistic additions, or complex re-elaborations of what happened: they are conceived as the most unadorned and suitable form to tell the Holocaust, also because fiction cannot add anything to what witnesses can relate (see *ibidem* 188-89).

For Howe, memoirs are also the genre that best allows the wider audience to approach from a shorter distance the historical fact as well as related authors, because while "[r]eading Holocaust memoirs, we respond not just to their accounts of what happened; we respond also to qualities of being, tremors of sensibility, as these emerge [...]" (Howe 185). Thus, Holocaust memoirs allow for an emotional as well as cognitive 'relationship' between the reader and the subject matter, and between readers and the author as a human being.

Accepting fiction as literary mode to foster Holocaust memory is in stark contrast with the rules that authors followed when writing about the historical fact in the late 1980s, and commonly accepted among Holocaust literature scholars when Terrence Des Pres wrote in that period. Des Pres calls these rules "fictions" (Des Pres 217):

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

As Des Pres says, the three rules are highly interrelated and they strengthen each other, but are not "tyrannical" (*ibidem*). These 'fictions', as formulated above, seem to defend Holocaust memory from potential diminishing and modifying literary attacks on what the Holocaust really was, from a historical perspective. In other words, they seem to secure Lang's idea that Holocaust memory shall not change by clarifying what must and must not be done.

Surely agreeable in their aim of safeguarding the Holocaust as historical fact that must be approached with respect, it is nonetheless true that they do not allow any space for new forms, modes, and perspectives. By reading them, one may suppose that viewpoints are restricted to those conveying the Holocaust as a historical fact and in its entirety. However, as it has been said in chapter 2.1, one word or one representation is not enough to convey what the Holocaust was, even accounts could be conceived as a “*represented* rather than unmediated reality” (Langer, “Interpreting” 26; emphasis in original). Although they are not compulsory, these rules are highly restricting and do not envisage the acceptance of fiction, so they seem to deprive the audience of potentially good ways to approach the subject matter – obviously while respecting witnesses and historical truths. They refuse to acknowledge the potentials of creative writing in telling and conveying contents beyond formal, objective data to raise awareness.

The form and mode may vary, but respectful cultural products about the Holocaust share the scope as well as the fact that they always lack something. This is a characteristic that goes beyond the division into related and non-related authors. Cultural products proposed by the first generation lack a fundamental part, that is, the contemporaneity or immediacy of the experience. Since every work of art follows the historical facts²⁰⁸ that first-hand witnesses experienced directly, they can represent only in part what that experience was; moreover, witnesses are commonly regarded as ‘living museums’ and ‘living memory’, but personal memory is always a partial recollection of what happened, as Spiegelman’s *Maus* makes clear. Similarly, non-related authors do not have first-hand experience, so they cannot include it in their works. In both cases, the cultural product lacks an element. Therefore, it is impossible to convey the Holocaust ‘in its entirety’ – which is the opposite of what the rules demand.

Adopting another viewpoint, it may well be said that non-related people can never count on a direct experience of the historical facts like witnesses, but they can indeed have an ‘experience’ of the subject matter, personal and specific at the same time, via cultural works representing the Holocaust. Each of these ‘experiences’ gained via Holocaust representations rather than the historical fact is different because it depends on multiple factors like the historical moment, what the reader already knows and does not know, the cultural-political context of the country he lives in, the relevance of the Holocaust within the education and scholastic system.

²⁰⁸ There are also a few examples of artistic productions made in concentration camps, like miniature books (see Hirsch, *Generation* 180-201).

Recent studies have focused on museums like the USHMM, which has been defined an “experiential museum” (Landsberg, *Prosthetic* 33) because it was designed, built, and internally planned so as to give the audience the chance to ‘feel’ what it was like living at the time. Indeed, contemporary Holocaust museums seem to be driven by the idea of urging visitors to be active, not just ‘spectators’ (see Popescu 326-36). An extreme, though debatable case is given by Alison Landsberg’s experience at the USHMM. She admits that she was so drawn into the world of the Holocaust that for a moment she thought that her life was in danger, as if she really was at the time. However, she cannot possibly have had the witnesses’ exact experience for a number of reasons. For example, the socio-cultural, historical,²⁰⁹ political, and even geographical context was different. Another relevant point is the fact that she had much more information and historical awareness than witnesses at the time, because while she was at the museum, she was aware of what the Holocaust was, that is, what happened and how, and she also knew that the Holocaust had ended.

It is true that visitors of a museum, even an ‘experiential’ museum, cannot ‘experience’ the Holocaust as it happened during World War II. Nonetheless, they can indeed feel the ‘same’ emotions, which are urged by the specific configuration of the museum and the kind of information it provides them with. In this sense, an ‘experiential’ museum is a place where visitors are likely to ‘experience’ the feelings connected to the Holocaust, rather than the historical Holocaust, if they are open and willing to get ‘involved’, since the emotional experience cannot be present if it is a unidirectional attempt to establish a link. Visitors can have a glimpse of what the Holocaust was, but they can never have a ‘full’ perception of it, precisely because they are not in ‘that’ reality. The same happens with cultural productions, including literary works and films: the individual may be fully engaged by the clever and wise use of forms and genres that try to pass this kind of ‘experiential’ feeling, but they can succeed in conveying a part of the Holocaust at most, be it at the cognitive or emotional level.

Literary works cannot make the reader experience nor tell the Holocaust in its entirety, as the rules demanded, and there is no difference between related and non-related authors’ works in this case. Therefore, even works by witnesses always lack something when representing the Holocaust, despite their direct experience. This is not because of authors’ inability, but because it is necessarily so for each and every fact that is conveyed through art

²⁰⁹ See Wiesel qtd. in Hilberg (21).

and not experienced in the same moment in which it is happening. As a consequence, despite the ‘fictions’ reported by Des Pres, depicting the Holocaust ‘in its entirety’ is not possible.

Even though it is impossible to convey every detail of the Holocaust, regardless of the genre of form used, this does not imply that fiction should be privileged over testimonies or that it is better to use a higher number of imaginative additions. Similarly, fiction should not be totally excluded because if the representation is always partial, it is better to read the partial representation of someone who was there. The incomparable authenticity of the facts that witnesses tell is not grounded in Holocaust partial representability, but on the fact that witnesses were there. Saying that accounts should be sided by fiction does not mean to level fiction with testimonies but that both must be present. This is because, even if their scope may be the same, they indeed have different potentials: for example, testimonies can provide readers with details, personal thoughts, ‘immediacy’; fiction can propose an elaboration of various materials and it can ‘point at’ the Holocaust as a first step before getting in contact with testimonies. This does not change the fact that testimonies are fundamental if one really wants to ‘know’ the Holocaust, whereas fiction is auxiliary. Fiction is secondary, but should not be discarded from the beginning.

It is necessary to urge the dialogue between accounts and other forms like fiction now because there are still witnesses and non-related children’s authors start proposing more literary works. In this way, it is possible to agree on a few indications that will hopefully be used in the future to continue the conversation between descendants and non-related authors, as well as between descendants and non-related readers.

As the previously cited study by Vice shows, there is a part of Holocaust literature that is called Holocaust fiction: this does not mean that the historical fact is not real – form and historical content do not coincide – nor that it is necessarily trivialized, which is a surely agreeable fear. As it has been said above, works, even of fiction, that do not have Holocaust memory as their scope should be denounced and condemned because they are abusing the subject matter. If fiction is trivializing the historical fact, it disrespects historical truth and witnesses, does not help to foster memory, and does not offer any acceptable basis onto which related and non-related individuals can build a constructive dialogue. Trivialization does not equal fiction as genre, as there are cases in which fiction is offering useful means to approach the Holocaust, as Vice states. Therefore, fiction as a genre should be divided from the idea of trivialization and should be seen as a tool that can be used to urge a dialogue rather than a supposedly simplified view of the Holocaust.

Considered the importance of and the tight connection felt between the author's biography and the contents of a literary work about the Holocaust, it could be said that representing the Holocaust is bound to a constant double fear: the fear of not having the right to represent, speak, or write about it, and the fear of 'the right way' to represent it. As for the feeling of not having the 'right', it may be useful to reconsider what was stated in chapter 2.1. Rather than focussing on divisions on who is entitled to use one or the other term to refer to the Holocaust by distinguishing between Jewish and non-Jewish individuals, it is more useful to consider the fact that a common term is useful to foster memory and the dialogue concerning it.

As Vice says, depending on the genre, the readers have different expectations: for example, when reading an autobiography, the reader expects that the narrator is the author.²¹⁰ The widening process involving both forms and authors is strictly linked to a number of problems. Firstly, the author's biography and positionality with respect to the Holocaust: Does he have 'authority' to write about the subject matter? If for related authors the answer is obvious, for non-related individuals the issue is entangled with the reasons why they decide to write about the subject matter, as well as the fear that readers will have information about the Holocaust only from their works. This is the second main problem, since non-related authors' works are commonly considered not at the same rigorous level of witnesses' accounts in terms of accuracy of historical information. The perceived fear is that receiving information only from historical fiction, for example, may provide readers with a 'misleading' version and perspective of the fact: their works may convey non-related authors' stance with respect to the Holocaust, but they may fail to provide enough accurate information for the readers to really develop a memory of the Holocaust.

It could be said that the absence of any previous historical knowledge about the subject matter is highly improbable nowadays. This is due to the intense production and wide availability of plural forms of conveying historical information, from long and short TV documentaries and the fact that the Holocaust is a compulsory school topic in many Western

²¹⁰ On readers' expectations regarding authors of literary works about the Holocaust, see Vice's *Holocaust Fiction* (2000). As already discussed, Howe defends memoirs as the best genre to tell the Holocaust. Nonetheless, Langer states that "[o]ral testimony is distinguished by the absence of [...] literary mediation: it avoids the interference of art" ("Interpreting" 32). Given that Howe concedes minimal elaboration linked to chronology and episodes to be told in memoirs – as the literary form traditionally requires – it could be stated that the two scholars are apparently opposed in their views because it could be inferred that, for Langer, oral testimony is the 'highest form' of representing and telling the Holocaust because the 'literary mediation' is absent. If one considers another scholar already cited, Roskies, his claim that Holocaust literature must be read "[i]n all genres" (Roskies 203) without preferring one genre over the other poses one more viewpoint apparently in contrast with the previous ones. Therefore, it could be said that all cultural productions by witnesses are inestimable, and depending on the scholar, one genre or form is preferred than the others.

countries. However, it could be stated that if these documentaries are made by non-related individuals, the problem persists. This is why it is important to have a plurality of representations available, and it is especially true when children are the viewers-readers. Since they may read a work without any previous information, authors should include some paratexts in order to make clearer what is fiction and what is history, upon what they based their writing, and they should offer prompts to readers to get to know more from first-hand and reliable sources. In addition to this, where the Holocaust is part of mandatory schooling, it may well be expected that children do already know something, a kind of knowledge that is supposed to be carefully ‘guided’ by teachers, given that there are courses and trainings specific for them to convey and teach the Holocaust.

Undoubtedly, the questions of ‘authority’, the reasons behind writing, and the quality – accuracy – of historical information are major themes in debating works about the Holocaust. Tackling the problem of authority, it could be said that non-related authors are subjects with a postmemory of the Holocaust. Then, even though they do not have a direct, first-hand experience to relate, they should be granted access to the subject matter to write about the kind of postmemory they have. In this way, they would contribute to foster Holocaust memory, a kind of which is attitudinal postmemory, as it is claimed within this dissertation. Non-related authors cannot ‘tell’ anything about the Holocaust in the sense that they cannot ‘add’ anything to what witnesses can relate,²¹¹ but it is different from the possibility they should have to write about and to convey postmemory. As a consequence, the reasons non-related authors may have to write about the Holocaust are not necessarily concerned with undue appropriation (as it could be thought) or even abuse. They may share the aim of promoting memory, thus a positive scope, despite the inherent limits of their different standpoint.

Given the above, one can assume that fiction by non-related authors should aim at proposing an ‘active’ memory, not urging a useless ‘hierarchy of value’. Notably, though, Vice accepts fiction as another ‘approach’ to the Holocaust, therefore she does not exclude fiction as genre that may be used to represent it. Refusal *a priori* of other possible forms limits the modes through which the subject matter can be conveyed to non-related people. For this reason, in order to spread memory, it is important to accept other approaches and to

²¹¹ Despite the fact that some writers, as Vice says, decided to “aggrandize” (82) the incidents in their life. Also Howe recalls some writers who did this (see Howe 185). This dissertation does not aim to discuss whether or not these works were urged by the need to prove the authenticity of their telling (see Vice 1-166), or other personal reasons. Even though these examples may not meet the expectations of detailed accuracy, the importance of accounts is not debatable.

consider fiction with its specificities as potentials, even if testimony is traditionally seen as the only ‘perfect’ means to write about the Holocaust. To foster memory, a balance should be found.

The importance of including historically accurate knowledge with paratexts or other means in fiction is due to the fact that this information is necessary to make reference to the real historical fact, whose centrality must never be obscured by aesthetic aims. One can also consider the positive impact that Holocaust fiction can have in preserving memory by ‘pointing at’ the Holocaust. The historical distance of the contemporary audience cannot be annulled but can be narrowed through literary works. With fiction, then, readers are encouraged to reduce the emotional and personal distance from the subject matter. The feeling of ‘imbuing’ oneself into the Holocaust period is only a perception, such as Landsberg’s experience while at the USHMM, because the Holocaust can never be ‘fully reached’ and ‘experienced’: fiction can just ‘point at’ it, but the historical perception it provides is a necessary one. If the attempt to ‘reach out’ is not univocal, that is, if readers are willing to engage with the literary work and its contents, it is possible for them to develop a ‘personal’ link that is at the basis of an ‘emotional’ experience. When it is well done, fiction can be an input for readers to get to know more – they could be urged to read first-generation works.

The rules belonging to the “Holocaust etiquette” (Des Pres 218) are meant to suffocate any attempts at ‘changing’, disrespecting, or trivializing the historical fact; therefore, they are an attempt to preserve the Holocaust from negative appropriation and revisionist claims. Although these actions must be prevented from happening, following the above rules in a strict way might also bring about the suppression of potential good modes to represent the Holocaust and to foster its memory. This does not mean to uncritically accept all available forms to secure up-to-date modes of representation by risking trivialization or abuse. It is claimed that a dialogue between related and non-related people, historically more accurate genres and fiction should be established – a dialogue in which the historical fact is clear in its severity, and the forms used are ethically-driven, aimed at conveying memory.

The many issues entangled with the debate about the ‘right’ ways to represent the Holocaust and to promote Holocaust memory concern authors’ biography, form, register, and focus, which are inextricably woven together. Benigni’s film or Waititi’s adaptation are cases in point. The driving force at the basis of the preoccupations with this entanglement of elements is the risk of disrespectful representations of the Holocaust. Quite reasonably, in order to avoid such possibility, the persistence of the dualism between witnesses and

authenticity and the respect of a series of ‘rules’ (formally stated or gathered according to traditional perspectives) are perpetuated.

Considering the deep entanglements between author’s biography, literary forms and genres, it is possible to draw two inherently tight sets linking authors-genre-authenticity that parallel the commonly perceived divisions and internal relationships: the first one comprises witnesses-accounts²¹²-full authenticity; the second group has non-related authors-fiction-total or partial²¹³ inauthenticity. They are rather ‘independent’ groups, meaning that each of them is perceived as if ‘on its own’. Each component inside a specific group is tightly connected to the other two, but it seems that there cannot be relevant inter-connections between the two groups. It could be said that scholars side with the first set if they agree with a narrower view of literary forms representing the Holocaust, and they side with the second set if they call for an acceptance of a variety of cultural products.

It is claimed that inter-relations between the two groups and their individual components are necessary, in the light of developing a kind of ‘rhizomatic’ relationship. One of the possible inter-connections between the two groups couples witnesses and non-related authors, accounts and fiction, authenticity and ‘forgery’.²¹⁴ The existence, and the very same possibility that these relationships are doable have been shown by Vice in her study of Holocaust fiction, where she notably analyses a number of works written by non-related authors – whom she calls “outsiders” (Vice 4; see also Bos 58) – and just one novel written by a witness that, in any case, “does work much better as a novel than as any kind of testimony” (Vice 160).

Vice privileges fiction that is “unaccommodating to the reader” (*ibidem*) to aesthetically pleasant works²¹⁵ because it “may be more successful in conveying the

²¹² Or memoirs, etc.

²¹³ ‘Partial’ here refers to the case in which readers are not sure about what parts are historically true and what is added by the author, in comparison with the case in which the reader believes that everything written is not ‘real’. In the case of the Holocaust, though, given the severity of the subject matter, it is not useful to focus on the difference, since there should not be any of these cases. Bad historical fiction – from a literary as well as an ethically point of view – misleads readers by bringing them to think that what is written is not ‘real’, or by not providing tools that enable them to discern what is historically true from the author’s additions to ‘fill in the gaps’. Tools can vary, from the use of paratexts to stylistic and narrative devices such as polyphony and dialogism (see Vice 9), to descriptions. In the case of poor historical fiction, the reader is not clear about the division of history from literary additions, at best, but there might also be the case in which the reader is made to think that everything is not ‘historical’ and, in this sense, the historically true content ‘becomes’, at worst, ‘unreal’.

²¹⁴ Hilberg claims that “[i]n regard to Holocaust literature, we often hear the word ‘genuine.’ Perhaps we should add the obvious conclusion that the opposite of genuine is ‘forgery’” (24).

²¹⁵ See also Loew regarding cinematic representations: “As to the form or genre appropriate to such an extreme subject matter, not all critics agree. Some argue that innovative forms are inadequate for the representation of the Holocaust, because a form that tries to correspond to the radical novelty of the subject rather than ensuring communication would make it more difficult. However, others believe that an

disruption and unease that the subject demands” (*ibidem*). In her study about Holocaust fiction, the scholar admits that

although there are no norms where fiction about the Holocaust is concerned, critical estimates tend towards establishing them. Fine imaginative prose, particularly when written by an author with good credentials, is valued more highly than generically unstable, intertextual, ironic or experimental texts. The fact that Martin Amis’s *Time’s Arrow* has received as polarized a reception as the manifestly less subtle *Sophie’s Choice* bears this out. Amis’s sure and inventive handling of novelistic form leads to accusations of bad faith [...] indeed, whereas William Styron’s novel at times sinks under the weight of its imperfectly digested sources, Amis’s is in perfect control of them. (*ibidem*)

‘Norms’ and ‘good credentials’ are at the basis of the evaluation of fictional works. In particular, Vice’s reflections are even more indicative of the difficult acceptance of fiction as a possible genre, and of discerning its positive and negative features, because the literary cases she takes into consideration are, for the most part, written by non-related authors.

These “outsiders” (Vice 4), as Vice calls them, are commonly seen as ‘suspect’ when they write about the Holocaust (see Vice 4-9). Vice, however, considers that there are other acceptable forms apart from accounts, even though these modes are usually considered improper, for example humour. She clarifies that criticism toward fiction usually concerns not only literary aspects, but also ethical ones that are linked to the biography – and thus positionality – of the author. By judging a work of Holocaust fiction with literary and ethical matters strictly embedded into each other, it is implied that there is an implicit separation between Jewish and non-Jewish, or related and non-related authors.

Similarly to what was discussed in chapter 2.1 in relation to terms to denote the Holocaust, in this case the risk of undue appropriation by ‘outsiders’ seems stronger. As discussed, the use of more words is to be accepted because one term in one language cannot really encompass what the subject matter was, so it could be said that there is an inherent, positive polyphony at the linguistic level. When considering literary works, polyphony is inside the texts, and it could be said that it is still positive only if the scope of non-related authors is promoting memory. The acceptance of fiction as genre to represent the subject matter does not justify examples where there are instances of silencing or victimization of related people. However, Vice thinks that fiction has specific characteristics that can be advantageous when it is used to tell the Holocaust. According to Vice, Bakhtinian polyphony within the text is the one feature that could be most useful when tackling Holocaust

unaccommodating narrative form could be the better way to convey the disruption and unease the subject demands” (217).

representation, as fiction should provide readers with “double-voiced” (*ibidem* 9) works, not “singlevoiced (sic)” (*ibidem* 10), even though she admits that readers and critics may see this as a disadvantage because they want a single vision, which demands less labor.

From Vice’s reflections, it could be said that she envisages the presence of a dialogue also outside of the text, precisely because there is a dialogue – the double-voicedness – internal to the work. By acknowledging fiction written by non-related authors and its specific characteristics, Vice not only accepts this genre as possible mode to write about the Holocaust, but she also accepts fiction written by ‘outsiders’, in particular, it could be said, because it may potentially draw dialogue from inside to outside the text, between people. Despite the lack of a direct link to the subject matter, non-related individuals may develop some ‘knowledge’ of the subject matter as well as ‘active’ postmemory based on and urged by the feeling of empathy developed through the reading.

It has been claimed that the double-voicedness within the text defended by Vice can bring about, urge, or enhance a kind of polyphony also outside of the text, that is, a dialogue between individuals. Indeed, there is a dialogue also between the author and the reader, because the latter has a participative role in the process of decodifying and interpreting the text, as double-voiced narrations imply a greater engagement of the reader.²¹⁶ The reader, then, is given a primary position – an active one – that expects him to engage with the text and, as a consequence, with its subject matter. It could be said that the ‘participative’ role ascribed to the reader presupposes that he develops an ‘active’ link with the text and its content: this ‘active’ link is the ‘personal’ link that allows him to ‘decode’ the text, but also to retain an ‘active’ memory afterwards.

In addition to Vice’s reflections on the specific characteristics of fiction that can be potential advantages in confronting the Holocaust, some more considerations are possible. Referring to the ‘personal’ link, fiction can get the reader nearer the subject matter ‘emotionally’ and ‘personally’, not via extremely moving plots, but because thanks to its specific features, the plot, and its characters this ‘personal’ relationship between the reader and the subject matter can be established. Generally speaking, a personal link is fundamental to maintain memory, including an ‘active’ memory, as it is claimed here. The ‘attitudinal postmemory’ conveyed by some children’s authors is ‘active’ thanks to the ‘personal’ link enabled by their works, as it will be discussed in chapter 3.

²¹⁶ On the contrary, single-voiced narrations, in Vice’s view, seem to convey an ‘easy’ or ‘ready-made’ perspective that the reader is supposed to absorb without a real demand for involvement.

Fiction should be counted among the possible genres to be used to represent and tell the Holocaust. Not by chance, Vice envisages a long-term prosperity of the genre, because “despite publishers’ expectations, there is no reason to believe the Holocaust will cease being the—unstable—subject of fiction in the new millennium” (*ibidem* 161). It is reasonable, then, to think that this way to approach the subject matter will continue to offer new examples.

It may be useful to briefly reflect on how the positive scope of promoting memory seems no longer a positive process. This is because it is spotted with the ideas of ‘belonging’, of social divisions, and of ‘hierarchies of value’. To refuse divisions into Jewish and non-Jewish individuals and traditionally relevant issues of appropriateness and ‘belonging’, it has been said that non-related authors should be granted ‘access’ to the writing of works about the Holocaust because they can offer their specific perspective as postmemorial subjects. In so doing, they can contribute to Holocaust memory. However, as already said, for their non-relatedness they are commonly seen as ‘suspect’ (see Vice 4-9). In other words, the positive scope of contributing to memory, albeit not shared by each and every one of them, is interpreted as negative for all of them because it is seen through the undue appropriation and ‘belonging’ lens. Although understandable, the reasons that are at the basis of an ‘exclusive’ approach toward literature about the Holocaust might eventually be limiting when fostering memory is concerned. Everyone, related and non-related, could positively contribute to it: Kokkola admits that she

cannot provide the personal insights and a lifetime of experience as can Kertzer. Nor can [she] cast judgments on whole generations of Germans as Bosmajian can. What [she] can offer, [she] hope[s], is something closer to the perspective of many contemporary child readers who [...] must learn about the Holocaust through texts alone. (*Representing* 3)

Thus, dialogue – ‘polyphony’ external to the text – between related authors and non-related ones is advisable, each one giving their own specific contribution depending on the kind of relationship with the subject matter.²¹⁷ It is necessary not to lose sight of the positive aim that also non-related authors can have. Since they are postmemorial subjects, they may have positively ‘absorbed’ witnesses’ and descendants’ works and they may try to convey their own specific postmemory through their works.

²¹⁷ It must be highlighted that Kokkola eventually left Holocaust studies because she thought that she her study was like a wrongdoing towards the subject (see Kokkola, “Reflection” 99-106). Lamentably, she did not continue to be part of the non-related scholars whose scarcity she complained about (Kokkola, *Representing* 5), although her reasons are embraceable.

Disrespectful representations of the Holocaust cover a range of cases: for example, the tension between empathy and ‘excessively moving’ stories, the description of violence for a purpose or just for ‘the sake’ of it, and the difference between enabling the audience to get nearer to the subject and voyeurism. The development of empathy while reading should be considered positively. If readers acquire empathy, it means that they are ‘involved’ in the story and in what the characters suffer. Thus, empathy may be a symptom of the establishing of a ‘personal’ connection with the characters and, as a consequence, with the subject matter.

Real empathy persists after the reading is over and it is the ground for the ‘active’ memory that readers are enabled to form while engaging with the text and to perform afterwards. It is contrary to ‘empty empathy’ theorized by Mitschke (see Mitschke 438), and it does not coincide with the feelings that may arise for stories that are written so as to have a “heightened effect” (Hilberg 23), that is, to be more moving. These plots emotionally affect the reader on a superficial level and for a short period of time that lasts at most until the end of the reading. Empathy presupposes an emotional connection that goes beyond ‘immediate’ feelings for the plot, and has to do with the characters and the reader as person outside of the text. In case of empathy, the reader has developed “the ability to understand another person’s feelings [and] experience” (“empathy”, accessed 01.11.2021), so he considers characters as his peers – that is, as other human beings. A moving plot brings about ‘immediate’, superficial, and temporary emotions that may be due to the particular circumstances told, but they do not imply a deeper ‘connection’ between readers and characters. Non-related authors must write with empathy in mind, because relying on ‘moving scenes’ is a debatable way to write about the Holocaust, not to say a form of abuse, and, following the reasoning here proposed, it does not envisage the development of a relationship eventually useful to foster memory.

The description of violent scenes in graphic detail in fiction might also be considered an abuse. Even though Nazi physical, psychological, emotional violence has few parallels, when extreme violence is represented on the page without a clear scope, such as depicting a specific incident, or showing Nazi practices, it may be an abuse of the subject matter because it has more to do with depicting disturbing images just to add more horror to the story, to add something that, albeit being historically true, is represented to urge an extreme and superficial reaction in the reader. The situation is the same as the one discussed for ‘moving’ scenes. Extreme violence may incite readers’ fear and horror, but these feelings are not aimed at a higher purpose: they are temporary reactions to what is told if violence is not part of a greater narrative frame that enables readers to develop a ‘personal’ link with the content and the

characters. Therefore, “gratuitous brutality” (Vice 44) is enmeshed in aesthetic issues and could be seen as another form of abuse.

The development of a ‘personal’ relationship with the subject matter is also helpful to counter the risk of voyeurism. Non-related authors’ fiction can be a tool through which readers can approach the Holocaust and get nearer to it, but this movement is only possible in case of the development of that kind of link. If fiction does not provide readers with inputs to do so, it may well be the case that it proposes a kind of voyeurism on others’ suffering, on violence, and on true horror. Of course, this latter case is to be denounced and it is an issue that concerns many study areas about the Holocaust.²¹⁸

The question of voyeurism can also be linked to the reasons why readers read fiction novels about the Holocaust. Are they interested in the subject or do they perform a kind of abuse by being interested in stories depicting violence? If their reading is aimed at knowing more and performing memory, then it should be acceptable. However, how can one be sure of their motives?²¹⁹ These are the questions that scholars like Howe and Bose pose with reference to non-related authors, and are thus applicable also to non-related readers. Getting to know people’s reasons is difficult; however, given that the formation of a ‘personal’ link with the characters and the subject matter is aimed to widen respect, if readers do form this kind of relationship, it could be said that their reading is not an abuse of the Holocaust.

The aim of cultural products about the Holocaust should always be that of informing or increasing the number of recipients of memory, or both. However, there might be issues, for example due to national politics or the culture considered. Some countries, for example, may promote Holocaust memory because national remembrance responds to a hidden political agenda that may have little to do with the Holocaust.²²⁰ Therefore, it might be the case that some people oppose official remembrance not because they are against remembering the Holocaust, but as a way to oppose the government. A constructive dialogue between Holocaust Studies and literature and other cultures and histories must be sought: in this way,

²¹⁸ For example, recent research about Holocaust museums (see Popescu 326-36) and monuments has addressed similar problems: What purpose does the Berlin monument have? What might the audience infer from it – what the artist thought, or its opposite?

²¹⁹ Students, for example, are often expected or asked to read novels about the subject matter by teachers, if the Holocaust is part of compulsory education. Is their reading some form of abuse because they may read accounts or historical fiction following the teacher’s indications? Should they read these works without external guidance so as not to risk an abuse? However, if they are interested without external suggestion: Is their interest in the subject matter genuine, or are they interested in the kind of war story, or the genre? In both cases, focusing on readers’ reasons to read fiction about the Holocaust seem to bring about a loop with no clear answer. On the contrary, debating about the scope of fictional works may be more productive and useful, especially when focusing on the kind of memory that they convey.

²²⁰ On this topic, see for example Alexander’s *Trauma: A Social Theory* (2012).

it is possible to find common grounds and the historical fact is no longer perceived as a past historical fact ‘belonging’ only to Jewish culture, but it is of interest to each individual as human being, regardless of his culture or relationship with the historical fact.

Of course, to increase the number of genres, forms, and registers to represent the Holocaust carries some risks. At the extreme opposite of the rules discussed above, the proliferation of Holocaust representations in various media may be deemed as the proof that the Holocaust can be represented in ‘all’ forms, with ‘every means’. This is not true. The fact that it ‘can’ be represented is different from saying that it ‘must’ be represented. As it has been stated in the first part of this chapter, the Holocaust must be represented so as to continue its memory. However, the need of representation does not mean representing ‘at any cost’; in fact, it is quite the opposite. Representations that promote memory opt for genres that are particularly indicated for the story that the author is determined to tell. Then, by discarding some forms, they avoid potential abuses implied in writing with ‘every means’ about the Holocaust.

To conclude, the possibility (the historical fact ‘can’ be represented in a specific mode) and the necessity (it ‘must’ be represented) shall work together. They do so in witnesses’ works, whereas non-related authors must be careful in their decisions so as to be respectful. Focusing on the ‘right’ of representing the Holocaust, which has traditionally been ascribed to witnesses and that nowadays also non-related individuals could claim, might be against the general scope of fostering memory through constructive comparison and dialogue. Genres, forms, and registers are commonly linked to a traditional division between related and non-related people that, even though it is true for some aspects, it may not help the common scope. Therefore, it seems more useful to go beyond the common belief that non-related authors are all driven by undue appropriation, especially when writing fiction, and that they cannot positively contribute with their works.

Similarly, it is advisable to accept representation into various modes and forms that pose a constructive dialogue at the basis, rather than to follow strict rules or a division based on ‘rights’ and ‘belonging’. The subject matter does not ‘belong’ to non-related individuals: however, they should be considered entitled to feel it as ‘part’ of their life if they develop a kind of ‘personal’ link through literary works. This link is essential to develop and retain a real ‘active’ memory. ‘Active’ memory is both cognitive and emotional and it is relational and ‘rhizomatic’, as it presupposes that human beings can be interested in historical facts to which they are not directly related because they can feel the ‘same’ feelings of related people,

so they can ‘connect’ with the historical fact on an emotional basis, and they may share the aim to avoid similar situations in the future.

Thus, if Holocaust memory is possible for all human beings, non-related people can develop their own perspective of their relationship with the historical fact and then propose it in literary works. If they develop this relationship, they have the moral duty of remembering, on a personal level, and of easing the acquisition of remembrance in young generations. If non-related authors’ scope is Holocaust memory, ‘possibility’ and ‘necessity’ are in agreement, then non-related authors shall be granted the chance to use available forms and genres, including fiction, to pursue it.

Literary works about the Holocaust written by witnesses and their descendants share the intent to inform, remember, avoid something similar from happening in the future. If non-related authors want to take part in the latter aim, they must propose a kind of memory that is ‘active’. In the specific case of children’s literature, the aim to inform has inherent limits, but it is indeed possible to convey an ‘active’ memory to avoid disrespect among human beings, which has been called ‘attitudinal postmemory’.

Chapter 3

Scope, Relationships, and Emotions: Attitudinal Postmemory

The previous considerations were meant to accept other individuals' contribution to Holocaust memory (non-related people as authors and 'active' subjects), another kind of memory (non-related people's postmemory), and other 'acceptable' genres and forms (fiction) if non-related people share the same scope with witnesses and descendants. Non-related individuals are receivers of memory but can also participate in producing it, as recent literary examples prove, for example in historical fiction for children. After accepting that non-related people's works are viable means of promoting remembrance, the next point to be discussed is: How is non-related individuals' knowledge and postmemory of the Holocaust (in)formed and moulded? To answer this question, some preliminary considerations on collective memory, prosthetic memory, and postmemory are necessary.

Although being almost a century old, Maurice Halbwachs' concept of *mémoire collective* (1925) is still at the basis of Memory Studies today. Reflecting on it, Astrid Erll states:

Our perception is group specific, our individual memories are socially formed, and both are unthinkable without the existence of collective memory-which can be that of a circle of friends, of a religious group, or of a family. However, collective memory is not a supra-individual entity separate from individual memories. Instead, social and cognitive levels are mutually dependent[,] [as Halbwachs notes]: "One may say that the individual remembers by placing himself in the perspective of the group, but one may also affirm that the memory of the group realizes and manifests itself in individual memories". It is only through individual acts of remembering that collective memory is performed, and can be observed. (Erll, "Locating" 305)

In the above lines, prominence is clearly given to the interaction between the individual and the community of which they are part. There is an indelible interrelation, mutually nurturing, between the individual and the community: the first inscribes his memory into and is influenced in moulding it by the community, while at the same time the communal memory is also formed by the group of individuals' memories, therefore it is unthinkable without the contribution of individuals, who act as carriers and popularisers of the specific community's memory. When Erll says that "[o]ur perception is group specific" (*ibidem*), it may recall Stone's anthropological approach to mass killing, or Levy and Sznajder's cosmopolitan memory, both of which are based on a "human dimension" (Stone 137; see also ch. 2.3).

Memory always depends on the socio-cultural, political, geographical context in which it is inscribed.

Further exploring Halbwachs' concept, Jan and Aleida Assmann propose a differentiation of collective memory into communicative, cultural, and political memory (see J. Assmann, "Globalization" 122). Given that this dissertation is on children's literature representing the Holocaust, what may interest more here is what they conceive as 'cultural memory', that is, "an externalization and objectivation of memory, which is individual and communicative, and evident in symbols such as texts, images, rituals, landmarks and other 'lieux de mémoire'" (J. Assmann, "Globalization" 122) and which "grows over centuries as an interaction between uncontrolled, self-organizing bottom-up accretion and controlled topdown (sic) institutions more or less independent of any particular political organization" (*ibidem*). In a similar way to Halbwachs' collective and individual memory, these three kinds of memory are deeply interrelated: communicative memory refers to an interaction because it "is a matter of socialization and communication, like consciousness in general and the acquisition of language" (*ibidem*), whereas political memory "shares its externalized, symbolical character with cultural memory, but is a top-down institution which depends on the political organization that institutes it" (*ibidem*).²²¹

In Jan and Aleida Assmann's definition, cultural memory is particularly interesting because it is reached through a "bottom-up" (*ibidem*) process, which involves individuals as driving force, and "symbols" (*ibidem*), including texts and images. The Holocaust literature 'canon' as well as the emergence of literary works by non-related authors can be considered as these 'symbols. At the same time, they can also be understood as what Astrid Erll gathers under the umbrella term 'media' when discussing Halbwachs's *mémoire collective*.

Erll and Rigney are interested in the role that media have in forming collective memory and they move from Halbwachs' focus on the "social frameworks" (Erll and Rigney "Introduction" 5) that mould the individual's memory. For example, Halbwachs claims that a visitor in London has his city viewing and long-term memory of the capital influenced and shaped by the previous knowledge he may have acquired of the city, by reading of Dickens' novels or thanks to friends' stories (see *ibidem* 1). Therefore, the scholars claim that

²²¹ Political influence in the construction of memory is an issue often stated by critics (for remembrance and political agendas, see for example Goldberg and Hazan, "Preface" x-xv). The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) currently checks how Holocaust memory is promoted in countries that apply to be members, from official remembrance to education.

“media” of all sorts—spoken language, letters, books, photos, films—also provide frameworks for shaping both experience and memory. They do so in at least two, interconnected ways: as instruments for sense-making, they mediate between the individual and the world; as agents of networking, they mediate between individuals and groups. (Erll and Rigney, “Introduction” 1)

Thus, media always act as mediators as well as potential enhancers of memory by relating individuals.

As Erll and Rigney continue: “*cultural* memory is itself premised on the idea that memory can only become collective as part of a continuous process whereby memories are shared with the help of symbolic artefacts that mediate between individuals and, in the process, create communality across both space and time” (*ibidem*). Media allow the formation of a double kind of link: as Erll and Rigney state, a relationship is formed between individuals through these “symbolic artefacts” (*ibidem*), but these individuals are also linked to the authors of these products via the symbolic works themselves. Consequently, media and their products are at the centre of a network of relations that connects individuals on the same level – meaning that they share the same position of ‘receivers’ of artefacts – but also individuals with the authors of cultural products. In the case here considered, it could be said that literary works ‘connect’ all readers, and the readers with non-related (or related) authors. At the centre of the relationship there is Holocaust memory and the Holocaust, so a “communality” (*ibidem*), a specific relationship with the subject matter is formed.²²²

Media always “play an active role in shaping our understanding of the past, in ‘mediating’ between us (as readers, viewers, listeners) and past experiences, and hence in setting the agenda for future acts of remembrance within society” (*ibidem* 3), so they must be understood as “caught up in a dynamics of their own” (*ibidem*) while at the same time enabling a dynamic understanding of the past and also of its remembrance. Given the basilar ‘active’ and ‘dynamic’ interplay between different media, media and receivers, and receivers and authors, it could be said that a constant dialogue is implied in this network, or, in Erll and Rigney’s words,

one can note a shift towards understanding cultural memory in more *dynamic terms*: as an *ongoing process* of remembrance and forgetting in which individuals and groups continue to *reconfigure their relationship to the past and hence reposition themselves in relation to established and emergent memory sites*. As the word itself suggests, “remembering” is better seen as an *active engagement with the past*, as performative rather than as reproductive. It is

²²² Moreover, the ‘communality’ to which Erll and Rigney refer could recall the networks of relations and the dialogue called for by Levy and Sznajder, Rothberg, Stone.

as much a matter of acting out a *relationship to the past* from a particular point in the present as it is a matter of preserving and retrieving earlier stories. (*ibidem* 2; my emphasis)

‘Dynamic terms’, ‘ongoing process’, ‘reconfigure’, ‘reposition’, ‘active engagement’, ‘relationship to the past’: these are the keywords that Erll advances as for cultural memory. Media are thus inserted in and central in this view precisely because they enable this dynamic relationship: in other words, they enable a dialogue between various individuals and groups. The key point here is that a dynamic relationship with the past (and its representations) is more ‘active’ and potentially more productive than reproductions of the past that do not allow space for some innovation, or inclusion of new forms. Starting from Erll and Rigney’s considerations, it could be said that dialogue between different individuals and groups is more advisable as for remembrance of the past because it presupposes an active engagement; on the contrary, reproductions may be more passively received, without a real ‘involvement’ on the part of receivers-individuals. However, in the scholars’ view, there is not any kind of hierarchy implied: they do not privilege some media over others, nor a few relationships that can be urged over many others, so the dialogue between individuals and groups and the active engagement with the past is considered as a positive, constructive, sharing comparison.

Two key points are at the basis of Erll and Rigney’s perspective: the need for a dynamic and active remembrance of the past, because “[i]f stories about the past are no longer performed in talking, reading, viewing, or commemorative rituals, they ultimately die out in cultural terms” (*ibidem*), and the fact that all memory of the past is a mediation. The “mediatedness of memory” (*ibidem* 5) is particularly evident in works based on ‘hypermediacy’, as the scholars claim, because these products do not allow people to become “immersed in the past” (*ibidem*). Rather, they privilege foregrounding the existence of the medium and of its being representing the past so that the individual eventually has an “experience of the medium” (*ibidem* 3-4) used rather than of the past, and he is aware of how memory is mediated through that media.

Cultural memory, according to Erll, can be understood only in relation with and by taking into account “not just the social factors at work, but also the ‘medial frameworks’ of remembering” (Erll and Rigney, “Introduction” 2) and in particular the “medial processes through which memories come into the public arena and *become* collective” (*ibidem*). By ‘medial processes’, Erll and Rigney intend the role that novels and films have

in sparking public debates on historical topics that had hitherto been marginalized or forgotten. In such cases, particular media offerings become agenda-setters for collective remembrance and it is then through the inter-medial reiteration of the story across different platforms in the public arena (print, image, internet, commemorative rituals) that the topic takes root in the community. (*ibidem* 2-3)

Referring to Lang's preoccupations (see ch. 2.3), films and novels are examples of "symbolic artefacts" (*ibidem* 1) that are conceived as potential promoters of memory, not as changers of the fact. Memory of the past is dynamic thanks to 'active' relationships of the individuals with the past and between themselves thanks to the "medial frameworks" and "symbolic artefacts" (*ibidem* 2, 1) that are 'mediators of memory' (see A. Assmann, "Canon" 97-107).

As claimed above, it is different to say that memory of the past is dynamic, in movement, due to possible changes of the 'symbolic artifacts' than saying that the historical past is 'changed'. Active memory of the past is fundamental because, without performance of many kinds, stories become "obsolete or 'inert'" (Olick and Robbins qtd. in Erll and Rigney, "Introduction" 2), which could be understood as if they are no longer part of an 'emotional' relationship with prospective holders of memory. On the contrary, as it has already been said, a 'personal' relationship is basilar for memory to be retained. Therefore, forms and media may vary but changing them, as well as considering other perspectives on the past,²²³ does not mean changing the past in terms of historical truth. As it has been claimed, accepting new novels about the Holocaust presenting non-related people's perspective does not change the historicity of the Holocaust. This is so not only because there are a number of documents proving what happened, but also because in considering new novels it is not implied that all cultural works have to be accepted –only those that share the aim of memory, that is, that respect historical truth. Works that deny historical truth are not enriching cultural memory with another mediation of the past: they are assaulting history, witnesses, and also depriving people who do not know the fact of a means to get in contact with it. Therefore, a change of form only changes the medium through which the Holocaust is told, they are not a suppression of what happened and of its memory.

In focusing on the three aspects that they consider fundamental in the formation of cultural memory – mediation, remediation, and performance in the public arena – Erll and Rigney "do not suggest that there is a clear-cut distinction between the three components; it is rather through their constant interplay that cultural memory is continuously being produced" ("Introduction" 5-6). Mediation essentially refers to the 'mediateness' of memory, that is, the

²²³ It is intended, perspectives which are respectful of the past.

fact that memory is not direct because it is “an active shaping of information about the past using a variety of historically evolving technologies: writing, photography, film, digitization [...]” (*ibidem* 6). However, mediation may also refer to the compresence of more than one media in the mediated memory, or of one medium representing or explaining another (see *ibidem* 6 and following).

Dynamics of cultural memory is strictly linked to the concept of “remediation” (*ibidem* 5), according to Erll and Rigney. As the terms imply, both foresee ‘movement’. In particular, the concept of remediation refers to the one proposed by David Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin. Remediation is “the mediation of mediation” (Bolter and Grusin qtd. in Erll and Rigney, “Introduction” 3), that is, “the formal logic by which new media refashion prior media forms” (*ibidem*). According to the two scholars, media are not isolated, but interrelated with each other because since the Renaissance they have been “commenting on, reproducing, and replacing each other, and this process is integral to media. Media need each other in order to function as media at all” (*ibidem*).²²⁴ Therefore, media refashion and represent, repropose and update other prior media in a continuous cycle. In Bolter and Grusin’s view,

[j]ust as there is no cultural memory prior to mediation there is no mediation without remediation: all representations of the past draw on available media technologies, on existent media products, on patterns of representation and medial aesthetics. In this sense, no historical document [...] and certainly no memorial monument (from the Vietnam Veteran’s Wall to the Berlin Holocaust Memorial) is thinkable without earlier acts of mediation.²²⁵ (Erll and Rigney, “Introduction” 4)

The scholars’ concept of remediation calls to mind Langer’s already quoted words, as he says that all authors of works about the Holocaust, from historians to survivors to novelists, “re-create the details and images of the event through written texts, and in so doing remind us that we are dealing with *represented* rather than unmediated reality” (Langer, “Interpreting” 26; emphasis in original).

Eventually, “social performance” (Erll and Rigney, “Introduction” 6) of memory refers to “media producers and users and [...] the public occasions and discourses which turn a device for (re-)presenting the past into a medium of cultural memory proper” (*ibidem*). In

²²⁴ Remediation also takes place in relation to memory sites (Nora’s *lieux de mémoire*): “When we look at the emergence and ‘life’ of memory sites, it becomes clear that these are based on repeated media representations, on a host of remediated versions of the past which ‘converge and coalesce’ [...] into a *lieu de mémoire*, which create, stabilize and consolidate, but then also critically reflect upon and renew these sites” (Erll and Rigney, “Introduction” 5).

²²⁵ As Grusin said: “The logic of remediation insists that there was never a past prior to mediation; all mediations are remediations, in that mediation of the real is always a mediation of another mediation” (qtd. in Erll and Rigney, “Introduction” 4).

social performance, “mediation is linked to agenda-setting, iconisation and publicity” (*ibidem*), thus it shifts attention from remediation of previous memory products to

the social actors and organisations which ensure that certain stories rather than others enjoy publicity and become salient; even more fundamentally, which ensure that certain topics rather than others are put on the society’s commemorative “agenda”. These agenda-setting organisations include media organisations such as the press and television, but also political and civic organisations with the power to orchestrate public attention for particular stories or issues in the form of official commemorations. (*ibidem* 9)

As Erll and Rigney continue, “[i]n the case of cultural memory, it is—as Halbwachs famously claimed—the social frameworks which ultimately *make* the memory. It is the public arena which turns some remediations into relevant media versions of the past, while it ignores or censors others” (*ibidem* 5), which is what Leavy makes clear. Organisations Erll and Rigney refer to are not only directly involved with media, such as the press or television, but also “political and civic organisations with the power to orchestrate public attention for particular stories or issues in the form of official commemorations” (*ibidem*).

“Cultural memory relies on what Bolter and Grusin would call ‘repurposing’, that is, taking a ‘property’ (in our case a memory-matter) from one medium and re-using it in another. In this process, memorial media borrow from, incorporate, *absorb*, critique and refashion earlier memorial media” (*ibidem*; my emphasis): it is particularly interesting the term ‘absorb’, since it recalls the concept of cultural anthropophagy where the contents of a given culture are “devoured, assimilated, completely absorbed” (my translation of “divorato, assimilato, totalmente assorbito”, Albertazzi 45) by another culture so as to produce a cultural work that is the confluence of components from both cultures. Similarly, as it was previously suggested, new forms, genres, and registers not previously used to foster Holocaust memory could be useful in doing so precisely because they are ‘mediation of mediation’, that is, remediation of what other media have proposed so far while at the same time the centre remains the Holocaust and the need to maintain its memory.

In highlighting that all media are interconnected and not isolated, Bolter and Grusin also claim that “no single media event [...] seems to do its cultural work in isolation from other media, any more than it works in isolation from other social and economic forces” (Bolter and Grusin qtd. in Erll and Rigney, “Introduction” 5). Therefore, this sides with the idea that multiple forms, genres, and registers to remember an historical fact such as the Holocaust – a fact for which one single word is not enough to encompass the real, historical referent – is advisable. There must be a common labour where many forms are accepted to

foster remembrance because each of them is not enough to secure Holocaust memory, they all can offer their own contribution thanks to their specific characteristics (such as polyphony in fiction for Vice) and they must dialogue with each other. In our interconnected world, if they work together, they have more chances to really foster Holocaust memory than pursuing this aim alone. With cooperation, following Bolter and Grusin's concept, their efficacy is multiplied. It must be a common labour to reach a common scope, which must be reached thanks to a plurality of sources – this is true for adults but especially for young generations, far removed from the historical fact, because in this way they can attain knowledge, inspiration, memory via a range of media and medial representations. This recalls Stone's "human dimension" (Stone 137) in the importance given to the cultural-anthropological context in which media are placed, and possibly influenced by. Similarly, memory is shaped also by the socio-cultural, political-economical, and geographical context in which the individual lives and has grown up with (see Stone 127-42).

While stating that they combine in constructing cultural memory, Erll and Rigney differentiate between "premediation" (Erll and Rigney, "Introduction" 8) and Bolter and Grusin's remediation, because premediation "refers to the cognitive schemata and patterns of representation that are available in a given media culture (very much like the books, maps and conversations that Halbwachs mentally took with him to London), and which already preform the events that we later remember through remediation" (*ibidem*). The fear, foregrounded above, about the fact that readers may come to know about and get in 'contact' with the Holocaust only through forms like historical fiction by non-related authors, and that these works could be used as the only source of information is based on this reasoning. If historical fiction is the only source, that is, the only premediation, scholars worry about the image of the Holocaust that is conveyed by them and that could be understood by inexperienced readers. In this sense, the fear is understandable because novels for children are usually scarce as for information. However, it is also true that nowadays it is really difficult, in Western countries, not to know anything else or having other sources of information apart from that information given by them, precisely because there are multiple media offering cultural products about and forms of remembrance of the Holocaust, from films and websites to official commemoration and education.

In addition to the above, it may be useful to reflect upon the concepts of shared memory and common memory proposed by Avishai Margalit in *The Ethics of Memory* and the related concept of caring. Margalit distinguishes between shared and common memory on the basis of "mnemonic labor" (Margalit 52). Shared and common memory are rooted in a

specific historical fact, but a common memory may not become a shared one. More specifically, a common memory gathers all those who have a direct experience (thus, a direct memory) of a specific historical fact or incident. Therefore, it is “an aggregate notion” (*ibidem* 51) because it

aggregates the memories of all those people who remember a certain episode which each of them experienced individually. If the rate of those who remember the episode in a given society is above a certain threshold (say, most of them, an overwhelming majority of them, more than 70 percent, or whatever), then we call the memory of the episode a common memory—all of course relative to the society at hand. (*ibidem* 51)

It could be said, then, that a common memory aggregates individual memories into one, single memory, agreed by the majority of a given society. A shared memory presupposes one or more common memories – that is, groups of people that are linked to each other by the same perspective on the happening of a fact. Shared memory implies a further step because individual memories have to be communicated and it aggregates various points of view. In Margalit’s words,

[a] shared memory integrates and calibrates the different perspectives of those who remember the episode—[...] each [individual] experiencing only a fragment of what happened from their unique angle on events—into one version. Other people in the community who were not there at the time may then be plugged into the experience of those who were [there], through channels of description rather than (sic) by direct experience. Shared memory is built on a division of mnemonic labor. (Margalit 51-52)

Therefore, shared memory partly resembles what Jan and Aleida Assmann call “cultural memory” (J. Assmann, “Globalization” 122), since they define it as “an externalization and objectivation of memory, which is *individual and communicative*” (*ibidem*; my emphasis). In the specific case of the Holocaust, a parallel could be drawn between common memory and witnesses’ memory, and between shared memory and Holocaust memory comprising witnesses’, descendants’, and non-related individuals’ memories of the historical fact. Each group can contribute with its own specific view on Holocaust memory, thus adding a piece to the Holocaust memory ‘puzzle’. They all share the difficulties of fostering memory to the society as a whole, thus they share Margalit’s ‘mnemonic labor’.

In particular, shared memory conceived in this way allows space for young generations into the ‘puzzle’, because Margalit specifies that “[o]ther people in the community who were not there” (Margalit 52) can be ‘connected’ to the historical fact, so it envisages the addition of future generations into the shared memory of the Holocaust. It could

also be said that the descriptions Margalit refers to could be deemed as all the medial representations that Erll proposes when discussing mediation and remediation. Therefore, a plurality of forms is advisable to nurture and maintain shared (that is, cultural) memory, as it was already said.

Margalit says that shared memory is essential to secular nation states apart from history, because “*stories* about the past that are shared by a community are as a rule more vivid, more concrete, and better connected with live experiences than is critical history[,] [therefore] shared memory [is] a cement for the community [that] involves a far more ambitious sense of live memory” (*ibidem* 60; my emphasis). In the philosopher’s reasoning, a community that ‘brings to life’ the dead through memory is a stronger society because it relies not only on strong relationships between the living, but has equally strong relations to the dead as it tackles the great issues of life and death. In this sense, the community conceives itself in the future through the persistence of memory. As a consequence, and particularly for tragic facts like mass killings, the concept of community having a shared memory could be extended so as to include humanity at large. Indeed, for example, Margalit wonders who will remember “the Gulags, the kulaks, Majdanek and Treblinka, Hiroshima and Nanking” (*ibidem* 71) and answer by rhetorically wondering “why cannot the kulaks be remembered by humanity at large?” (*ibidem*).

The question at the basis of Margalit’s reasoning is “why cannot humanity be shaped into a community of memory and why cannot it be formed into an ethical community, based on the thick relation of caring?” (*ibidem*) and it is extended to the concept of humanity ‘just’ as “a moral community” (*ibidem*). As it is quite clear from the philosopher’s words, mankind, either as an ethical or a moral community, ought “to have some minimal sense of memory” (*ibidem*) of the above historical facts “as warning signposts in human moral history [...]” (*ibidem*). Therefore, Margalit’s reasoning is, conceptually speaking, at the basis of Rothberg’s concept of multidirectional memory, since Rothberg envisages a mutual enrichment of the cultures that get in contact with other cultures and share their pasts. In doing so, the process of relation and sharing at the basis of multidirectional memory intends to form a better society, tighter in shared memories of mass killings, for example, and more ethical and moral precisely because of the sharing.

At the basis of an ‘ethical community’, according to Margalit, there is caring. Caring is opposed to gratitude, which is characteristic of religious relations, and it is possible not only towards people we know, but also towards communities we do not know, and that we are not likely to encounter in person, because “[t]he attitude of caring, after all, is based on

belonging, not on achievement. So belonging to the ‘family of man’ should be enough” (*ibidem* 75). Therefore, individuals could feel they belong to the community of mankind by widening their sense of belonging to a family, as they could “imagine an extension of family relations that would include relatives [they] have not met. So why not imagine ‘the family of man’ to be such an extended family?” (*ibidem*). Despite this, Margalit admits that, in practice, forming a mankind-encompassing ‘ethical community’ is difficult.

Although being decidedly convinced of the necessity to pursue a caring ‘ethical community’ that comprises all mankind, Margalit is fully aware that this is quite a tough aim for the nearer future (see *ibidem* 71-83). While “we should [not] give up on the regulative idea of the human commonwealth as an ethical community of caring” (*ibidem* 77), the philosopher claims that the second-best option is to pursue a moral community and to ask “whether humanity, as a moral community, ought to have some minimal shared moral memories, or whether the business of memory should be left entirely to smaller ethical communities” (*ibidem* 78).

One of the main problems in building and identifying a memory that should be shared by mankind is the danger of ‘biased salience’, that is, the risk that historical facts geographically based in the First World “are likely to be more salient to us than comparable events in the Third World” (*ibidem* 80). When some facts are more widely remembered than others, it follows that they are commonly perceived as ‘superior’ or “morally more significant” (*ibidem*) than those happened in less developed areas. Eventually, there is the risk that Western countries “claim false moral superiority” (*ibidem*) over historical tragedies. In this sense, it could be said that the scope of forming an ‘ethical community’ by adopting shared historical memories, which is inherently positive, becomes a way for the Western world to affirm their superiority over others, and to silence them: they would appropriate the positive aim and spoil it by making it a tool for establishing a ‘hierarchy of shared memory’, rather than a group of memories of the same relevance and that should be shared among all humanity for the sake of mankind.²²⁶

Another problem that Margalit foregrounded has to do with institutions. Shared memories among mankind are advisable, for example regarding radical evil, as this “consists [...] of acts that undermine the very foundation of morality itself” (*ibidem* 79). In particular, Nazi regime and its “elimination of Jews and Gypsies as subhuman, was a direct onslaught on

²²⁶ This risk is the one that seemingly backgrounds Stone’s reflections about the ‘uniqueness’ of the Holocaust and the ways in which mass killings can be viewed, as well as Rothberg’s call for connecting the Holocaust to other mass killings, as historical fact and, in Margalit’s terms, as potential globally-shared memory.

the very idea of shared humanity. Hence, it was a direct onslaught on morality itself. Such an attack on morality should be recorded and remembered. And with it, gross crimes against humanity that undercut the root of morality, that is, shared humanity [...]” (*ibidem*). Apart from avoiding to make a ‘hierarchy of grief’, Margalit says that “[i]t is hard to form effective institutions that will store such memories and diffuse them. Such institutions are likely to be bureaucratic and soulless” (*ibidem*). Institutions seem to be in contrast with the common memory of events that is a bottom-up process, starting from individuals, and it could be seen as the negative side that shared memory could develop into.

It is likely that Goldberg and Hazan’s reflections against the concept of a cosmopolitan memory of the Holocaust could find their first steps in Margalit’s alert about institutions and the problem of biased salience, since they claim that Levy and Sznajder’s ‘cosmopolitan’ Holocaust memory is really a memory diffused mainly in Western countries, whereas in some areas of the world other historical facts are at the centre of public commemorations, as Jeffrey C. Alexander also highlights. However, the two problems proposed by the philosopher may be overcome by means of ‘positive’ appropriation. It is true that Holocaust memory could be seen as an ‘imposition’ of Western countries, particularly the European area, onto other countries that would be required to officially ‘remember’ an historical fact that is not part of their immediate (geographically speaking), national history. There may also be the case in which the country has another example of mass killing that should be included in national remembrance, and that risks to be “overshadowed” (*ibidem* 80) by European historical memories. An imposition of this kind is not useful to anyone: it is a form of silencing other cultures’ past, and it does not help foster a Holocaust memory that is ‘active’, meaning that is felt by individuals and not only performed in official, national commemorations, which may be empty. Contrary to this, the two issues could be overcome through cultural anthropophagy and positive appropriation as outlined above. When individuals get in contact with other human beings and their history, they can positively appropriate these histories and then act in society (and Margalit’s “human commonwealth”, 40) according to their double knowledge – that is, knowledge of their own community history, and knowledge of other groups’ past. In this way, others’ history is ‘absorbed’ and becomes ‘their own’: through positive appropriation, it is made ‘personal’ because it can be related to similar historical facts that the individual has experienced firsthand, or that he knows as part of the shared memory of the community he belongs to. On a further view, the individual may interact with the society and through ‘active’ memory of the facts of both

histories, that is, by adopting an attitude that is influenced by this historical knowledge, respectful of others.

Margalit's concept of shared memories extended to all humanity with the aim of improving society has some points in common with the process of universalizing Holocaust memory that assumes different names depending on the perspective adopted, from multidirectional memory (with reference to postcolonial theory), to cosmopolitan memory and social trauma (referring to sociological aspects). In the latest decades, Holocaust memory has frequently been associated to the idea of the Holocaust as “‘global icon of evil’” (Giesen qtd. in Alexander, *Trauma* 100; see also A. Assmann, “The Holocaust” 109) that has surpassed other mass killings, geographically located elsewhere, in its becoming a transnational symbol (see Alexander, “Social Construction” 8-85; see also Stone 127-42). However, a differentiation between universalism and globalization is needed, according to Jan Assmann, because the first is “the rise of theories, ideas or beliefs with a claim to universal validity” (J. Assmann, “Globalization” 121) and “suggests an intellectual and spiritual phenomenon, globalization; on the other hand, a political, economic and civilizational process (implying material rather than spiritual culture)” (*ibidem*).

Globalization, in Jan Assmann's definition, is

a process of general dissemination (of merchandise, technologies, news, political influence, religious ideas) across political and cultural boundaries and of the ensuing integration of various, previously isolated zones into one system of interconnections and interdependencies, where all nations, empires, tribes and states cohere in some way or other through political, economic or cultural relations. (*ibidem*)

For the scholar, globalization and the dissemination of memory on a global scale are incompatible. Haim Hazan also states that “the two intertwined components—globalization and the trope of the Holocaust—are starkly and inherently opposed” (Hazan 30).²²⁷ Hazan continues by denouncing a “globalized appropriation” (*ibidem* 31) of the Holocaust that is all but positive in the sense claimed here, as it seems to silence other instances of traumatic experiences rather than seeking dialogue and pursuing relationships with other cultures by means of ‘cultural anthropophagy’. In Hazan's viewpoint, this form of appropriation of the Holocaust that makes it “an intelligible omnipresent phenomenon” (*ibidem*) has one of its

²²⁷ In a note, Hazan defines ‘globalization’ as “a commonly used catchphrase relating to the unhindered spread and interconnectedness of production, communication, and technologies across the globe” (Hazan 40). Therefore, Hazan conceives globalization in similar terms to Jan Assmann, given that both focus on dissemination and interconnectedness between different entities of material and immaterial elements encompassing technology, communication, culture, and many more subjects.

downsides in seeing every attempt of “framing the Holocaust within a graded index of genocide events [as a] tacit [suggestion] of denying the uniqueness of the Holocaust” (*ibidem*).

In connecting the globalizing process and the possible “graded index of genocide events” (*ibidem*), Hazan implies that the diffusion of Holocaust memory on a global scale does not help dialogue between different instances of mass killing; on the contrary, it may be indicative of an inherent ‘hierarchy of mass killings’ where nothing is comparable to the ‘uniqueness’ of the Holocaust, which has already been discussed in the previous chapter. What is more, for Hazan, is that what he calls the “globalized Holocaust” (*ibidem*) bears no resemblance to the ‘historical’ Holocaust because the globalizing process “divorce[s] the authentic Holocaust from its globally perplexing manifestations” (*ibidem*). Therefore, according to Hazan’s reasoning, it could be said that what Levy and Sznajder claim to be the cosmopolitan memory of the Holocaust should be considered a memory of a different fact altogether.²²⁸

Goldberg and Hazan’s considerations are not only useful to discuss the importance of dialogue between cultures and historical facts, but also to foreground the ever urgent need to continue discussing the ways in which Holocaust memory – as well as any other memory of mass killing – can be fostered among young generations because they highlight the possible downsides in conceiving and pursuing a cosmopolitan memory of the Holocaust (from silencing others’ histories to dividing the ‘globalized Holocaust’ from the historical fact). As it is important to note the flaws of historical fiction apart from its potentialities and positive characteristics, as Vice does, it is equally important to denounce the limits and contradictions inherent in new critical approaches to Holocaust memory, although this does not mean that there are not potentialities in cosmopolitan memory as told by Levy and Sznajder. The main point would be: To what end do countries and politics pursue a globalized Holocaust memory? Is positive or negative appropriation involved? Is a dialogue or relationship with others on the same level envisaged?

All the questions above and many others that could be posed here are linked by the importance of the scope of Holocaust memory, be it cosmopolitan, globalized, or local. Holocaust memory, as the term implies, must be a remembrance of the Holocaust – the term including the historical fact, victims, and witnesses. The remembrance may be of various form, but the scope should always be unchanged. Therefore, any recent development in the

²²⁸ In agreement with Goldberg and Hazan’s view, Jeffrey C. Alexander has stated that the Holocaust has become a social trauma after a social process ‘constructing’ this trauma.

forms and kinds of Holocaust memory should answer the question: Is this kind or form of Holocaust memory aimed at fostering remembrance of the Holocaust, be it canonical or innovative? If the answer is positive, then the form or kind of Holocaust memory is really memory of the Holocaust. If the answer is negative, then what may seem a form of remembering the Holocaust may be a form of abuse, negative appropriation, or even an extreme form of assault that could be called ‘merchandising’ of mass killings. In the latter case, Jan Assmann’s consideration about the incompatibility of globalization with memory are fundamental, as in this case there is not a real memory but an abuse that may be linked, for example, to consumerism, by commissioning and commercializing novels that only refer to the fact to ‘raise sales’.

The question of how to preserve the memory of the Holocaust, of its victims, and of survivors for future generations that will not be able to count on the presence of flesh-and-blood witnesses has informed recent Holocaust Literature Studies as well as second- and third-generation descendants’ works. As it has been previously said, the Holocaust has constantly been object of attention by the media, – cinema and television, above all. Apart from *Schindler’s List*, it is quite easy to recall more than one title of recent films like *The Pianist* (Roman Polański, 2002) and *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* (Mark Herman, 2008), or documentaries like *Till the Tenth Generation* (Gerry Gregg, 2008) and various kinds of detailed studies that are periodically shown on television.²²⁹ Not surprisingly, scholars have researched this trend and, as a result, there are studies focusing on the continuous presence of the Holocaust on screens, especially in relation to the way its knowledge and remembrance can be passed on to future generations.

Writing still seems to be one of the most preferred means to promote and continue remembrance: critical approaches to answer the previous question are already available as well as third-generation Holocaust fiction.²³⁰ As for fiction, in particular, there is an ongoing wealth of literary production – a quick look at the novels available on the market published in the latest decades makes it clear that the Holocaust is one of the preferred historical subjects chosen by authors, publishing houses, and readers alike.

²²⁹ Examples of historical studies and other documentaries are the TV mini-series *My Family, The Holocaust and Me* (2020) offered by BBC one, the two documentaries *Tomi Reichental - Condemned to Remember* (2017) and *Close To Evil* (2014), and the animated documentary *The Children of the Holocaust* (2014), proposed by BBC four.

²³⁰ Some critical approaches are, for example, Vice’s *Holocaust Fiction* (2000), Stone’s “The Historiography of Genocide” (2004), and Aarons and Berger’s *Third-Generation Holocaust Representation* (2017); on third-generation Holocaust fiction, see again Aarons and Berger’s volume and Hirsch’s “Generation Gaps” (2003).

However, as presented in chapter 1, for this dissertation it is particularly important the focus adopted by Alison Landsberg in *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (2004) when researching the importance of media in the formation and passing on of memory. Her concept of prosthetic memory is based on a positive approach to media and technology, although she admits that mass cultural technologies present a remediated past that is influenced by the role and importance of the same media within the society. The main point of her thesis is that prosthetic memories can be 'added' to the individual, they are portable and irrespective of the individual's lack of direct experience of the historical facts that he/she remembers. Landsberg's idea takes into consideration both collectivities and the individual, since mass cultural technologies offer access to prosthetic memories through shared experiences, like watching a film at the cinema, but at the same time the individual's response to the mass cultural product is unforeseeable and specific to each one.

Deepening the analysis of one kind of media in particular, the press, Patricia Leavy's *Iconic Events: Media, Politics, and Power in Retelling History* (2007) has provided an insight that shows the negative side of media relevance and use in contemporary society. Her study on the mechanisms through which people are induced to acquire misleading memories of events that are disconnected from the original historical context could be considered research complementary to Landsberg's. Leavy describes step-by-step how American society constructs 'iconic events', starting from the storytelling offered by the press, which later develops into political and cultural appropriation so that the event is later used in socio-cultural and political contexts that may have little to do with the original historical fact. By considering the influence on the society at large rather than the individual, Leavy focusses on what she defines as 'contained' events, that is, events that took place within a short time-frame, but she leaves open the possibility of studying 'diffuse' events, which cover longer time periods, to complete the picture.

Since the Holocaust can be considered a 'diffuse' event, Jeffrey C. Alexander's *Trauma: A Social Theory* (2012) seems to respond to her call with his study on the social construction of trauma. This has given prominent attention to the Holocaust since, as the author states, it has become the symbol of evil within Western societies and their constant interest in trauma and traumatic experiences (see Alexander, *Trauma* 83). Like Leavy, Alexander's analysis of Holocaust relevance in Western cultures from a sociological point of view takes into consideration collectivities rather than individuals.

The same year that saw the publication of Alexander's work, another study was published: Marianne Hirsch's *The Generation of Postmemory*. Hirsch brings the Holocaust back to the individual sphere, as it were, since her concept of postmemory finds its beginnings in Spiegelman's *Maus* – the telling of the past of the author's father and of the difficult relationship between the two, centred on Spiegelman's inheritance of Holocaust traumatic memories. Spiegelman and Hirsch are both second-generation descendants and have told their inherited traumas: Spiegelman in *Maus I* and *Maus II*, while Hirsch in the recounting of the 'journey back' to Czernowitz, the city her parents come from and that she never knew first-hand prior to the war (see Hirsch and Spitzer, "We Would" 257). The first in creative literary form, the latter in a scholarly article, both authors have tried to convey what Hirsch defines postmemory, that is,

the relationship that the "generation after" bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before — to experiences they "remember" only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to *seem* to constitute memories in their own right. (Hirsch, *Generation 4*; emphasis in original)

The following generations' relationship with the traumas that were experienced by their parents, grandparents or other relatives is what both Spiegelman and Hirsch have in relation to their parents as Holocaust witnesses.

Specifically, postmemory has been theorized by Hirsch as "intergenerational transmission" (*ibidem* 18) and "in relation to children of Holocaust survivors, but [...] it may usefully describe other second-generation memories of cultural or collective traumatic events and experiences" (Hirsch, "Mourning" 416). Therefore, the scholar does not envisage postmemory as an 'exclusive' kind of memory that is proper only of second-, third-, and fourth-generation descendants of Holocaust witnesses, but it is a "*generational* structure of transmission embedded in multiple forms of mediation" (Hirsch, *Generation 35*; emphasis in original) that might explain the kind of relationship and transmission of memory between witnesses and their descendants in multiple contexts of mass killing or other historical traumas.

In other words, "postmemory is *not* an *identity* position" (*ibidem*; emphasis in original) but a process of passing on memory from first-hand witnesses to the following generations. Therefore, Hirsch does not intend to divide the society into two groups – Jewish and non-Jewish – so as to ascribe postmemory as specific to one group, but she identifies postmemory as characteristic of an entire generation, no matter if individuals are directly

linked to the subject matter because of their parents' life. This also implies, as Hirsch concedes, that postmemory is not only peculiar of the second-generation of descendants, which she calls "*literal* second generation" (*ibidem* 34; emphasis in original), but it is the passing on of memory even to second-generations that share the same age with the literal one, without the direct kinship to Holocaust witnesses. Therefore, 'non-literal' second-generations (and the following ones) coincide with the individuals that have been here called 'non-related'.

Of course, there is not an exact coincidence between the postmemory of the literal second-generation and that of non-related people. Drawing on Eva Hoffman's "tenuous and permeable" (*ibidem* 35) line of differentiation between "the postgeneration as a whole and the *literal* second generation in particular" (Hoffman qtd. in Hirsch, *Generation* 36), Hirsch admits that "we would have to account for the difference between an intergenerational vertical identification of child and parent occurring within the family, and the intragenerational horizontal identification that makes that child's position more broadly available to other contemporaries" (Hirsch, *Generation* 36), where 'other contemporaries' can be understood as non-related people. According to Hirsch, the different kind of postmemory between them amounts to the fact that for the literal second generation it is a familial postmemory, whereas for non-related people it is an affiliative postmemory (see *ibidem* 35-36). 'Familial' clearly makes reference to a direct kinship to witnesses, but familial structures are central also in the 'affiliative gaze' that non-related individuals can have. This is because, given the rupture of the common inheritance and transmission of memory within families from older generations to younger one due to traumatic experiences,

[a]ffiliative postmemory is [...] no more than an extension of the loosened familial structured occasioned by war and persecution. It is the result of contemporaneity and generational connection with the literal second generation, combined with a set of structures of mediation that would be broadly available, appropriable, and, indeed, compelling enough to encompass a larger collective in an organic web of transmission. (*ibidem* 36)

In the above lines, Hirsch's affiliative postmemory foregrounds many concepts. Firstly, in the context of this writing, it is particularly important to highlight how Hirsch presupposes a network of relations as part of postmemory. Non-related individuals' postmemory is possible thanks to, and at the same time it is characterized by, a "generational connection with the literal second generation" (*ibidem*), therefore it is implied that a dialogue between related and non-related people must be present. However, this relationship is not a 'closed' or 'exclusive' one, since Hirsch envisages a "larger collective in an organic web of transmission" (*ibidem*),

which may be thought to correspond to the seeking of relationship between countries and cultures,²³¹ such as the ones proposed by Rothberg or by Stone between populations that have experienced mass killing. In addition to this, Hirsch defines “a set of structures of mediation” (*ibidem*), which obviously calls to mind Walter and Grusin’s concept of mediation (and remediation) as well as Aleida Assmann’s ‘mediators of memory’ (see A. Assmann, “Canon” 97-107). These processes of mediation are ‘appropriable’, or ‘prosthetic’, as they can be ‘added’ to the individual, which in this dissertation can be understood as meaning positive appropriation through cultural anthropophagy. Affiliative postmemory of non-related individuals, thus, encompasses a range of concepts that have been discussed above and that highlight how this kind of memory is in relation (‘rhizomatic’), open to dialogue, ‘absorbed’, and conveyed through media.

The family structure is the lens through which Hirsch reads the transmission of memory in the generations ‘after’, both for descendants and non-related people, because

[u]nlike public images or images of atrocity, [...] family photos, and the familial aspects of postmemory would tend to diminish distance, bridge separation, and facilitate identification and affiliation. When we look at photographic images from a lost past world, especially one that has been annihilated by force, we look not only for information or confirmation, but for *an intimate material and affective connection that would transmit the affective quality of the events*. (Hirsch, *Generation* 38; my emphasis)

It is clear that what is sought and at the basis of familial and affiliative postmemory is a personal, affective connection – that is, a link based on emotions.²³² This link cannot be reached only through a ‘cognitive’ memory of the historical fact, precisely because the affective and imaginative dimensions must be present: “[p]ostmemory’s connection to the past is [...] actually mediated not by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation” (*ibidem* 4). Therefore, even in absence of direct experience of the fact, postmemory of the Holocaust is possible thanks to affect and creative labor (which has to do with the representations of the fact through media such as novels, films...). The point is that a ‘felt’ link with the subject is necessary in order for memory to be possible.

A discussion about some of the obstacles proposed by Margalit regarding the establishment of a global ‘ethical community’ based on shared memories of historical facts has already been proposed. In particular, the scholar said that individuals should form an ‘ethical community’ because they are all human beings, so being part of mankind should be

²³¹ Indeed, Hirsch states that “[t]hese resonances and connections are important and announce new directions in the field of memory studies” (“An Interview”, accessed 08.05.2021).

²³² The same could be said, in part, of Howe’s words about the response to memoirs (see ch. 2.2).

sufficient to constitute it, but, evidently, it is not so. Hirsch's postmemory, in theorizing a common familial-kind of relationship between the postmemorial generations – related and non-related – and the witnesses proposes a way to circumvent the problem. The familial structure enables postmemorial individuals to 'connect' with the subject matter thanks to affect. In other words, emotions are at the basis of the postmemorial link that enables and allows memory of the Holocaust to be passed on from the witnesses to the postgenerations, even though the kind of memory is inherently different.

The "fractured" (see Hirsch, *Generation* 35-36) transmission of memory, from the older generation to the younger one, that happens in case of traumatic experiences obstacles or makes impossible the "embodied" transmission (see *ibidem* 5-22). As Hirsch states,

[p]ostmemorial work [...] strives to *reactivate* and *re-embody* more distant political and cultural memorial structures by reinvesting them with resonant individual and familial forms of mediation and aesthetic expression. In these ways, less directly affected participants can become engaged in the generation of postmemory that can persist even after all participants and even their familial descendants are gone. (*ibidem* 33; emphasis in original)

Readers should move close to the subject matter by means of emotions. In Hirsch's definition, "postmemory is distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection. Postmemory is a powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation" (Hirsch, "Mourning" 416). The range of emotions that human beings can feel is limited. As a consequence, and despite the profoundly different situations, contexts, and severity of experience, it is sound to state that witnesses, descendants, and non-related individuals may all feel possibly similar emotions when in front of particularly tough situations.

Of course, the horror and desperation felt during the Holocaust can only find a possible counterpart in the terror of first-hand witnesses of other mass killings. However, also descendants and non-related people may have felt, and indeed know in theory (through 'imaginative investment'), what horror, desperation, and terror are. Therefore, it could be stated that they are enabled to move closer the subject matter because they know the emotions that other human beings may have felt when they were experiencing the fact. This is not to say that non-related people's experiences, apart from other instances of mass killings, are at the same level of the Holocaust. Nonetheless, given that 'experiencing' the Holocaust to 'understand' it is impossible, the next best option is to draw near to witnesses by understanding the emotions that accompany situations told in literature, film, and through

other media. Here it is claimed that the link of the affiliative mode envisaged by Hirsch is ascribable to emotions in general and not only to a familial kind of affect.

Similar experiences and emotions linked to them that non-related individuals may have experienced in their life or that may be part of Margalit's common memory have a key relevance. The Holocaust and other, more daily experiences are not levelled up, nor the importance and severity of the Holocaust are diminished by becoming linked to non-related individuals through daily experiences. The Holocaust and the daily, not life-threatening experiences are pulled together so that it is possible to establish a dialogue between them. The memory of the Holocaust and the memories of other experiences are interconnected, following Jan and Aleida Assmann's reasoning, therefore they are part of a network of memories and connections are formed between them, as in Glissant's rhizome. Through the rhizome constituted by dialogue and relations between memories, the Holocaust is 'positively' appropriated through cultural anthropophagy by non-related individuals so that they can eventually feel a "living connection" (Hirsch, *Generation* 33) with the subject matter.

From Hirsch's words, one infers the fact that postmemory, and thus Holocaust memory, is possible only provided that it is "resonant" (*ibidem*) with emotions, that is, with a 'personal' link that connects the witnesses and the subject matter to the postmemorial individual. This is even more important in the case of non-related individuals, because descendants do have a familial link. Non-related people must rely on the fact that they are human beings like the witnesses, so they can know the emotions that they may have felt at least cognitively or imaginatively. They also may have experiences in their own life that are similar to the Holocaust or much less extreme that enable them to feel similar emotions because they have been tough for them. Consequently, the link they establish with the Holocaust can indeed be felt as 'personal' because they can establish a connection with witnesses thanks to shared emotions and empathy. Emotions enable and develop empathy, rather than identification; they allow non-related individuals to enter into dialogue with others (descendants and witnesses); and, eventually, they are transformed into attitude in the case of attitudinal postmemory. Therefore, attitudinal postmemory is possible only through empathy based on shared emotions between characters and readers.²³³

²³³ By considering the links between and relevance of personal investment, positionality, personal memory, cultural memory, identification, and empathy when studying and researching the Holocaust, Bos agrees that Hirsch's concept of postmemory is useful to describe the kind of relationship that the "literal" (Hirsch, *Generation* 34) second generation has as well as "extra-familial postmemory" (Bos 60) of those who are not descendants, she also agrees that in the latter case it is "a form of identification that facilitates the crucial

Hirsch states that postmemory tries to “*re-embod*y [...] memorial structures” (*ibidem*; emphasis in original) in postgenerations because traumatic experiences ‘disconnect’ the common transmission of memory, which for Hirsch is of familial kind and, as such, both affective and bodily. For Jan Assmann, “[i]n the normal succession of generations [...], this embodied form of memory is transmitted across three to four generations—across 80 to 100 years” (*ibidem* 32). Hirsch claims that family photographic images, particularly analog ones,

in their enduring ‘umbilical’ connection to life are precisely the medium connecting first- and second-generation remembrance, memory and postmemory. They are the leftovers, the fragmentary sources and building blocks, shot through with holes, of the work of postmemory. They affirm the past’s existence and, in their flat two-dimensionality, they signal its unbridgeable distance. (Hirsch, “Mourning” 417)

Even though Hirsch states that family photographs are stronger “revenants” (“An Interview”, accessed 08.05.2021) than oral or written narratives as for the transmission of memory, literary works for children can be “media of postmemory” (Hirsch, *Generation* 36) as much as photographs. Of course, only narratives trying to convey a respectful kind of postmemory of the Holocaust can be considered in this way because, like photographs, they pass on postmemory through empathy and an affiliative relationship. Since there is not a familial relationship that enables an affective connection, the affiliative link may well be reached through fiction, even though this has not the same properties and characteristics as photographic images. Indeed, readers may picture the facts and incidents in their minds while reading.

Especially through analogic photographic images, postmemory allows to re-embod, to re-establish a connection with the people that experienced the trauma, and thus with the traumatic fact (see *ibidem* 33). If the familial connection is understood in more general terms as an emotional link with people who experienced traumatic experiences first-hand, then non-related individuals are receivers of a postmemory that ‘embodies’ – meaning it is a carrier of

bridging of the gap between survivors and those who were not there, since it seems to allow for a connection, a dialogue” (*ibidem*). Nonetheless, Bos fears that “this identification [...] can also potentially become problematic if it remains unexamined” (*ibidem*); the same “Hirsch warn[ed] that these ‘lines of relation and identification’ need to be theorized further in order to resist appropriation and incorporation” (*ibidem*). In particular, identification becomes an issue when it “leads to ‘adoption,’ appropriation, and the erasure of the difference between self and other in [confronting] with the Holocaust (in research and/or teaching) [...], as it allows the viewer or reader to become ‘a surrogate victim’ and allows ‘context, specificity, responsibility, history’ to become blurred” (*ibidem* 61). In Bos’s perspective, if deeper studies about the influence of cultural memory upon the single researcher and individual and about the individual’s reasons to engage with Holocaust study and research are not envisaged, there is the risk that postmemory “becom[e] a vague catch-all term used by academics through which to articulate a broader cultural-historical awareness of and emotional connection to the events of the Holocaust, but which conveniently leaves out one’s particular personal investment in this knowledge or connection” (*ibidem*).

– an ideal behaviour and set of values that pose respect for human beings at the forefront, through a link with the fact and the people who experienced it. This kind of postmemory can be called ‘attitudinal postmemory’ because non-related individuals are supposed to transform this cognitive and emotional postmemory into an ‘active’ memory. Although the cognitive part is present, this kind of postmemory is primarily emotional, meaning that it is not mainly based on acquiring information and historical details on the past, but on establishing a personally felt link with it. ‘Active’ memory means that non-related individuals, through postmemory, transform it into an attitude that may determine their everyday open and respectful behaviour towards others. Learning and adopting this disposition is how non-related individuals ‘remember’ what happened, victims, and witnesses: they ‘embody’ a kind of attitude contrary to the personal and collective behaviour that allowed the historical fact, thus they ‘honour’ people who lived through the Holocaust because they are not passive receivers of a memory that remains disconnected from their own lives.

As discussed, only if the ‘personal’, emotional link is present, memory of the Holocaust can be truly felt in non-related individuals. The personal link is made through connecting the historical fact and the emotions linked to it to personal experiences that non-related individuals may have experienced in their life. In Western countries, it is more likely that young individuals have had common, everyday experiences, at the basis of which there is disrespect towards the other in many forms. For example, the individual may have been ‘singled out’ for some reason that ‘makes sense’ only to the people who are not recognizing him or her as a peer. Non-related readers can develop the personal link – the “material ‘living connection’” (*ibidem*) about which Hirsch talks – thanks to empathic connection with the characters experiencing the same.

The familial element cannot be overlooked as it is an insurmountable difference between descendants and non-related individuals.²³⁴ According to Hirsch, the main difference between second-generation and non-related individuals’ postmemory is the presence or absence of a familial relationship. However, its memory structure can be present in the affiliative relationship of non-related people, as they become “adoptive witnesses or affiliative contemporaries” (*ibidem* 5). It could also be said that descendants and affiliative individuals share the external origins of the relationship they have with the Holocaust: the second-generation did not have any influence on their parents’ choosing to start a family, therefore the origins of their kinship are external to them. For non-related individuals, their potential

²³⁴ See also Erll for the position of family in Cultural Memory Studies (“Locating” 303-18).

link is an externally-originated type of relationship because it is aided by cultural products offered by sociocultural and market-driven forces on which they do not have any immediate influence.

Nonetheless, the striking difference between descendants and non-related individuals is that the second generation cannot ‘escape’ the weight of their past,²³⁵ whereas the latter can make a choice. They can decide if and how to get more involved in the relationship,²³⁶ that is, whether and how much getting informed about the Holocaust, and with what means.²³⁷ Non-related individuals may or may not develop Hirsch’s affiliative link and attitudinal postmemory through the multiple representations they are driven to and with which they get in contact, from first-hand accounts to the ‘mediators of memory’ (see A. Assmann, “Canon” 97-107).

As Hirsch says, “[t]he challenge for us in the next generations is precisely to acknowledge and to signal our own distance from the traumatic events that preceded us and not to appropriate them for ourselves” (“An Interview”, accessed 08.05.2021): indeed, postgenerations do have to manage the contrasting concepts of distance and appropriation, especially in the case of non-related people. Their historical and physical distance from the Holocaust can be ‘bridged’ by an affiliative relationship, but at the same time the emotional relationship they may develop must not become a form of undue appropriation so that their own individuality and life overshadow its importance. They must reach a balance in which there is mutual recognition of the Holocaust and of their experiences, in a dialogue enabled by an affiliative relationship. Unless there is an affiliative relationship and the scope of appropriation is memory, the process of appropriation is likely to be driven by market forces, or it is used to highlight a socio-political situation, as it happens with the play *Perdition* (see Vice 160-66).

Today, the young generations’ need to establish an affiliative relationship while finding a balance between distance and appropriation does not imply that contemporary children must be traumatized by literary works. A particularly harsh, violent, and tough plot is not the only way to ‘really’ tell the Holocaust without disrespecting the fact, and this is true

²³⁵ Hirsch states that “[t]o grow up with overwhelming inherited memories, to be dominated by narratives that preceded one’s birth or one’s consciousness, is to risk having one’s own life stories displaced, even evacuated, by our ancestors. It is to be shaped, however indirectly, by traumatic fragments of events that still defy narrative reconstruction and exceed comprehension” (“An Interview”, accessed 08.05.2021).

²³⁶ I say “more involved” because, especially in Western countries, it seems implausible that young generations do not get in contact with the Holocaust in more ways, given the abundance of medial representations and the compulsory material studied at school in a number of countries.

²³⁷ See also Landsberg on the interchangeability and prosthetic quality of memories acquired through media in chapter 1.

also for some works for older readers that very well exemplify “gratuitous brutality” (Vice 44). Indeed, most children’s literature about the Holocaust tend to ‘spare’ the children from its harshest realities.²³⁸

The common practice to spare the children the most gruesome realities of the Holocaust finds many reasons. Hirsch admits that “[t]o grow up with overwhelming inherited memories, to be dominated by narratives that preceded one’s birth or one’s consciousness, is to risk having one’s own life stories displaced, even evacuated, by our ancestors” (Hirsch, *Generation 4*). Considering this, one may well say that it is potentially dangerous to expose children to extreme violence, gruesome details, and horrific descriptions of real facts, precisely because they *are* real facts. Therefore, one may think that they can be ‘annihilated’ by the details of the Holocaust. Adults, on the contrary, are perceived as having more experience and knowledge that enable them to better manage the harsh realities. The risk is avoided if major themes are not violence and horror but solidarity, friendship, and the encounter with evil and the ‘enemy’, because these themes are faced by all children when they are growing up. By focusing on these topics, children’s novels make the ‘experience’ of getting in contact with the Holocaust less traumatic.²³⁹

Nowadays, the main point in telling the Holocaust to young readers is to foster its postmemory, given that all young individuals form new postmemorial generations. Holocaust memory should be conceived not only as knowledge of historical detail, but also of a mental and behavioural attitude that is against disrespect and discrimination, also through stereotypes and prejudices, which were at the basis of the division of Jewish people from the rest of the society. Then, the aim is to convey a kind of postmemory that not only links young generations to the historical fact and witnesses, but that also enables a change in mental and behavioural patterns towards a more respectful society.

The personal link that connects individuals’ incidents with the historical fact and witnesses via the characters’ experiences in the novels is essential for young readers because, given the historical gap between them and the Holocaust, they may perceive historical information acquired through textbooks as too ‘historical’: too detached from them, a ‘past’

²³⁸ For example, see Bosmajian’s volume *Sparing the Child* (2002), Kokkola’s monograph *Representing the Holocaust in Children’s Literature* (2009), and Lindsay Myers’ article “What Do We Tell the Children?” (2009).

²³⁹ There may be, in these cases, a displacement of the central theme of the novel, which may be one of the above rather than the Holocaust as historical fact. It is to be encouraged the study of readers’ response(s) to the experiences and facts told in novels to truly assess their impact and the quantity and quality of historically accurate information about the fact that is passed through them.

thing that has nothing to do with them, their present, and that does not catch their attention.²⁴⁰ If a good personal link is established between the child reader and the Holocaust, one may hope that it grows with the child during his life and then makes him a better member of the society, and of mankind too.

The importance of the emotional component of attitudinal postmemory is fundamental because nowadays Holocaust trauma cannot be conceived only in terms of direct family relationship to the traumatic experience nor only as a ‘cognitive’ knowledge of what happened. Attitudinal postmemory does not substitute, nor is in ‘competition’ with other forms of memory, be it cognitive, national-political, or the literal second generation’s one. ‘Cognitive’ knowledge is essential, but it must be sided by a more ‘active’ memory, especially in non-related young generations. Attitudinal postmemory highlights the emotional connection with the past over the cognitive knowledge of historical details because it presupposes, through personal “imaginative investment” (*ibidem*) and connection, a positive return in terms of attitude that, in the long term and following the child’s growth, may determine a more respectful and less racist society than the one the witnesses lived in. It is a kind of memory that looks at the past while considering what can be done in the present and in the future to oppose the basis of what happened in the period that young readers approach through novels.²⁴¹ Therefore, non-related children did not witness the Holocaust, but they must ‘know’ and act accordingly and attitudinal postmemory answers Hirsch’s question “How are we implicated in the aftermath of crimes we did not ourselves witness?” (*ibidem* 2).

Like any other mass killing, from Rwanda to native Americans, the Holocaust was directed to specific social groups. Considering Margalit’s reflections, those people that suffered Nazi policies and then the Holocaust could be substituted by any other internally or externally defined group. Even though the history of Anti-Semitism in Europe is long and terrible (see Howe 175), here attention is given mainly to the fact that each social group could possibly be discriminated because of some other group that regards itself as superior (see

²⁴⁰ As Hirsch states, “[i]t is this presence of embodied and affective experience in the process of transmission that is best described by the notion of memory as opposed to history. Memory signals an affective link to the past—a sense, precisely, of a material ‘living connection’—and it is powerfully mediated by technologies like literature, photography, and testimony” (*Generation* 33). Therefore, history is traditionally perceived as less ‘involving’ or ‘engaging’ at a personal level than memory.

²⁴¹ Considering novels for children about the Holocaust as means to convey attitudinal postmemory in the sense provided here does not mean to propose a hierarchy of mass killings where the Holocaust cannot have relations and enter in dialogue with other instances. The Holocaust is the specific genocide considered in this dissertation, but it is necessary to propose studies that discuss if the same kind of postmemory is applicable to the other instances of mass killing. As Levy and Sznajder state, the Holocaust “can happen to anyone, at anytime” (101): the Holocaust is an example of how racism, disrespect, and hatred can be directed towards a specific group of people, but the risk of suffering the same can be extended to all mankind. As a consequence, each reader should act in order to oppose this possibility.

Levy and Sznajder 87-106). The supposedly 'inferior' group is identified because of some 'characteristics' spotted by perpetrators. Therefore, the reasoning here offered is based on the assumption that Jewish people were targeted because of their being Jewish, that is, 'other' than what the perpetrator group considered better. Jewish witnesses, though, are human beings like everyone else, and everyone else could substitute them on the basis of 'characteristics' other than being Jewish that can be singled out and for which other individuals could be considered different and inferior, and thus they could be discriminated or even killed.

For the second- and third-generation, the traumatic inheritance of Holocaust memory is always synonym with absence, impossible retrievals and 'returns'.²⁴² Considering the lack of a familial connection that brings the feeling of loss and absence, for non-related postmemorial individuals loss and absence can be 'substituted' by the sense of injustice towards human beings. It is this sense of outrage and disrespect, which could directly affect even them, that can be passed through medial representation.

According to Hirsch, postmemory is not made of "literal 'memories' of others' experiences" (Hirsch, *Generation* 31), because "one person's lived memories cannot be transformed into another's" (*ibidem*). Therefore, "[p]ostmemory is not identical to memory: it is 'post'; but, at the same time, [...] it approximates memory in its affective force and its psychic effects" (*ibidem*). In other words, the 'content' of postmemory can be received by someone who has a direct memory of the experience, but the emotions associated to the memory as well as the psychic effects can be similar to the ones felt by the person who experienced the fact (the 'sharer'), or quite near.

Basically, one may say that postmemory is not undue appropriation of others' memories, but it is a 'positive' appropriation of memories – as in cultural anthropophagy – that enables a cognitive and emotional approximation to the people who experienced the fact.²⁴³ According to Hirsch, non-related people are able to 'draw nearer' to witnesses and the Holocaust thanks to affiliative postmemory. Children can get nearer to the Holocaust by feeling empathy towards the characters and what they experience because they regard them as peers: they are other children experiencing difficult situations that may remind readers of personal tough experiences and when they felt hatred, anger, terror, despair. Therefore, readers 'feel' what is told as if it was experienced by them, or as if it happened to someone

²⁴² For a discussion of the concept of absence in relation to Holocaust memory, see for example Aarons and Berger's volume *Third-Generation Holocaust Representation* (2017); on impossible retrievals and 'returns', see for example Hirsch and Spitzer's "'We Would Not Have Come Without You': Generations of Nostalgia" (2002).

²⁴³ Non-related individuals' postmemory could be understood as 'memory anthropophagy'.

they know and care about, precisely because they regard characters as children prior to seeing them as ‘Jewish’ children. In other words, characters can be Jewish, but it is not because they are Jewish that non-related children feel near to them and develop empathy: it is because they are other children, they are peers experiencing extreme situations, including being persecuted because of religion.

Hirsch’s foundations of postmemory are to be found in Jan and Aleida Assmann division of collective memory into communicative and cultural memory, further divided by into individual and social memory, and political and cultural memory, respectively (see Hirsch, *Generation* 32; see also J. Assmann, “Globalization” 122). Despite the division into different kinds, the “fundamental assumption driving this schema is, indeed, that ‘memories are linked between individuals’” (Hirsch, *Generation* 32), therefore a relationship between all kinds of memory, and between individuals carrying them, is always present. Considering this, it is not surprising that Jan and Aleida Assmann state that “[o]nce verbalized, [...] the individual’s memories are fused with the inter-subjective symbolic system of language and are, strictly speaking, *no longer a purely exclusive and unalienable property*. ... they can be exchanged, shared, corroborated, confirmed, corrected, disputed—and, last not least, *written down*” (qtd. in Hirsch, *Generation* 32; my emphasis). Once memories are shared with others, they no longer ‘belong’ exclusively to the original owner, and they become subject to a series of mediations and remediations (see Erll and Rigney, “Introduction” 1-11) that are enacted by other individuals. Therefore, it does not seem sound to insist on the ‘untouchability’ of Holocaust memory and the concept that it must ‘remain the same’ and uniquely in the form of witnesses’ accounts (see Howe 175-99). Of course, as already said, Holocaust memory ‘remains the same’ as for historical content – the Holocaust happened – but its form may (and should) vary with time so as to be up-to-date and use the latest technological advancements as well as new perspectives sharing the aim of fostering memory (see ch. 1).

Following the Assmanns’ words, a personal memory is no longer only personal once it is shared, but it is also part of someone else’s knowledge and ‘acquired memory’. The individual who has received this memory necessarily ‘handles’ it and can make it ‘his own’ by positively appropriating it, eventually feeling nearer to the original owner and what he or she experienced. Thus, regarding Holocaust memory, it could be said that witnesses have shared it with the wider society, making it ‘available’ to anyone and part of human heritage. Non-related people can positively appropriate it, but respectful handling and attitude should not be limited to a ‘passive’ reception and knowledge of the content: both should be open to a more ‘active’ engagement with the latter that presupposes the sharing of their involvement,

for example by writing their own non-related perspective in historical fiction.²⁴⁴ This process can also be regarded as a necessary response to the witnesses sharing their experiences and memories.

Since in Jan and Aleida Assmann's view all individuals' memories are connected, if non-related postmemorial children acquire attitudinal postmemory there is a possibility to reach an international, inter-generational network of memory that has the potential to counter destructive ideas of mass killings like the Holocaust.²⁴⁵ Of course, not all available children's literature concerning the Holocaust can be considered taking part in this aim (see Part Two). This is why it is important to consider the scope of the literary works and to distinguish between authors who try to foster postmemory and other writers who do not even attempt to contribute to Holocaust memory. However, if well done, children's literature by non-related authors can contribute to the formation of the memory network that will have short- and long-term positive consequences, which will outnumber the potential risks of undue appropriation and abuse.

²⁴⁴ 'Active' means that non-related individuals' postmemory should encompass behavioural and thinking patterns that are opposed to the ones that enabled the Holocaust. In this way, and as Hirsch claims, postmemory is located not only in the mind but it is an "embodied" (Hirsch, *Generation 5*) memory, grounded in emotions and the body.

²⁴⁵ Of course, attitudinal postmemory is not the only factor that would prevent mass killings, as many other elements are to be taken into account. However, given that the sociocultural context and education are two key elements at the basis of a society that might accept and perpetrate mass killings (see Woolf and Hulsizer 101-28), attitudinal postmemory seems particularly important.

Chapter 4

Why Non-Related Authors' Historical Fiction for Children

In focusing on children's historical fiction where the Holocaust is referred to directly or indirectly, there are plenty of examples that could be considered as case study, starting from Kerr's *When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit*, which tells the author's first-hand experiences during her childhood in novel form, and followed by *A Small Person Far Away* and *The Other Way Round*; to Roberto Innocenti's picture book *Rose Blanche* (1983) and Tom Palmer's recent *After the War* (2020). However, since this dissertation focuses on the kind of postmemory that non-related authors convey through their works, by taking into account only them the number of literary works significantly decreases. In addition to this, other 'criteria' have informed the preference for the case studies analysed, which eventually comprise novels written in Anglophone countries, not in translation, and commonly marketed to children aged from late childhood to pre-adolescence.

One of the criteria that have been followed is to limit the case studies to works written in English because a secondary aim of the present analysis is to identify a possible common trend among non-related Anglophone authors telling the Holocaust to children in the contemporary era. Even though all the four countries considered (the UK, the USA, Ireland, and Australia) are commonly perceived as 'heroic' for their role during World War II, the UK and the USA traditionally occupy a more central position in this sense within scholarly discussions: "the dominant cultural perception within Britain and America of the role of these countries is as liberators" (Mitschke 431). On the one hand, the UK was "the only non-occupied nation to fight against Hitler from the beginning of the Second World War" (*ibidem*) and it was part of the rescue operation called Kindertransport. Unsurprisingly, British war stories for children about the period usually depict this heroic stance, the arrival of Jewish children in the UK and their difficulties, the country's resistance and bravery in the face of German air raids (in particular, the London Blitz), and the moving of London children to safer villages in the countryside.²⁴⁶ With reference to the Holocaust, Britain is usually seen as a "liberator", offering a 'happy ending' to the suffering of Europe's Jews" (*ibidem* 432). Similarly, the USA started to perceive the Holocaust "as an event that had not just happened to European Jewry 'but as one in which America had participated as liberator'" (*ibidem*). The "universalist approach" (*ibidem* 433) in remembering the Holocaust that is typical of the USA

²⁴⁶ For example, in Emma Carroll's *When We Were Warriors* (2019).

well suits the “self-proclaimed mission to act as defender of the free world” (Levy and Sznajder qtd. in Mitschke 433) and it “is informed by American ‘ideological tendencies’” (Rosenfeld qtd. in Mitschke 433).

Despite being politically and culturally linked to the UK, both Ireland and Australia were already officially autonomous during World War II,²⁴⁷ therefore, one may wonder if Irish and Australian non-related authors have the same approach as English ones to World War II and the Holocaust. Moreover, geographical distance may have a major relevance in the Australian approach to and perception of the war and the Nazi genocide. It might not be a case that some of the most interesting examples of historical fiction for children about the Holocaust and Holocaust memory have been written by Australian authors.²⁴⁸ Consequently, it is interesting to look for a possible common narrative of postmemory in these Anglophone areas that goes beyond the particular cases of each country during the war years, and their individual effort to put an end to the war.

A second consideration is that English-written books are usually the most translated ones into other languages of Western countries, rather than the opposite, due to what Lawrence Venuti describes as “the marginal position of translation in contemporary Anglo-American culture” (Venuti, *Translator’s Invisibility*, Kindle edition, Preface) and that Puglisi refers to as “una peculiarità del mondo angloamericano, forse per una presunzione di egemonia linguistica e di sostanziale imperialismo culturale e, in qualche modo, editoriale” (“a peculiarity of the Anglo-American world, probably due to a presumptuous belief of linguistic hegemony and of cultural imperialism, which is, in some way, also editorial”, my trans., Venuti, *L’invisibilità*, Kindle edition, Introduzione). Indeed, nine out of twenty novels considered are available in other languages – mainly Italian, Spanish, and French, but also German.²⁴⁹ However, why not considering also works translated into English from other languages?

Translation brings forth multiple issues that complicate literary analysis. First of all, the question of translation accuracy and of the translator’s perspective, which are deeply interconnected: for example, the translator could opt for a more literal translation (‘word-for-word’), or he may prefer a more ‘sense-for-sense’ translation (see Munday, Kindle edition,

²⁴⁷ Ireland became the Irish Free State (without Northern Ireland) in 1922, while Australia became a Commonwealth in 1901.

²⁴⁸ For example, Morris Gleitzman (born in England, he moved to Australia when he was sixteen years old) and Jackie French.

²⁴⁹ The novels herein discussed currently available in translation are *The Devil’s Arithmetic* by Jane Yolen; *Waiting for Anya* by Michael Morpurgo; *Number the Stars* by Lois Lowry, *The Boy with the Striped Pajamas* and *The Boy at the Top of the Mountain* by John Boyne.

ch. 2.1). Depending on the kind of translation, the translated work may give a different impression to native speakers of English with respect to the original source and its readership. This is also influenced by many other factors, including the translator's personal preferences about literary features to maintain or discard, his country's literary and translating tradition, and potential restrictions or preferences of the publishing house. Given the specific case of novels about the Holocaust, also the governmental approach to Holocaust memory, or the role of the country during World War II, may influence the reception of a translation and charge it with meanings and expectations, and potential misinterpretations, that were not part of the original text.

Kokkola proposes the example of Hans Peter Richter's "quasi-autobiographical works" (Kokkola, *Representing* 138) *Friedrich, I Was There*, and *The Time of Young Soldiers*, which were translated from German into English during the 1970s²⁵⁰ and which "recount the process of becoming caught up in the Hitler Youth movement and adopting an uncritical attitude towards Nazi ideology" (*ibidem* 139). However, considering the point of view in the novels and cultural elements that belong to the German readership and need not to be explained in the original context,

when such works are translated into English, thereby changing their readership, the implications of such confessional writings are significantly altered. While it seems perfectly reasonable for Richter to try to enable young German readers to see the ordinariness of the perpetrators and to ask for forgiveness from the younger generations who have been forced to bear the burden of responsibility for actions they have not personally committed, it is a wholly different matter when the readers are English speaking. Young English-speaking adolescents are hardly an appropriate audience for such entreaties. (*ibidem* 140)

Therefore, in this specific case, the subject matter is particularly relevant as well as the historical stance of the country where the literary work has been written, and the role of the country where it has been translated. Another issue arising from considering translated works involves culturally specific uses of some words and the potential differences in meaning between the original and the target language: if a translator maintains some words in the original language, the meaning conveyed depends also on the readers' level of knowledge of the source language and culture.

To better understand the limits and issues posed by translation, it could be useful to consider Jeremy Munday's explanation of the two traditional concepts associated to it, at least up until the twentieth century:

²⁵⁰ In 1970, 1972, and 1976 (see Kokkola, *Representing* 139).

The distinction between ‘word-for-word’ (i.e. ‘literal’) and ‘sense-for-sense’ (i.e. ‘free’) translation goes back to Cicero (106–43 @AC) and St Jerome (347–420 AC). In the west, where the status of the Classical authors of ancient Greece and Rome remained pre-eminent, it formed the basis of key writings on translation for nearly two thousand years. (Munday, Kindle edition, ch. 2.1)

It is possible that translating ‘word-for-word’ leads to “absurd” (*ibidem*) texts; thus, the ‘sense-for-sense’ approach has traditionally been preferred by writers. These include Cicero, who states, in *De optimo genere oratorum*, that he

did not translate [Aeschines and Demosthenes’s speeches] as an interpreter, but as an orator, keeping the same ideas and forms, or as one might say, the ‘figures’ of thought, but in language which conforms to our usage. And in so doing, [he] did not hold it necessary to render word for word, but [he] preserved the general style and force of the language. (Cicero qtd. in Munday, Kindle edition, ch. 2.1)

On the contrary, what Cicero proposes as the “interpreter” (*ibidem*) approach, is usually understood as the ‘word-for-word’ translation.

By claiming that he paid attention to their linguistic ‘usage’, Cicero implies that the uses and customs of his contemporary era, culturally and geographically located, had a role in shaping his translation process, as well as the translated cultural product itself. In doing so, a sort of ‘appropriation’ of the original work might be envisaged. Lawrence Venuti clearly focuses on the “ethical” (Venuti, *Translator’s Invisibility*, second edition 2008, 19) dimension and value of translation according to different, although not opposing, approaches. These are domestication and foreignization: in lay terms, domestication is the process of making the original text ‘nearer’ to the target culture and readers so that the translation is “immediately recognizable and intelligible” (*ibidem* 5) to readers and “capable of giving the reader unobstructed ‘access to great thoughts,’ to what is ‘present in the original’” (*ibidem*). In this way, the translator makes himself ‘invisible’, the reader contributes to his invisibility by thinking that apparent ‘difficulties’ while reading are due to “the foreign text or writer” (*ibidem* 1) rather than inherent characteristics of the translation, and the translated work is eventually perceived as if it were the original text.

Contrary to this, foreignization is translating by means of what Venuti calls ‘resistancy’ (see *ibidem* 18),²⁵¹ a process through which the translator maintains certain

²⁵¹ In Venuti’s words: “[...] the inclusion of non-standard items can make the translator visible in the translated text. It leads to a strategy that can be called ‘resistancy,’ not just because the strategy results in a translation that demands greater and possibly unexpected cognitive processing from the reader, but also because

elements that signal the presence of an original work and culture, different from the receiving one, and that ultimately makes the presence of the translator ‘visible’ to the reader. This is in contrast to what is commonly and widely accepted in the Anglo-American context, since the invisibility of the translator is conceived as an essential element for a high-quality translation (see *ibidem*). Indeed, it is very common that

[a] translated text, whether prose or poetry, fiction or nonfiction, is judged acceptable by most publishers, reviewers and readers when it reads fluently, when the absence of any linguistic or stylistic peculiarities makes it seem transparent, giving the appearance that it reflects the foreign writer’s personality or intention or the essential meaning of the foreign text – the appearance, in other words, that the translation is not in fact a translation, but the “original.” (*ibidem* 1)

However, in Venuti’s view, domestication and foreignization do not constitute a “dichotomy” (Venuti, *Translator’s Invisibility*, Kindle edition, Introduction) in simple terms, because

[a]ll translation, regardless of genre or text type, including translation that seeks to register linguistic and cultural differences, is an interpretation that fundamentally domesticates the source text. Translation is inevitably domesticating insofar as it aims to interpret the source text in terms that are intelligible and interesting in the receiving situation. It manages the linguistic and cultural differences that pose obstacles to intelligibility and interest through a twofold process of assimilation. On the one hand, translation decontextualizes the source text by detaching it from the multidimensional contexts of production and reception in its original language and culture [...]. On the other hand, translation simultaneously recontextualizes the source text by constructing another, comparable set of contexts in the translating language and culture. This assimilative process constitutes an *interpretive act* in which the source text undergoes a significant transformation. (*ibidem*; my emphasis)

The above words clarify that foreignization is not opposed to domestication; in particular, “foreignizing translation cannot be reduced to literalism, or close adherence to the source text” (*ibidem*), so they do not simply correspond to Cicero’s ‘sense-for-sense’ and ‘word-for-word’ translation.

Venuti claims that the translated text, either through domestication or foreignization, is transformed because the translator’s interpretation is made through the use of “interpretants” (*ibidem*), which are “formal and thematic factors that include a relation of equivalence and a particular style as well as values, beliefs, and representations” (*ibidem*). Both approaches share the fact that interpretants are given mainly by the receiving context,²⁵² but a foreignizing

it questions the dominant resources and ideologies that are put to work in domesticating translation” (Venuti, *Translator’s Invisibility*, Kindle edition, Introduction).

²⁵² Also foreignization implies a degree of domestication “because the interpretants, [...] are drawn predominantly from the receiving situation” (Venuti, *Translator’s Invisibility*, Kindle edition, Introduction).

translation allows the reader to understand that there is an original text, while the common effect of domestication is that the translation is thought to be the original because the translator and his translating process are made invisible, as already said. Therefore, although “[f]oreignization does not offer unmediated access to the foreign” (Venuti, *Translator’s Invisibility*, second edition 2008, 18), the main difference between the two approaches is that foreignization “rather constructs a certain image of the foreign that is informed by the receiving situation but aims to question it by drawing on materials that are not currently dominant, namely the marginal and the nonstandard, the residual and the emergent” (*ibidem* 18-19).

Indeed, the two approaches are defined by Venuti as “*ethical attitudes*” (*ibidem* 19; emphasis in original) because they imply a specific relationship between the original and the receiving culture: he prefers a ‘resistant’ translating process because it makes the translator and his translation ‘visible’ to the reader as mediator and mediation, and because it is in contrast with the widespread and hegemonic ‘invisibility’ stance. This offers an “effect of transparency [that] conceals the numerous conditions under which the translation is made, starting with the translator’s crucial intervention” (*ibidem* 1), so it could be said that, in some way, it ‘silences’ the original culture. As the scholar explains,

[t]he terms “domesticating” and “foreignizing” do not describe specific verbal choices or discursive strategies used in translation, but rather the ethical effects of translated texts that depend for their force and recognition on the receiving culture. The interpretants by which the translator transforms the source text into the translation are derived from the hierarchical arrangement of linguistic and cultural resources in the receiving situation. By “hierarchical” [it is] mean[t] that these resources are not assigned the same value and prestige: some are dominant while others are marginal with various gradations between these poles. The current standard dialect of the translating language, canons of literary and other humanistic texts, authoritative interpretations of those texts, prevalent translation theories and strategies – all exemplify dominant resources. (Venuti, *Translator’s Invisibility*, Kindle edition, Introduction)

These ‘dominant resources’ are what influences the translator and his translation, and makes the latter a fundamentally ‘different’ text from the original. This kind of influence cannot be avoided, so it is clear that translators always mediate between the source text and the translated work that will be marketed and read in the receiving culture. This mediation inevitably modifies the original text, in a domesticating or foreignizing way, so it is not possible to ‘cancel’ the translator’s handling of the source: on the contrary, his presence and work in-between the author and the reader should be acknowledged, especially in the case of works about the Holocaust.

The scholar's reasoning that "[a]ny text is only ever available through some sort of mediation that is most productively seen as a succession of interpretations in various forms and practices, media and institutions – even before it becomes a source text that receives a translator's interpretation" (*ibidem*) makes the process of multiple mediations implied in translation similar to Bolter and Grusin's concept of remediation. However, the manifold factors and 'interpretants' that are involved in this sort of mediation are not the scope of this dissertation.²⁵³ Given that any translation implies the translator's interpretation of the original source and that this writing focuses on the kind of postmemory conveyed by authors, only works that have been written in English will be considered.

In this way, the analysis of historical fiction will not be biased by the socio-cultural influences of the receiving context that translations imply, and which may modify more or less consistently the original text focus and perspective, according to the "hierarchical" (*ibidem*) array of interpretants of the receiving culture. In Venuti's words, "no translation can provide direct or unmediated access to the source text" (*ibidem*): considering the socio-cultural importance of the Anglo-American context on a global level and its common practice of accepting translator's invisibility, it is quite easy to acknowledge an inherent risk if an analysis of works in English and works translated into English is made without making distinctions. Due importance may not be given to the presence of a mediator between the original work, as intended by the author, and what is read by readers in the target language, filled with more or less evident influences that were not present in the original work.

Consequently, the multiple considerations, perspectives, and influences implied in translation should be taken into consideration when approaching translated works, especially about the Holocaust. Since they would have partially shadowed the techniques used by non-related authors to refer to the Holocaust in literary terms, it seemed necessary to discard works in translation so as not to have the analysis of the original text influenced by the presence of a mediator – the translator – between the literary source and the translated work.

As it has been said, there are internationally acclaimed picture books that are considered excellent examples of historical fiction for children about the Holocaust²⁵⁴ and scholarly studies about them abound. Picture books are literary works conveying meaning through words and image: they are not simply literary texts enriched by a visual component. However, it could be said that, thanks to the visual parts, authors are 'spared' the difficult task

²⁵³ They would form an interesting research area in relation to children's literature and the Holocaust.

²⁵⁴ For example, Innocenti's *Rose Blanche* (1983) combines text and images to accompany children readers through the plot but strictly maintains them at a safe distance, because an element separating the images and the reader-viewer is always present (see L. Myers, "What" 32-39).

of telling in writing what images can represent visually. Thus, images can be considered an ‘aid’ to tell the story as they convey a great deal of meaning and shape children’s historical image of the period and the Holocaust more directly than written text. Novels cannot count on such ‘aid’, so authors have to find ‘acceptable words’,²⁵⁵ even when it is difficult to do so, as well as narrative techniques and literary devices to represent the Holocaust – or to convey the impossibility to represent it.²⁵⁶ In addition to this, two secondary reasons should be considered as well to explain the preference for novels: historical fiction has recently reached again a good success among young readers,²⁵⁷ especially through novels, and these are the literary works usually adapted for the cinema.²⁵⁸ as a consequence, children may get more easily in contact with their stories rather than the plots in picture books.

Lastly, two reasons guided the preference for works aimed to readers from late childhood to pre-adolescence. Firstly, children at this age are independent readers so they can read these works alone, without an adult as mediator who reads the story aloud, as in the case of picture books. In the latter case, children are dependent on their parents’ preferences as for what to buy and read, or when, precisely because they cannot read. The second reason is that children usually learn about the Holocaust at school around this age,²⁵⁹ even though there are internal problems and contradictions in students’ learning about the Holocaust, first of all because Holocaust education is not compulsory in all the Anglophone countries here considered. For the UK situation, Bauer considers the UCL Centre’s conclusions as indicative of the fact that

[s]o it is no good taking the easy path of blaming teachers or students for young people’s limited understanding. School can have only so much influence [...].

Schools are burdened with a large part of [Holocaust education], but they are also hampered by the place the Holocaust is given in the curriculum. The National Curriculum, as is clearly stated in the report, includes school instruction on the Holocaust chiefly at Key Stage 3, the ages of 11 to 14. At this stage, there is no formal public examination against which learning is assessed; teachers have to cover the Holocaust in history, but there is no stipulation

²⁵⁵ ‘Acceptable’ should be considered in contrast with ‘right’: since it has been said that it is impossible to find the ‘right’ words to represent the Holocaust, authors should try to find the ‘most appropriate’ and relevant terms to represent the Holocaust.

²⁵⁶ On the impossibility to represent the Holocaust, see for example Kokkola’s ‘framed gaps’ (Kokkola, *Representing* 25-27).

²⁵⁷ On the success of historical fiction, see for example Rahn (1-26) and Owen (22-24).

²⁵⁸ An interesting study could consider the analysis of adaptations in relation to novels. Of the novels here considered, four have already been adapted for the cinema or are in the process of being so: the films already available are based on *The Devil’s Arithmetic*, *Waiting for Anya*, and *The Boy with the Striped Pyjamas*. An adaptation of *Milkweed* by Jerry Spinelli is supposed to be released next year. It is also interesting to note that *Number the Stars*, despite not being adapted, is often paired with *Miracle At Midnight* in school contexts (see “Novel study”, accessed 01.11.2021): indeed, the plots are quite similar.

²⁵⁹ For an analysis of what students know about the Holocaust in British secondary schools, see the study by Foster et al.

regarding how many lessons, what should be covered or – even – what the Holocaust was. Later, it becomes problematic, optional, and uncertain. One does not need to be an expert in pedagogy in order to understand that until the age of 15-16 at the earliest, concepts of historical time are vague at best. Connections, contexts, and so on, are hazy, and are indeed, as the report shows, impacted on by what the youngster absorbs from parents, films, Internet, social media, peers, and society in general. Schooling [...] can impact on this situation only, I think, very partly. (Bauer viii-ix)²⁶⁰

It is interesting to note that, for Bauer, pre-adolescents (meaning teens younger than 15-16 years old) cannot really understand ‘historical time’. He denounces the fact that teenagers at this age are likely to be unable to place the Holocaust along a historical timeline as well as the scarce organization of the UK National Curriculum in conveying and testing children’s knowledge of the Holocaust (see *ibidem* viii-ix). In continuing his reflections, however, it seems clear that Bauer’s main points are that children and teenagers should know two key aspects of the Holocaust: its victims and the relevance (and definition) of Anti-Semitism (see *ibidem*).

As Walker, Myers-Bowman, and Myers-Walls report,

[c]hildren as young as 6 years old demonstrate at least a limited understanding of war, and by the age of 8, their understanding seems fairly complete. Children’s understanding of war generally includes a concrete description of the objects and activities of war such as soldiers, weapons, fighting, killing, and dying. Older children, more than younger children, add abstract ideas to their definitions of war. Not surprisingly, these developmental differences have been linked to the cognitive advances in children’s thinking identified by Piaget (1952). Thus, older children, in addition to their concrete descriptions of war, include the *consequences of war and the reasons people participate in war*. They also are more likely than younger children to *associate negative emotions with war*. (Walker et al. 191-92; my emphasis)

Therefore, starting from 8 years of age, with their own age peculiar skills children are able to understand what war means, the concept of dying, and the consequences and reasons of war. Children’s understanding is influenced by “sociocultural factors” (*ibidem* 192), as the scholars claim. In particular, according to the theory of symbolic interactionism, this is true because

²⁶⁰ Bauer makes a call to the British government for more attention on older teenagers and for more time dedicated to Holocaust education: “The major thrust of recommendations should, in my humble view, be directed at suggesting that if indeed the Holocaust is a ‘civilizational break’ (as Dan Diner put it), and young people should grapple with it, then the emphasis should be on ages 15-18, at GCSE and at Advanced Level. And yet – shockingly – the examination boards have all dropped the Holocaust from intensive study at A-level. The very limited time the teachers have to teach about the Holocaust makes it very difficult to accommodate the – quite correct – demands and recommendations of the report. The obvious conclusion would be to increase the time allocated, and that again is very difficult indeed. But make it an examination subject – not as a bullet point in a wider paper on Nazi Germany but as a crucial part of European history in its own right – and then school investment in time, resources, and teacher development will certainly follow” (Bauer ix). The last part poses his reflections in dialogue with Levy and Sznajder’s claim that Holocaust memory is a founding part of Europe’s ‘memory-making’ process (see ch. 2.3).

meanings arise from social interactions and[,] [according to Patton, they] are “modified through an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he [or she] encounters”. Thus, children’s interactions within their environments will impact the meanings they give to war and peace. This is in line with a socialization approach to children’s understanding of war and peace, which suggests that sociocultural factors contribute to the development of social meanings including peace and war. If this is the case, children in the U.S. may have a very different understanding of war and peace than children in other countries based on differences in their sociocultural environments. For example, their relative lack of direct involvement in armed conflict could impact the meanings they give to peace and war.²⁶¹ (*ibidem*)

Of course, sociocultural factors are relevant in the children’s construction of meaning referring to war. However, what is particularly important to consider in the present dissertation and on which the same scholars agreed is the children’s ability to understand the concept by eight years of age, and their association of negative emotions to it, which is a characteristic common to all children, regardless of the culture of origin. Moreover, this ability does not depend on the children’s personal (meaning direct) or mediated experience of war because, “even children not directly impacted by political violence often are aware of current violent political conflicts and report feelings of fear, worry, sadness, anger, and confusion in their reactions to such events” (*ibidem* 191). Considering Bauer’s words in relation to the above quote, it could be said that the Holocaust historical ‘positioning’ in a historical timeline may be difficult up until later adolescence, but at the same time emotions associated to war (and its reasons and consequences) are already known by children from middle childhood.

Two considerations can be inferred from the words quoted above: firstly, children have an active stance and they play an active role in the interpretation and construction of meaning thanks to their ‘interactions’ (*ibidem* 192); secondly, children’s ‘understanding’ of the Holocaust and Holocaust memory can be shaped also by the works of historical fiction herein considered, as they form part of the ‘sociocultural environment’ they live in (*ibidem*). Given that children are able to associate negative emotions to war regardless of experiencing it first-hand, and that, in particular, “[a]lthough not directly in harm’s way, children exposed to war through the media or other sources must try to make sense of the information they receive” (*ibidem*), it is likely that they will be drawn to look for books of historical fiction about the Holocaust to have another ‘instrument’ to approach, know more about, or better ‘understand’ it. Considering what Bauer said, it is highly probable that children will get in

²⁶¹ On the importance of the sociocultural context, see also Woolf and Hulsizer (101-28).

contact with this kind of historical fiction at this age also because some works might be suggested by teachers as aid to tackle the Holocaust at school.²⁶²

Generally speaking, non-related authors' historical fiction for children can be seen as one of the cultural products deriving by the ongoing interest in World War II and trauma – and specifically in the Holocaust. However, it is also a representation of non-related authors' knowledge of and relationship with the subject matter, their own 'response' to the need to remember, and the way non-related authors have written about the Holocaust for children in the latest decades. Historical fiction is also another 'approach' (see Vice 5) to the Holocaust that shows its inherent limits and potentialities while presenting non-related authors' perspective and specific kind of postmemory. Focusing on children, this kind of historical fiction can be seen as an additional instrument through which children can approach the Holocaust and try to 'understand' it, as well as a tool to engage actively with the past by 'interacting' with fictional peers (namely, characters). By getting in contact with the relationships represented in historical fiction, children might be urged to reflect on their own way to relate to others. In doing so, historical fiction by non-related authors is a way to 'remember' the Holocaust and witnesses through 'active' postmemory, as it was claimed in chapter 3. Therefore, it is an additional tool that helps build contemporary children's postmemory in a similar way to what proposed by Landsberg for prosthetic memory.

²⁶² For example, Melissa Rabey's *Historical Fiction for Teens* is a teacher's guide containing thematic reading suggestions to help teachers respond to their students' interests and enquiries, or to plan classroom activities and readings, and it includes novels about the Holocaust.

PART TWO

Translating History into Historical Fiction, Historical Fiction into Attitude

To pass from history to historical fiction implies that it is possible to set a link between the two; therefore, history and historical fiction are not antipodes. As it has already been stated in chapters 1 and 2, history and literature are not at opposite sides, as the discussion of White and Friedländer's debate proved. With respect to Holocaust literature, chapter 2 claimed that writings that are not witnesses' accounts or historical documents should be included as means to pass Holocaust memory. Therefore, historical fiction, as part of non-account literature, needs to be considered in its positive potential, and in particular children's historical fiction about the Holocaust should be included within the media that promote Holocaust memory as a strategic mediator of memory. It is therefore necessary to investigate the fact that the Holocaust and *children's* historical fiction seem to be in contrast with each other.

The controversy involving history and literature about the Holocaust did not begin with Friedländer's reservations to White's theory, nor the ethical issues posed by fiction as a genre to pass on Holocaust memory began with Wilkomirski's and Defonseca's forged memoirs (see ch. 1). Right after the war, there were two cases involving literary works proving that literature had always been a means to convey Holocaust memory and that it has been using its devices and characteristics to convey what readers 'needed', without attempting to change the historicity – the fact that it happened – of the Holocaust.

The two debates were reported in the Yiddish press (see Roskies 178-81). The first of them developed between the Buenos Aires journal *Di yidishe tsaytung* and the *Di goldene keyt* based in Tel Aviv, when, in 1946, the former published a story written by Zvi Kolitz where the author claimed to present a testament found in the Warsaw ghetto and written by Yosl Rakover.²⁶³ The controversy began when, in 1954, the latter received "an anonymous typescript of the original Yiddish story" (*ibidem* 180) and published it "with stylistic improvements" (*ibidem*). After the latter publication, the story was acclaimed "as 'a part of our monumental Holocaust literature [*khurbn-literatur*], which [would] remain for all the generations'" (*ibidem*), but later on "Holocaust historian and former ghetto fighter Michel Borwicz [...] decided to expose the story's manifold historical inaccuracies and obvious literary gildings" (*ibidem*). Borwicz's findings were not welcomed at all by the public, who "protested because [...] the need to believe was simply too great" (*ibidem*); that story "fully

²⁶³ Roskies notes that an English version was published the following year, but it contained changes and all references to theology were not present (see Roskies 180).

met its expectations” (*ibidem*) and provided them with what they needed and were looking for.²⁶⁴

The second debate, the Leivick-Mark controversy, happened in the same years, since in 1952

the revered Yiddish poet H. Leivick published a lengthy article in the New York daily *Der tog* in which he compared ‘Two Documents’ that had recently appeared in scholarly publications: one, an anonymous chronicle of the Great Deportation from Warsaw, in the Warsaw-based *Bleter far geshikhte*, and the other, the Vilna ghetto diary of Zelig Kalmanovitsh, translated from the Hebrew, in the *Yivo-bleter*. Leivick was so scandalized by the first document (in which the anonymous author poured out his wrath on the Judenrat and the Jewish ghetto police, thus desecrating the memory of the martyrs) that he pronounced it a forgery, a product of the Jew-hating, Polish Communist regime. Kalmanovitsh’s diary, in contrast, he held up as a model of balance and empathy that correctly viewed all the victims in the same sacred light. (*ibidem* 179)

Like the previous case, it was an historian, Ber Mark, who claimed otherwise than Leivick’s opinion. In “a monograph-length rebuttal” (*ibidem*) he stated that popular Yiddish novelist Yehoshue Perle was the author of the chronicle and that his “abhorrence of the Judenrat, the Jewish police, and the Jewish bourgeoisie [...] was shared by Ringelblum, most members of the archive, and all members of the Jewish Fighting Organization” (*ibidem*). Overturning the poet’s claims, Mark considered Kalmanovitsh’s writing as an example of the “the despicable ideology of ‘culturism,’ which validated the ghetto, further isolated the Jews, and lulled the masses into passivity” (*ibidem*). In contrast with Kalmanovitsh’s narration was “Perle’s moral reckoning” (*ibidem*), which Mark regarded highly relevant in the context of the increasing presence of neo-Nazism in the West. However, even though Mark ‘won’ the debate, “the series of Yiddish wartime writings that he managed to publish from 1948 to 1955 [and] ought to have formed the primary canon of Holocaust literature [...] was morally unassimilable for their intended audience in the West” (*ibidem* 179-80).

Roskies interprets the two controversies as an example of a division in scholarship about the way to foster remembrance: “the battle lines were drawn: on one side were those who believed that the way to keep memory alive was by reopening old wounds; on the other, those for whom the memory of the martyrs was sacred” (*ibidem* 179). What is interesting to note in this context, however, is that history and literature must collaborate to pass on Holocaust memory. Even though the above were controversies between historians and literary

²⁶⁴ As Roskies continues, “a French translation appeared in 1955, the same year as Borwicz’s exposé, and was heralded by the philosopher Emmanuel Levinas (1906–1995; HL 759–762); it was then published in German, Hebrew, and once again in English. ‘Yosl Rakover Speaks to God’ remains a revered—and controversial—text to this very day” (180-81).

authors, they can be considered as contributions by both history and literature, the first providing accurateness of historical details, the latter by providing a means manageable by the audience that stretches ‘a bridge’ between historiography and non-historians. Nowadays, the issue is not to offer the audience what it expects, it is to provide people with another mediator of memory through which they can acquire a postmemory of the Holocaust. For literature to be another means, though, readers need that the literary work promote a personal link with the historical fact, since they are more and more removed from it – temporally and geographically.

The controversies between literary authors and historians, Holocaust memory and Holocaust literature show that until the Eichmann trial, “[c]ommunal memory, then, was *témoignage*—real or constructed—mediated by a set of core values, whether political or theological. The unassimilable facts of the Holocaust were reinterpreted in the light of credos, archetypes, and myths; or, [...] mediated by various fictional means” (*ibidem* 181). From the beginning, then, fictional and literary means and devices were used by authors to tell the Holocaust.

Surely enough, the readers who knew the languages to read those journals were more knowledgeable about what happened, so one may claim that the use of “fictional means” (*ibidem*) right after the war was not as relevant and potentially misleading as it is nowadays with young generations, especially in the case of non-related ones. Nonetheless, the main point of both the controversies revolves around the mode of passing on memory, that is, about the preference of historical details or “literary gildings” (*ibidem* 180), or the preference between presenting a more ‘sacred’ or less ‘sacred’ memory.²⁶⁵ Roskies’ claim that the Holocaust was “mediated by various fictional means” (*ibidem* 181) should be understood as the connection point between the literary production during the decades before the trial and the ‘mass-mediated’ representations that were available in the 1990s.

The attempt to present the Holocaust by referring to current ideas at the time when the controversies happened shows that, from the very beginning, there was the belief that Holocaust memory was in danger of being misunderstood or presented in misleading ways, not respectful towards the witnesses. After the war, as it was claimed in chapter 1, the main readership of literary works about the Holocaust knew Yiddish and Hebrew and, most importantly, was directly linked to the historical fact because they had lived through it and thus knew what it was like. Nowadays, the political-ideological connotation of certain uses of

²⁶⁵ For more information about the ‘Holocaust etiquette’, see chapter 2.3.

Holocaust memory²⁶⁶ is considered an abuse and has different aims from those ascribable to the works presented in the years after the war. Moreover, today one cannot take for granted that the readership of works about the Holocaust has an accurate historical knowledge, so much so that literary means should be used as tools to promote memory rather than to convey political ideas. The contemporary situation is both different and similar to the years when the controversies happened,²⁶⁷ but the main point is still to promote Holocaust memory among the society. To do so, it is fundamental that historiography and literature, including historical fiction, collaborate, and that historical fiction also refers to the present of contemporary readers to better link them to the historical past, as already claimed in chapter 2.

The use of literary and fictional devices, that, as said, dates back to the first after-war period, becomes therefore strategic to foster and encourage remembrance and understanding. As Roskies claims, right after the war, “Yiddish and Hebrew readers strongly preferred reading a documentary novel about the Holocaust rather than actual documents rescued from the Holocaust” (*ibidem* 178-79). For this reason, writers like Rochman, Strigler, John Hersey and Eliezer Wiesel “chose fictional modes of enhanced authenticity, such as confessions, autobiographies, memoirs, and diaries, lest, as Strigler worried out loud, these novels be read as ‘mere’ fiction” (*ibidem* 179). Some authors used “literary techniques to make their story more readable” because the readers were searching for this kind of works (*ibidem*). Similarly, writing in 2008 about collective memory, Rigney states that

it is only through the mediation of cultural practices that figures of memory can acquire shape, meaning, and a high public profile within particular communities. The repertoire of such cultural practices changes over time together with technological and aesthetic innovations: The historical novel was at the forefront of new mnemonic practices in the first decades of the nineteenth century, for example, but this role is arguably now being played by graphic novels like Art Spiegelman’s *Maus* (1973, 1986) or Joe Sacco’s *Safe Area Goražde* (2000) and by virtual memorials using the new digital media. (Rigney 345)

By claiming that collective memory “is constantly ‘in the works’” (*ibidem*), Rigney supports the idea that memory sites are at the centre of a dynamic process as they are constantly subject to the interaction sought by social groups “who seek to replace, supplement, or revise dominant representations of the past as a way of asserting their own identity” (*ibidem* 346) and thus “become invested with new meanings and gain a new lease of life [or] they may also be upstaged by alternative sites and become effectively obsolete or inert” (*ibidem*), depending

²⁶⁶ On the socio-political use of Holocaust memory and commemoration, see for example Alexander’s volume *Trauma: A Social Theory* (2012). The same topic has been discussed in chapter 1.

²⁶⁷ It is a different context because Holocaust memory is now spread across many countries, but it is also similar because there are multiple examples of misuses and abuses of Holocaust memory.

on whether “people consider it worthwhile to argue about their meaning” (*ibidem*). Considering that historical fiction for children has seen a new success in the recent decades (see Pavonetti 78-82; see also Rahn 1-26),²⁶⁸ the above quote should include it among contemporary mediators of memory and Rigney’s considerations about fiction, and historical fiction in particular, are especially relevant.

Referring to White’s reflections about the relevance of narrativity in representing historical facts, Rigney states that more recent scholarly work has considered narrativization “not just as an interpretative tool, but also as a specifically *mnemonic* one” (Rigney 347; emphasis in original). In other words, “[s]tories ‘stick.’ They help make particular events *memorable* by figuring the past in a structured way that engages the sympathies of the reader or viewer” (*ibidem*; emphasis in original).

By saying ‘stories’, Rigney intends fiction, not historiography. Rigney’s defense of fiction, including historical fiction, seems reminiscent of what Alison Landsberg had said in 2004 about mass cultural technologies and products and their potential as mediators of the past (see Landsberg, *Prosthetic* 1-24). The fact that fiction less strictly follows historiographical details is not considered as a flaw, but an inherent characteristic with a high potential since “[s]tudies have shown that fiction [...] is a great help when it comes to narrativizing events since narrators who are free to design their own stories can more easily evoke vivid characters and give closure to events” (Rigney 347).²⁶⁹ Their ability to catch the reader’s attention makes them “difficult to displace because it is not easy to come up with a non-fictionalized account that has the same narrativizing and aesthetic power” (*ibidem* 348).

Rigney does not aim to downgrade the importance of historiography; rather, she wishes to highlight the positive characteristics of fiction instead of its limits and flaws for not following history in the same way. Historiography cannot count on the same ‘catching skills’ that fiction has on readers, thus this is one of its limits. Undoubtedly, historiography is the best means to accurately report what happened in the past, but to reach a wide audience and promote memory within it, it does not seem the best tool. In Rigney’s words,

[t]hose who “stick to the facts” may paradoxically end up with a more historical and authentic story, but also a less memorable one, than the producers of fiction. The latter not only enjoy poetic license when narrativizing their materials, but also often have creative, specifically literary skills that help give an added aesthetic value to their work. This aesthetic dimension

²⁶⁸ About the renewed success of children’s historical fiction, see for example Pavonetti (78-82) and Rahn (1-26).

²⁶⁹ For a discussion of closure and its absence in historiography, see White’s article “The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality” (1980).

means that they can attract and hold the attention of groups without a prior interest in the topic, but with a readiness to enjoy a good story and suspend their disbelief. (347)

When Holocaust memory is considered, the above words may easily sound disrespectful. The reference to the ‘added aesthetic value’ reminds of Adorno’s words as well as Friedländer’s defense of the idea that historical facts like the Holocaust ‘tell themselves’ and that there is no need for the historian to ‘interpret’ them (see ch. 1). Following this reasoning, literary authors should not attempt to do what even historians must not do. As it has already been said (see ch. 2), literary works that are not witnesses’ accounts should not be considered only in terms of potential negative appropriation and assault on the historicity of the Holocaust, or as a means to find a ‘meaning’, an aesthetic element, or draw a ‘lesson’. These literary works should be seen both as ‘products’ of postmemorial non-related subjects and ‘agents’ taking part in the ‘dynamic’ of memory (see A. Assmann, “Canon” 97-107; see also Rigney 345-56). As products, they prove that non-related subjects too interact with the past and Holocaust memory, as they have received and developed it; as agents, literary works may contribute to the spread of Holocaust postmemory, for example in the form of attitudinal postmemory.

Rigney defines literary works ‘textual monuments’ because “they provide fixed points of reference [as they] can be reprinted time and again in new editions even as the environment around them changes” (Rigney 349). Even though they have some stability – “persistence” (*ibidem*) – for this reason, literary works are also characterized by “malleability” (*ibidem*), since “as they may enjoy this monumentality, [they] continuously morph into the many other cultural products that recall, adapt, and revise them in both overt and indirect ways” (*ibidem*), through other media. Even though Rigney here refers to literary works that are “acts of recollection” (*ibidem*), and to “all other works that have gained a monumental status as part of the literary canon” (*ibidem*), her reasonings about the role of literature in relation to collective memory may be applied in a broader sense. This is necessary because of the call for an ‘open’ canon (see Horowitz in ch. 2), and because ‘canonicity’ is not extremely relevant to child readers. They might be exposed to works already considered or in the process of becoming ‘canonical’ depending on their teachers’ or other adults’ reading advice, or they may decide on their own what to read. In the latter case, it is unlikely that they know the canon and they read what they are drawn to read, irrespective of the literary status or what Rigney calls the “recognized cultural value” (Rigney 350). Since the focus here is not on collective memory as Rigney’s study, her reflections are used on a smaller and wider scale at the same time: it is smaller because they are applicable to Holocaust memory developed by the individual, but it

also wider because they are applied in relation to works that are not traditionally considered part of the Holocaust literature canon.

Rigney believes that fictional narratives have “various roles [...] in the performance of cultural memory” (*ibidem*). These “five interrelated roles” (*ibidem*) are: relay stations, stabilizers, catalysts, objects of recollection, and calibrators. When fictional works “build on or recycle earlier forms of remembrance” (*ibidem*), they function as relay stations in “the circulation of memories” (*ibidem*).²⁷⁰ Thus, literary works contribute to relay “figures” (*ibidem*) across media, discursive genres, and practices, which eventually “can end up becoming collective points of reference for individuals inhabiting different locations” (*ibidem*).

Since they have a specific “sticking power as narratives and as aesthetic artifacts” (*ibidem*) because they “can succeed in figuring particular periods in a memorable way and so provide a cultural frame for later recollections” (*ibidem*), fictional narratives may function “as a stabilizing factor” (*ibidem*).²⁷¹ Given their social relevance, they may become objects of recollection, meaning that they can be referred to, updated, changed, and remediated through other means. Stories can be “appropriated in new contexts” (*ibidem* 351) and be renovated, and as a consequence the historical fact they represent, and its memory, are conveyed through new forms and means according to the sensibility of the society.²⁷² Fictional works can function as catalysts because they are able to “dra[w] attention to ‘new’ topics or ones hitherto neglected in cultural remembrance” (*ibidem*) thanks to the writers’ “imaginative powers” (*ibidem*) and as a consequence, they “may be actually instrumental in establishing a topic as a socially relevant topic and in setting off multiple acts of recollection relating to it” (*ibidem*; emphasis in original). Another possibility is that works are useful as calibrators when they are perceived as “benchmark for reflecting critically on dominant memorial practices” (*ibidem*). This happens in postcolonial literature, for example, where literary works revise earlier canonical texts, such as in J. M. Coetzee’s *Foe* (1986), which rewrites Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1719-20).

²⁷⁰ For an analysis of the many intertextual references present in well-known examples of Holocaust fiction, see Vice’s monograph *Holocaust Fiction* (2000).

²⁷¹ This may happen also if the literary work is considered as a negative example: “Thus Walter Scott’s novel *Old Mortality* (1816) became a privileged point of reference, if only as a punch bag, in discussions of the seventeenth-century Scottish civil war” (Rigney 350). The same can be applied to the case of *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* (2006).

²⁷² This may be understood in a negative sense, but Rigney’s point is the relevance of up-to-date means and stories to convey and spread memory; in this context, her claim should not be understood as a call for a revision of historical truth.

The role as calibrators does not apply well to the case of children's historical fiction, since it does not aim to tell a story different from the one proposed by earlier canonical works, for example witnesses' accounts. On the contrary, it is functional in pointing at them and emphasizing their presence. Nonetheless, Rigney's other possible roles are indeed applicable. Children's historical fiction is an important relay station and should be considered part of the "fictional narratives [that] can be seen as one of the many channels through which figures of memory are circulated and given a high profile" (*ibidem* 350) thanks to "their wide circulation and their broad appeal" (*ibidem*). Rigney's concept of relay station presupposes the interaction and mutual aid of a plurality of mediators of memory, which are fundamental to promote Holocaust memory within young generations. Referring to children's literature, Rigney's reasonings can be understood as meaning that fictional works help to spread hints that encourage readers to know more about the Holocaust and to commemorate it.

The persistent and multimodal presence of a story also reminds of the steps that, according to Levy and Sznajder, brought about cosmopolitan memory. In this sense, the 'wide circulation' of a story does not necessarily mean that readers develop a real personal-emotional relationship with the subject. However, Rigney also refers to the "broad appeal" (*ibidem*) they have in connection to their wide circulation, which is the key to differentiate the function as relay station, as intended by the scholar, from the construction of a cosmopolitan memory. The fact that readers like literary narratives makes the latter part of a web of remediations that represent a historical fact in which the audience is interested, and at the same time they are means through which readers can develop an emotional connection (something which goes deeper than the appreciation of the authors' narrative skills). These are the bases that allow the literary work to establish a relationship with the reader, and then, potentially, a relationship between the reader and the Holocaust. By doing so, children's historical fiction works as stabilizer because it helps to spread Holocaust memory and at the same time it helps maintaining it a stable part of young generations' individual and generational-collective memory on a personal and emotional level, in Western countries. Children's historical fiction is also an object of recollection: there are already films based on children's novels,²⁷³ and some authors write more than one work about the Holocaust, with intertextual and metaphorical links (for example, Boyne and Yolen). However, the concept of recollection can be expanded, because it can be understood as comprising books forming a

²⁷³ Regarding the novels herein considered, Jane Yolen's *The Devil's Arithmetic* (1988) became a film directed by Donna Deitch in 1999 and Michael Morpurgo's *Waiting for Anya* (1990) has been recently adapted (2020) into a film directed by Ben Cookson.

series: in this case, there are many works about the Holocaust that present different characteristics or reflections, and with intertextual references between each other (like in Gleitzman's series).

Considering the above reasonings, children's historical fiction shows the characteristics individuated by Rigney with respect to fictional narratives; therefore, it should be considered an example of the way literature can mediate, influence, and convey historical memory. As Rigney concludes,

literary texts and other works of art [...] are capable of exercising a particular aesthetic and narrative "staying power" that ensures that they are not always simply superseded by later acts of remembrance. Whether as objects to be remembered or as stories to be revised, literary texts exemplify the fact that memorial dynamics do not just work in a linear or accumulative way. Instead, they progress through all sorts of loopings back to cultural products that are not simply media of memory (relay stations and catalysts) but also objects of recall and revision. (352)

Memory and literary dynamism as well as remediation (see ch. 3) of mediators of memory set the basis for a constant dialogue between readers-viewers and the media. The key to preserve Holocaust memory alive is the ability to stay relevant because it is felt so by someone and not because of the number of times it is referred to, as in the case of cosmopolitan memory.

Chapter 5

Overview of Children's Historical Fiction History

When the origins and progress of children's historical fiction in English are considered, scholars usually refer to works written in the UK and in the USA, while other Anglophone countries such as Ireland and Australia are scarcely, if not at all, comprised in the overview. By common consent among literary academics, historical fiction in the UK was born in the XIX century thanks to Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe* (1819) and *The Talisman* (1825). Even though the genre may find earlier examples in the *Iliad* and the *Odissey* (800 B.C.) by Homer, as Italian writer Alessandro Manzoni claimed (see "Historical" 121), it was Scott who influenced the following generations of writers of historical fiction in English, including children's authors.

Scott is usually taken as the finest example to whom English writers "are indebted [...] for the tradition of good form and clear style in English historical fiction" (Saintsbury qtd. in L. Smith 125), and the inherent characteristics of his major historical works are taken as the paradigm to set the rules for the genre.²⁷⁴ According to Rahn, the Scottish author made historical fiction a "novel which reconstructs a personage, a series of events, a movement, or the spirit of a past age and pays the debt of serious scholarship to the facts of the age being recreated" (Thrall and Hibbard qtd. in *ibidem* 2). Scott was not only the founder of historical fiction, as he also wrote "the first major work of historical nonfiction for the young" (*ibidem* 4), *Tales of a Grandfather* (1828-30), which tells the history of Scotland. In the USA, his equivalent for child readers is to be found in Nathaniel Hawthorne, who published *Grandfather's Chair* three volumes in 1841, a "landmark" (*ibidem*) of the period and which the author wrote because he wanted "to give American children some sense of their own heritage" (*ibidem*). To do so, he "came up with a new way to combine fact and fiction, using the device of a 200-year-old chair to link the scenes and characters of New England's past" (*ibidem*). Given their relevance and the innovative character of their works, Scott and Hawthorne can be considered "the fathers of creative historical nonfiction for children" (*ibidem*).

Historical novels are deemed as a "relatively new literary creation" ("Historical" 121) within literature for an older readership; however, despite "Scott's enormous popularity with

²⁷⁴ Smith claims the same for Robert Louis Stevenson's *Kidnapped*, which is both an adventure and a historical story and, for this reason, it is a model novel to infer the "ingredients which make a good historical story" (L. Smith 124).

the young” (Rahn 3), this did not mean that children’s historical fiction began parallel to historical nonfiction, since the first was not thought of as a genre for children at the beginning, as it is often common in children’s literature.²⁷⁵ Indeed, children’s historical fiction is even more recent: according to Rahn, only thirty years after Scott “the new genre was adapted specifically for them” (*ibidem*), which implies that historical fiction for children and historical fiction for older readers have some differences.

Despite “Harriet Martineau [...] seems to have led the way with a series of novels called *The Playfellow* (1841)” (*ibidem* 3), in Rahn’s view the first author who wrote historical fiction specifically for children was British writer Charlotte Yonge, “who first established it as a distinct genre with high literary and scholarly standards” (*ibidem* 4). She wrote both historical fiction and nonfiction for children and teens, such as novels set in the Middle Ages and “histories of England, Germany, France, Greece, Rome, and America” (*ibidem*).²⁷⁶ She took Scott as his first model, as it is evident “in the dramatic events, chivalric idealism and pictorial scenic effects of *The Dove in the Eagle’s Nest* (1866)” (*ibidem*). Yonge’s works are not simply “scaled-down” (*ibidem*) historical novels: she revolutionized the genre because she “was the first to reorient history from a child’s perspective, so that a little boy living in a world of adults could be the hero of *The Little Duke* (1854), or a teenage girl take over a robber baron’s castle in *The Dove in the Eagle’s Nest*” (*ibidem* 5). However, the novelty she contributed to the genre was not only limited to child heroes and heroines, as she first introduced completely fictional child protagonists and she “cut loose the historical novel from the adventure story, and from the male audience traditionally associated with it” (*ibidem*). Thanks to her, “[l]ater authors could take for granted the centrality of imaginary girls and boys in stories of the past” (*ibidem*), and it was proved that the genre was inherently flexible and that it could appeal to different audiences.

The first examples of children’s historical fiction were influenced by what was common in Scott’s time: Romantic Medievalism and the Victorian fascination with the Middle Ages, which was the setting of many historical novels for older readers. Medievalism was so present in historical novels as it was “aimed to correct the present by re-introducing values of the past: not only chivalry, but the color and beauty of the Middle Ages, its

²⁷⁵ Some scholars talk about children’s literature as a “discarica tematico-morfologica” (“thematic-morphological landfill”; my translation; Calabrese 14) of literary genres: when a genre has used all its potential in literature for older readers, it is usually adopted by or gains new relevance within children’s literature. Since only thirty years passed from the genre for older readers, this does not seem to apply to historical fiction, whose use in children’s literature seems more an evolution of the genre.

²⁷⁶ Much later, in 1905, Dickens wrote *A Child’s History of England*.

individualized craftsmanship [...], and its religious fervor” (*ibidem* 7); some considered it useful also “to educate and guide the future” (*ibidem* 8).

Regarding child readers, the increasing popularity of the adventure story in the same period was relevant because this genre often overlapped with historical fiction, like in Howard Pyle’s *Men of Iron* (1841) and *The Story of Jack Ballister’s Fortunes* (1845), or in Robert Louis Stevenson’s *The Black Arrow* (1883) and *Kidnapped* (1886) (see *ibidem* 7). In parallel, some authors continued to publish historical novels that were not aimed specifically to young or older readers, but both, even though they were usually considered part of the literature for an adult audience: for example, Arthur Conan Doyle’s epigraph in *The Lost World* (1912) presupposes a mix audience: “I have wrought my simple plan/If I give one hour of joy/To the boy who’s half a man,/Or the man who's half a boy” (*ibidem*).²⁷⁷

The period between the end of the XIX and the beginning of the XX century offered children’s historical fiction that referred to the British Empire, as in the case of George Alfred Henty’s works. Contemporary to Henty, also Rudyard Kipling wrote historical fiction for children, agreeing with the widespread skeptical attitude of novelists of the time towards the Middle Ages (see *ibidem* 5). Believing that “knowledge of the past might guide the future” (*ibidem* 9), he looked at the past from a range of historical periods, especially Ancient Rome, that could be useful to make England and its Empire aware of their own errors so as to improve in the future. Testing new crossbreedings, in *Puck of Pook’s Hill* (1906) and the sequel *Rewards and Fairies* (1910) Kipling overlapped the historical novel with the time travel fantasy, as Edith Nesbit did in *The Story of the Amulet* (1906). This kind of overlapping enabled child protagonists to meet people from the past and to travel themselves to previous eras: time travel “offer[ed] a multiplicity of vantage points from which to comprehend the long-evolved complexity of England as the twentieth century began—and from which to envision a future for their country and the world” (*ibidem* 10).

However, the idea that society could learn from its past errors to build a better present and future was soon changed by World War I. As it is known, comics and child magazines like *Magnet* were used as war propaganda to raise young generations used to war while offering images and readings of it as a play: Baden-Powell’s scouts activities in the UK were meant to be interesting and didactic, but especially they were aimed to form young soldiers, and school or sport matches were considered as precursors of battles (see Carlotti 98-104). Young people who grew up with late-XIX century historical novels proposing “the ideals of

²⁷⁷ In Rahn’s opinion, the same can be said of Doyle’s *The White Company* (1890) and *Rodney Stone* (1896; see Rahn 7).

chivalry went to war in a spirit of adventure and found themselves trapped in a world of meaningless mass suffering and death” (*ibidem* 10).

The soldiers who managed to return “were radically disillusioned” (*ibidem*) and vehemently rejected the past, the Victorian era, and its fascination with the Middle Ages. Since the historical novel became successful in the Victorian society thanks to its Medieval settings, the most obvious consequence was that it was perceived as “hopelessly passé” (*ibidem*). In Britain, “children’s literature in general had fallen into a moribund condition” (*ibidem*) after the war: historical novels with late-XIX century characteristics were still published, but most of the historical works available proved that the genre “had petrified” (*ibidem*). Instead of presenting new offers and reinventions of historical fiction, Henty’s works “remained the popular paradigm, his books printed and reprinted for decades after the War, as though the world had not changed and Britannia still ruled the waves” (*ibidem*). Also, boys’ formula fiction “continued to reflect pre-War assumptions of national and racial superiority and the glory of combat” (*ibidem*).

The decline of the genre within British children’s literature due to the reality of World War I was evident and maybe the USA were able to revitalize it precisely because they were geographically farther from the main war setting in Europe. In the 1920s and 1930s, American writers, mainly women, were to be at the centre of children’s historical fiction writing: Caroline Dale Snedeker (*Downright Dencey*, 1927), Rachel Field (*Hitty*, 1929; *Calico Bush*, 1931), Laura Ingalls Wilder (the *Little House* series starting with *Little House in the Big Woods*, 1932), Elizabeth Coatsworth (*Away Goes Sally*, 1934). These authors revolutionized the genre by substituting the centrality of the Middle Ages with America and its past and by preferring “ordinary” (*ibidem* 11) protagonists and the “everyday lives of girls and young women unconnected to great events and ‘famous generals’” (*ibidem*). This inward-turn towards the American past might have been brought about by a number of socio-political causes, such as “American isolationism after World War I” (*ibidem*) and the fear of “cultural dilution” (*ibidem*) due to “the huge influx of immigrants early in the century” (*ibidem*).

During the 1940s, the historical novel “officially c[ame] of age” (*ibidem* 13) in the USA thanks to its growing prestige, which was highlighted by the awarding of five Newbery Medals between 1942 and 1950: *The Matchlock Gun* (1941), *Adam of the Road* (1942), *Johnny Tremain* (1943), *King of the Wind* (1948), and *The Door in the Wall* (1949).²⁷⁸ On the contrary, in the UK the children’s historical novel “renaissance had still barely begun”

²⁷⁸ For all the literary works, the Newbery Award was given the year after their publication.

(*ibidem*). The only author who distinguished himself from the literary production still modelled on pre-World War I historical fiction was Geoffrey Trease, who proposed the “‘committed’ historical story” (*ibidem*). An example of this is his *Bows Against the Barons* (1934), a Robin Hood story where the author went against the “outworn values” (*ibidem*) still central within historical fiction and updated the genre by using modern English, influenced by Naomi Mitchison’s *The Conquered* (1923), in which Gauls and Romans spoke the readers’ English. Trease’s works and innovations “helped force the British historical novel into the twentieth century at last” (*ibidem*). Like American authors, he preferred protagonists from the middle or lower class who were involved in the humanities and who fight side by side with talented, “spirited, intelligent, and daring” (*ibidem*) female characters, with their own ambitions: with Trease, the usual “upper-class fighting man” (*ibidem*) was no longer the common hero in children’s historical novels.

Contrary to what happened after the Great War, during the decades after World War II in the UK the historical novel reached its peak in popularity and in the USA it continued the positive trend of the previous years. According to Collins, the 1950s were the “golden age of historical fiction” (22). Surely, the 1950s and 1960s were particularly ripe periods for children’s historical fiction: together with Geoffrey Trease, the major authors of the period were Rosemary Sutcliff, Cynthia Harnett, Henry Treece, Ronald Welch, J. G. Fyson, Hester Burton, Stephanie Plowman, K. M. Peyton and, in Australia, Nan Chauncy. These authors innovated the genre by letting it ‘breathe’, so that it “revealed more potential for depth and variety than at any time in its previous history” (Rahn 14): for example, authors “moved away from the romantic, heroic, general and idealised fiction of the nineteenth and early twentieth century towards the more realistic, domestic, miniature and ordinary” (Collins 22), the audience was enlarged by writing novels for a wider age-range, the style was varied, and there was an intense activity of ‘crossbreeding’ “with nearly every other genre in children’s literature” (Rahn 14), from the usual adventure story, to the domestic novel, the teenage romance, the animal story, fantasy, the tall tale, science fiction, and the detective story.

Sutcliff, one of the most prolific authors of historical fiction, published her first novel in 1950, *The Chronicles of Robin Hood* (see Collins 22-23). She was to become famous for her works about Roman Britain, such as *The Eagle of the Ninth* (1954) and *The Lantern Bearers* (1959, Carnegie Medal winner), although her works span from the Bronze Age to the XVIII century (see *ibidem* 23). Harnett, another UK author, was active since the end of the 1940s and her historical novels “feature the lives of ordinary children growing up during momentous events in the 14th to the 18th centuries” (“Harnett”, accessed 19.10.2021), but her

most successful works for which she is remembered were mostly published in the 1950s: *The Great House* (1949), *The Wool-Pack* (1951, Carnegie Medal winner), *Ring out Bow Bells!* (1953), *Stars of Fortune* (1956), *The Load of Unicorn* (1959), *The Writing on the Hearth* (1971). Another UK author of the time was Henry Treece, who wrote thirty-one historical novels for children in which details prove his “extensive historical knowledge” (Collins 23). His works presented a wide range of historical periods, but he mostly wrote about the Viking and the Roman times, for example in *The Legions of the Eagle* (1954) and the Vikings Saga (1955-60; see *ibidem*). In this period, “the first highly respected book” about World War II (*ibidem*) was Ian Serrailier’s *The Silver Sword* (1956), which “tells the story of three Polish siblings who, with the waif Jan, travel across Europe trying to find their parents who have been taken away by the Nazis” (*ibidem*). Despite scenes among city ruins, meetings with soldiers, and emergency camps, the novel does not ‘come near’ to the horror of the Holocaust in concentration camps (see Sherman 156-61; see also ch. 2.2).

During the 1950s and 1960s there were historical picture books and nonfiction as well: the Landmark Books series by Random House was the most successful of the kind and its books focused “in lively detail on a specific incident or sideline of history, instead of taking a broad overview” (Rahn 14). The idea of presenting one single happening instead of covering a longer period of time was appreciated both by young readers and teachers, because the works “were not only more fun to read but better history” (*ibidem*). The general successful innovating trend in the genre was shown by the high number of Newbery and Carnegie Medals awarded.²⁷⁹

As it was discussed in chapter 1, 1961 was a key year for Holocaust knowledge, representation, and memory. In literature, 1961 was the year in which what was to become a well-known title in children’s literature about the Holocaust was published: *Friedrich*, by Hans Peter Richter. This “was the first West German children’s novel to tell the story of the Jews during the Third Reich” (Collins 23) through the friendship between a German and a Jewish boy, the first of which, nameless, is the narrator. As Collins notes, “[t]he story is linked with the edicts that were passed against the Jews during this time as they affect both of these children. The reader is given a most vivid picture of the mistreatment that was suffered by the Jews and of ‘the fear of getting involved and the indecisiveness and inactivity of the German population’” (*ibidem*). However, Richter’s novel was translated into English and

²⁷⁹ For example, Rahn (13-14) reports *Rifles for Watie* (1957), *The Witch of Blackbird Pond* (1958), *Island of the Blue Dolphins* (1960), *The Bronze Bow* (1961), and *I, Juan de Pareja* (1966) for the Newbery Medal, whereas the Carnegie Medal was awarded to *The Wool-Pack* (1951), *Knight Crusader* (1954), *The Lantern Bearers* (1959), and *Time of Trial* (1963).

published by Penguin only in 1987. It could be said that the English and, more widely speaking, the Anglophone literary area and audience were not prepared yet to read and look for children's novels about the Holocaust, since also *Upon the Head of the Goat: A Childhood in Hungary 1939-1944* by Aranka Siegal had a similar reception. Published in 1968, it was a Newbery Honor Book only in 1982, when it was awarded also the Boston Globe - Horn Book Award for Nonfiction.

According to Rahn, authors and young readers' fascination with the past after World War II was a phenomenon common to both historical fiction and fantasy. In these genres, stories feature "a modern child [who] find[s] a private connection with the past" (Rahn 15). However, it must be noted that these works aimed to make the past "attractive and exciting" (*ibidem* 16), not to "convey information about [it]" (*ibidem*). Authors wanted "to suggest what treasures it might hold, and sometimes to underline the need and responsibility to preserve what still remained" (*ibidem*). To the "sense of helplessness, of inability to control one's destiny" (*ibidem*) that World War II and the Cold War spread among the society, fantasy and historical fiction provided their readers with a response that was contrary to the one offered by "here and now stories of the 1950s" (*ibidem*). These stories may be now thought of "as excessively safe, sheep-like, and bland" (*ibidem*) because they offered repetitive plots complying with a sense of "rigid conformity" (*ibidem*) as an answer to the perceived need of "'togetherness' and 'security'" (*ibidem*). Even though fantasy stories reflected the "fear of overwhelming destruction" (*ibidem* 16) in connection to the threat of a nuclear war, like historical fiction they provided "escape routes to a myriad other worlds" (*ibidem* 17). However, they were not simply 'escapist' stories: authors provided child readers with "the security of roots in the past" (*ibidem*); they represented protagonists who were able to be positive, to appreciate natural beauty, and who were hopeful despite the suffering and the dangerous situations they had to handle. The characters were the means through which the authors invited child readers "to use their imaginations" (*ibidem*) and, on a more general level, they "reaffirmed the power and freedom of the individual mind" (*ibidem*).

During its widest popularity, until the mid-1960s, historical fiction was often "in advance of large-scale movements" (*ibidem*), for example regarding women's liberation, physical handicaps, and the representation of ethnic minorities. In her widely read novels about Roman Britain, for example, Sutcliff presents characters that are

complex and sometimes have to contend with disability (as did Sutcliff herself). Marcus, the central character in *The Eagle of the Ninth*, is wounded in combat and as a result is invalidated

out of the army [...] and his servant, Esca, is emotionally damaged from having to be a slave. Likewise Drem, the central character in *Warrior Scarlet* (1958), suffers from a withered spear arm. This disability might hinder a weaker character but Sutcliff shows how Drem continually attempts, and succeeds, in overcoming his disability in a society where men have to show their manhood through physical strength. (Collins 23)

Therefore, her stories do not only “illustrate the complexities and ambiguities of invasion and occupation alongside themes of self-making, reconciliation and compromise” (*ibidem*), from a didactic point of view, but also make children’s literature groundbreaking in representing these themes.

By the end of the 1960s, the changed socio-cultural and political scene made the past and tradition seen as linked to authority, which was highly criticized. As a consequence, historical fiction saw a rapid decrease in appreciation in the 1970s that lasted at least until the beginning of the 1990s (see Rahn 17). Not by chance, the historical novels that were successful in the 1970s were those that told the past from another perspective or contrary to official and governmentally approved history: such are the cases of *The Slave Dancer* (1973) and *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* (1976), which both won the Newbery Award. Novels presented the past not as a model or inspirational source, but as “neither enjoyable for its own sake nor a source of alternative solutions—only a storehouse of folly that may enable us to perceive more clearly the follies of our own time” (*ibidem* 19). Similar in aim, another kind of historical fiction followed the “new realism” (*ibidem* 22) to represent the squalid reality of historical happenings or periods that were “traditionally thought of as romantic, charming, or inspiring” (*ibidem* 18-19), like the American Revolution.

“Disillusion and pessimism” (*ibidem* 19) were common in all children’s literature of the period, since the most popular works were the first-person narrator “problem novels” (*ibidem*). Among the general decline of the genre, however, historical fiction about World War II seemed to resist, since two of the most widely known titles were published in the first half of the decade. Nina Bawden’s *Carrie’s War* (1973) is an example of the many novels that UK authors would later devote to stories about the *Kindertransport* and the refugees evacuated from London to the country due to the Blitz, while Robert Westall’s *The Machine Gunners* (1975) can be compared to the more recent *Friend or Foe* (2007) by Michael Morpurgo in that they both “focus on German pilots being shot down and found by English children and the dilemma the children find themselves in as a result of this” (Collins 23).

However, the decline of interest in and popularity of historical fiction was not extended to historical nonfiction. On the contrary, the genre “was thriving—enjoying exponential growth in quality, creativity, popularity, and prestige” (Rahn 19). Much like

fantasy and historical novels provided more lively stories instead of the repetitive plots of the 1950s, Jean Fritz offered child readers a revolution in biographies, which were traditionally “inaccurate, over-reverent, and dull” (*ibidem* 19-20). The author wrote biographies of the Founding Fathers starting in 1973 by relying on accurate historical details as well as on their “quirks and eccentricities” (*ibidem* 20), which made them “human beings rather than animated monuments” (*ibidem*). Her approach “made them more individual and amusing” (*ibidem*) and “children could sympathize” (*ibidem*) with their eccentricities, while at the same time she added scholarly and informative endnotes. Like Charlotte Yonge, Jean Fritz revolutionized the audience, since the intended readership of her works was younger than usual.

Illustration was paramount in nonfiction books and picture books of the 1970s, probably due to the influence of television, and this may be a reason why they were more successful than historical fiction, since drawings had been common in novels during the 1940s and 1950s but were later abandoned due to their cost (see *ibidem* 20). The overall success of historical nonfiction in the 1970s is also shown by “its role in filling in the gaps and correcting the distortions of traditional history textbooks and curricula” (*ibidem* 21), since it provided child readers with “much more of the truth than they had ever had” (*ibidem*).

As it was discussed in chapter 1, the broadcasting of the Eichmann trial had a relevant influence in broadening Holocaust knowledge and memory, and it ‘allowed’ witnesses to talk about their experiences. In this sense one may understand the fact that it was ten years after the trial, in 1971, that UK children’s author Judith Kerr published *When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit*, the first novel of an autobiographical series inspired by her family and her own experiences and escape from the Nazis. It was then followed by *The Other Way Round* (1975) and *A Small Person Far Away* (1978), while in the same years other authors who lived through the Nazi genocide decided to tell their experiences through a children’s book, paralleling the surge of interest in witnesses’ accounts after the trial, such as Johanna Reiss with *The Upstairs Room* (1972).

The 1980s did not see a recovery of historical fiction, at least until the end of the decade, where major titles were proposed. To make historical fiction more popular and read, in 1982 Scott O’Dell, actor and author of *Island of the Blue Dolphins* (1960), established the Scott O’Dell Award for Historical Fiction, which would award \$5,000 every year to an author for a children’s or young adult historical fiction work. The writer’s aim was “to encourage other writers to focus on historical fiction [hoping] to increase the interest of young readers in the historical background that has helped to shape their country and their world” (“The Scott

O'Dell Award", accessed 26.11.2021).²⁸⁰ Even though the historical works published during the decade were not as varied as they had been after World War II, the genre "adapted" (Rahn 21) to the new contemporary setting and the "general retreat into conservatism" (*ibidem*), symbolized by the elections of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher.

During the decade, the Little House books were rediscovered, since they were considered the embodiment of 'family', the main value of the time. In addition to this, World War II was the most popular period in the UK and in the USA, as proved by the success of Michelle Magorian's *Goodnight Mister Tom* (1981). There are not easy motives to explain this interest in the war: it may be that historical fiction provided readers with "moral issues that both left and right wingers can support" (*ibidem* 22), or that young people during the war became adults who wanted to share their experience, or it may also be that "[f]or a culture that seems increasingly afflicted with child abuse in its broadest sense, World War II [...] offer[ed] the most appropriate models of destruction and survival— children in air raids, in concentration camps, children losing parents, homeless children, children learning intolerance and violence or being traumatized by them" (*ibidem*). According to Rahn, this would explain the publication of novels such as Myron Levoy's *Alan and Naomi* (1980) and Christopher Gallaz and Roberto Innocenti's picture book *Rose Blanche* (1985). Both works have a World War II setting and refer to the Holocaust, since the first is the story of the friendship between Naomi, a refugee child, who moves into Alan's New York apartment, and the latter "tells the story of a young girl who discovers a concentration camp on the outskirts of her town [and who] bravely smuggles food to the starving children" (Collins 24). The same year of publication, *Alan and Naomi* was among the finalists at the 1980 National Book Awards for Children's Books (see "Alan and Naomi", accessed 19.10.2021) and *Rose Blanche* has been recently retold by Ian McEwan (2004).

Apart from the translation of *Friedrich* in 1987, the end of the 1980s was a key period for children's historical fiction about the Holocaust, since two of the most widely known novels were published: Jane Yolen's *The Devil's Arithmetic* (1988) and Lois Lowry's *Number the Stars* (1989), which won the Newbery Medal in 1990. *The Devil's Arithmetic* was adapted into film in 1999, probably following the success of *Schindler's List*, and both works are still considered among the main titles about the Holocaust to propose to students. Yolen's and Lowry's works seem to be in line with the general trend of the decade in historical fiction for

²⁸⁰ It seems that the award was useful to enhance historical fiction popularity, since in "1981 and 1982, no books of sufficient merit were published, so no award was given in 1982 or 1983. Since 1984, the award has been presented each year" ("The Scott O'Dell Award", accessed 26.11.2021). The Award is still running, so it can be seen as an incentive to authors to write good children's historical fiction.

children but, considering the widely accepted rules in the 1980s for Holocaust representation (see ch. 2.3), Yolen's novel in particular is innovative.

Since the preferred themes of children's historical fiction in the 1980s are family and World War II, Yolen's and Lowry's novels easily fit into the expectations of the genre: both are set during the war (Yolen uses the 'time slip' narrative device) and family is a central subject in the stories, as it is in relation to other themes such as transmission of memory, courage, and distinguishing good and evil. However, they can also be seen as a good example of children's literature that presents themes 'in advance', as discussed earlier: given the general low interest and still wide decline in popularity of the genre, one would not expect that 'new' Holocaust representations would be proposed. Of course, the wider audience was already informed about the horrors of the Holocaust, and Holocaust literature works were available for older readers yet, Lowry's and Yolen's representation can be considered 'new' at least for two elements: *The Devil's Arithmetic* showed the inside of a concentration camp, even though imaginary, to child readers, and both Yolen and Lowry were not first-hand witnesses telling their own experiences. Both authors tell a story related to the Holocaust by making use of fiction and historical details.²⁸¹ Considering that the 'Holocaust etiquette' (see ch. 2.3) presupposed that the Holocaust should be written about in a 'sacred' way and that fiction could not add anything to witnesses' testimonies (see Howe 175-99), both novels went against the canon of Holocaust representation.

Overall, however, during the 1980s historical fiction was not as thriving as historical picture books and nonfiction. In the 1950s and early 1960s the overlapping of historical fiction with other genres showed the vitality and the generating power of historical fiction, now it must crossbreed to be present in bookshops. The most widely common overlapping was fantasy and historical fiction through the "time slip" novels (Rahn 22), where "a contemporary child slips back to some former time, assumes the identity of some person of the past, and remains there for the major part of the book, learning its way around the alien culture" (*ibidem* 22-23). Ruth Park, Jill Paton Walsh, and Jane Yolen all made use of this narrative device.

Writing in 1991, Rahn is optimistic about the potential of historical fiction to regain the relevant place it once had because "[t]he opportunities both in and out of the classroom for connecting fiction and nonfiction, using the fine nonfiction available today, are more fruitful

²⁸¹ Lowry's story is based on real people, although it is rewritten. Yolen, on the other hand, does not provide any information about real-life people from whom she drew inspiration for her story, so it is possible that she wrote a fictional story based on real, historical happenings but with no reference to specific personal histories.

than they have ever been” (*ibidem* 23): she links the future success of the genre to the possibility for children “not only to learn from but to enjoy the past” (*ibidem*). As Rahn foresaw, the 1990s were a period when children’s historical fiction regained wider popularity among child readers.

Suggesting titles of “new releases that tackle unusual historical topics” (Pavonetti 78), Pavonetti provides a wide range of themes and forms including novels, picture books, blank verse mostly from the 1990s,²⁸² which can be seen as evidence of vitality of historical fiction during the decade. The novels that she suggests offered a wide variety of topics, although most of them are of American interest or linked to the history of the USA:²⁸³ the American Revolution, the Gold Rush, the Great Depression, the Civil War, the Reconstruction, the Middle Passage, the Lewis and Clark expedition, the Civil Rights movement, but there are also themes that privilege the point of view of minority ethnic communities like the representation of Native Americans, migrations, slavery, Pearl Harbor from a Japanese-American point of view, and historical happenings or periods in other parts of the world, such as Arthurian England, Shakespeare, the 1845 blight in Ireland, the story of Moses, XII century Korea, and crusades. Out of forty-one titles, six works (corresponding to around 15%) concern World War II²⁸⁴ and half of these refer more or less explicitly to the Holocaust, corresponding to more than 7%: Jane Yolen’s *The Devil’s Arithmetic*, Lois Lowry’s *Number the Stars*, and Norma Fox Mazer’s *Good Night, Maman* (1999).

The recovery of historical fiction during the 1990s is also proved by the number of Newbery Medals awarded to works of this genre: in the decade span, three Newbery Medals went to works about historical facts (*Number the Stars* in 1990, *The Midwife’s Apprentice* in 1996, and *Out of the Dust* in 1998),²⁸⁵ in 1998 *Lily’s Crossing* (1997) by Patricia Reilly Giff was among the Newbery Honor Books, and the Scott O’Dell Award was received by stories about the Depression era (*A Time of Troubles* in 1991), the Civil War (*Shades of Gray* in 1990; *Bull Run* in 1994; *Forty Acres and Maybe a Mule* in 1999), and various aspects of

²⁸² Pavonetti’s suggestions date back to 2003, so the most recent titles she includes for the century were published in the previous two years. Out of forty-one titles suggested, twenty-four works were published in the 1990s and ten at the beginning of the century, while four works were from the 1980s, only two works date the 1960s and just one was published in the 1970s.

²⁸³ Pavonetti’s article was published in *Voices from the Middle*, “the peer-reviewed journal of the Middle Level Section—by teachers, for teachers” (“Voices from the Middle”, accessed 28.01.2022) of the USA National Council of Teachers of English.

²⁸⁴ Among these titles, *Lily’s Crossing* (1997) and *Stepping on the Cracks* (1991) feature children and teens handling the absence of relatives away in the war, and incidents that bring the war in Europe nearer to them; *Goodnight, Mister Tom* (1981) is about an English child refugee in the country.

²⁸⁵ For all the winners, see the document “Association for Library Service to Children Newbery Medal Winners” (complete reference in the bibliography).

World War II (*Stepping on the Cracks* in 1992, on conscription and war effects at home; *Under the Blood Red Sun* in 1995, with a Japanese-American point of view on Pearl Harbor; *The Bomb* in 1996, whose story is linked to the first atomic bomb).²⁸⁶ As in the previous decade, literary works comprised historical fiction, picture books, and nonfiction, but not all of them were equally welcomed. For example, with the opening of the USHMM and the release of Spielberg's *Schindler's List*, 1991 also gave to the audience the highly contested picture book *Let the Celebrations Begin!* by Margaret Wild, whose criticism is in high contrast with what scholars said about *Rose Blanche*.²⁸⁷

Despite the apparently low number of novels about the Holocaust included in Pavonetti's suggestions, the 1990s were a productive decade in terms of children's historical fiction representing stories related to the Holocaust. At the beginning of the XXI century, Pavonetti's inclusion of *The Devil's Arithmetic* and *Number the Stars*, both published two decades earlier, proved that at the time they were considered among the touchstones of children's literature about the Holocaust. Nonetheless, more works were available to child readers in Anglophone countries: in the UK, Michael Morpurgo's *Waiting for Anya* was published in 1990; in the USA Jane Yolen proposed another historical novel, *Briar Rose* (1992); in Australia Jackie French published *Hitler's Daughter* (1999). In chapter 1, the 1990s were referred to as the decade of many 'openings': indeed, they also provided a wider children's literature response to Holocaust representation and its memory that interested the Anglophone world at large. In addition to this, apart from telling stories that are more or less linked to the Holocaust and its horrors, what Yolen, Morpurgo, and French have in common is that they are non-related authors. Thus, the 1990s can also be seen as the decade when there was a wider opening to non-related authors in children's historical fiction representing the Holocaust.

In the latest twenty years, the positive trend of historical fiction popularity seems to be constant. The first two decades of the XXI century proved to be in continuity with the previous years because historical fiction was about to "become the new fantasy, both in popularity and market positioning. Just about every publisher of children's fiction has at least one lead historical fiction title during the year, and across all publishers a large proportion of the very best and most engaging children's fiction has a historical basis" (Owen 22). Joanne

²⁸⁶ For more details on the works, see "The Scott O'Dell Award" (accessed 26.11.2021).

²⁸⁷ Roberts Baer thinks that *Let the Celebrations Begin!* "gives the child reader/listener almost no context, has a chillingly upbeat prose with too many exclamation points, a title that is potentially misleading, and soft watercolor illustrations that convey a sense of happiness" (Baer 387), while Myers positively comments on the visual elements in *Rose Blanche* that allow readers to be involved in the story, to "identify [with] the principal character(s)" (L. Myers, "What" 34), and at the same time to be spared the most shocking historical details.

Owen, like Rahn before her, links the new appreciation of historical fiction to “the fantasy craze” (*ibidem*) that developed within children’s literature: according to her, “[i]nterest in magical peoples and places, in other worlds and times” (*ibidem*) has been the first phase then developing into a new interest in historical settings.

The greater and renewed interest in historical matters is also shown by the many “series that take a narrative approach to non-fiction” (*ibidem* 23), which seem to be inspired by former successful children’s historical fiction writers and achievements, such as Jean Fritz’s biographies for the *Dead Famous* series, “lively, funny and informative biographies of famous historical figures” (*ibidem*). One of the most successful series is *Horrible Histories*, with more than 10 million books sold²⁸⁸ and published by Scholastic that, according to Joanne Owen, “is building on this success with a number of equally innovative series” (*ibidem*), including the above *Dead Famous* and *Double Take*, the latter of which “will look at the same historical event from the perspectives of two of the key people involved” (*ibidem*).²⁸⁹ Drawing on the *Horrible Histories* success and style, the *Who? What? When?* series by Bob Fowke²⁹⁰ “use an A to Z format to explore subjects such as the Tudors, Victorians and the First and Second World Wars” (*ibidem*), and with other examples it represents the fresh proposals of historical nonfiction in the first years of the XXI century.

Children’s historical fiction in the USA still has a major interest in historical topics of national appeal, which have not had many changes since the 1990s: out of twenty-one Newbery Medals, the works awarded are about the Depression era (*Bud, Not Buddy* in 2000, *A Year Down Yonder* in 2001) and medieval England (*Crispin: The Cross of Lead* in 2003, *Good Masters! Sweet Ladies! Voices from a Medieval Village* in 2008), plus one award was given to the crossbred *Dead End in Norvelt* by Jack Gantos (2012), which also won the Scott O’Dell Award the same year. Contrary to the Newbery Medals, the Scott O’Dell Award signals a relevant presence of historical fiction books about the Civil War in the first decade (*The Land* in 2002, *The River Between Us* in 2004, *Elijah of Buxton* in 2008, *Chains* in 2009), as well as new examples of fiction representing slavery (*Trouble Don’t Last* in 2003), the Dust Bowl (*The Storm in the Barn* in 2010), or again set during the Depression era (*Full of Beans* in 2017).

²⁸⁸ Until 2003.

²⁸⁹ One book is about World War II, while other themes are the Battle of Hastings, dinosaurs, pirates, the Tudors, the race to the South Pole, the Tutankhamun’s tomb, and votes for women (see “Double Take Pack”, accessed 19.10.2021).

²⁹⁰ Texts are about World War I and the Victorians (see “Who? What? When?”, accessed 18.10.2021).

Despite the absence of Newbery Medals to historical fiction set in World War II, works representing various aspects of the war have been a constant: winners of the Scott O'Dell Award are *The Art of Keeping Cool* by Janet Taylor Lisle in 2001, *The Green Glass Sea* by Ellen Klages in 2007, *Dash* by Kirby Larson in 2015, while *Match of death* (2002) is part of Owen's "highlights" (*ibidem* 23). More specifically, children's historical fiction handling the Holocaust and its horrors that was awarded is represented by *Two Suns in the Sky* (Newbery Medal in 2000) and *Hitler Youth: Growing Up in Hitler's Shadow* (Newbery Honor Book in 2006). Historical fiction about the Holocaust has been steadily present in Anglophone countries. Apart from examples of novels in foreign languages like *Malka* (2001), translated from German into English, in the USA Ruth Zee and Roberto Innocenti published *Erika's Story* (2003), Jerry Spinelli *Milkweed* (2003), Jane Yolen *Mapping the Bones* (2018), and Kathy Kacer wrote the already mentioned *The Magician of Auschwitz* (2014), while in Ireland John Boyne published *The Boy in the Striped Pijamas* (2005) and then *The Boy at the Top of the Mountain* (2015), which can be considered as forming a duet despite the fact that the stories are not linked to each other. In Australia, children's writers Morris Gleitzman and Jackie French published, respectively, the *Once* (2005-2021) series and the two novels *Pennies for Hitler* (2012) and *Goodbye, Mr Hitler* (2017), which constitute, with *Hitler's Daughter*, the *Hitler Trilogy*.

Chapter 6

Children's Historical Fiction: Genre Expectations and Issues with Holocaust Representation

The above reasonings fostered by Rigney's considerations on fictional narratives are applicable to children's historical fiction, also written by non-related authors. This supports the idea that this kind of fiction should be considered as another 'approach' to the Holocaust (see Vice 5) because it potentially offers a positive contribution, and also as a different means to convey its memory. Since the main readership is made of child readers, however, it is necessary to reflect on its specific characteristics because they seem in contrast with the previous statement. Regardless of the potential that fiction has in literature for older readers, for example, one may think that the readers' young age demands a partial or 'simplified' narration of historical facts; therefore, children's historical fiction conveys risks to convey a trivialized representation of the Holocaust, which makes the genre disrespectful towards the subject matter. The following discussion will confirm that children's historical fiction should be considered part of literary works promoting Holocaust memory in a respectful and productive way.

Among children's literature scholars, it is traditionally accepted that 'good' children's historical fiction manages to blend two main expectations of the genre: to entertain young readers and to teach them some historical contents. Children's recreation and learning are inseparable in definitions of children's historical fiction, although scholars are far from having reached a univocal explanation. Those who have attempted to define this genre referred to its content and setting, placed in the past, and 'good' children's historical fiction is defined mostly by means of what it does, or allows to do, to readers, or what scholars think it should enable them to do, rather than through stylistic, narrative, or structural characteristics. Critics and authors agree on the fact that historical fiction for children is "set within the historical past" (Crawford and Zygouris-Coe 198), that "a work from this genre must not only present historical information, but also tell a compelling story in its own right" (*ibidem*), and that this story must be "accurate in detail but brought to life through imagination and creativity" (Cushman qtd. in *ibidem*). However, the debate is still open regarding other details that have sometimes being included in tentative definitions, such as the amount of time that should separate the writer from the historical facts they write upon.

According to A. Waller Hastings, "[t]he simplest way to define a historical novel is as a novel set a certain distance in the past – often at least 60 years past, as Scott established for

his *Waverly* novels” (Hastings), an amount of time considered sufficient “to create historical perspective” (*ibidem*).²⁹¹ However, Adamson claimed that “[h]istorical fiction [...] is generally written about a time period in which the author has not lived or no more recently than one generation before its composition. [F]iction having a setting within twenty years of the time it was written is not historical fiction” (xix). Both references to the author’s temporal distance from the historical facts agree with historical fiction novelist Geoffrey Trease, who “defined historical fiction as fiction set outside the time of living memory” (*ibidem*); on this basis, Adamson later adopted Hastings’ approach because twenty or sixty years are a huge amount of time in children’s eyes, since for them “‘outside living memory’ may be as few as five years ago” (*ibidem* xx). Therefore, “[i]t appears safe to say that a children’s book concerning events as recently as 20 years ago, *insofar as it* implicitly recognizes the contrast between that time and this, may be ‘historical fiction’” (Hastings; see also “Historical” 121).

It is given such importance to the time period considered because it is believed that “historical novels have the bulk of their action set within one specified era, such as the Irish Potato Famine, or reflect the events of a defining cultural period, such as the American Revolutionary War [and] are set entirely within the context of the period, mostly forgoing any modern perspectives” (“Historical” 121). While it is necessary to avoid anachronisms such as contemporary perspectives when presenting the characters’ viewpoint,²⁹² the fact that this definition implies novels to be “set entirely within the context of the period” (*ibidem*) is problematic, since it excludes the main production in the 1980s made of ‘time slip’ novels that feature a contemporary young character going back to a past time (see ch. 5). Historical novelist Jill Paton Walsh, in her influential paper “History is Fiction” (1972), wrote that a

novel is a historical novel when it is wholly or partly about the public events and social conditions which are the material of history, regardless of the time at which it is written.

In offering this definition I am very well aware that it leads to odd results. A certain kind of contemporary novel may be historical while many novels set in the past will not be. For example, merely choosing a Cavalier and Roundhead setting for a romance does not, in itself, make that a romance *about* the time of the English Civil War. We shall need a new name for the nonhistorical books with a setting in the past; I suggest we call them costume novels. To distinguish the historical from the costume novel we need only apply a simple test: Can we imagine the plot and characters set in any other period? If we can, then the book is not in any organic way *about* its historical period. It may be a very good book, but it is not a historical novel.

[...] A historical setting does not suffice to make a novel historical because the setting of fiction is not fundamentally of the first importance. A novel is not quintessentially

²⁹¹ Hastings’ paper does not have page numbers, probably because it is the written version of the lecture that the scholar offered in 1999.

²⁹² For example, female freedom and equality between men and women should not be part of novels with characters living in the Middle Ages.

descriptive or evocative. A novel is quintessentially a prose narrative. However good the description and incidentals which make up the setting, however deeply they enrich the novel, the heart of the matter is always the story — complex interactions of character and event. If the novel as a form of art can have anything to say about history, it must say it through the story, through character and event, not merely through setting. (Walsh 19; emphasis in original)

Therefore, the writer's fictional story has more weight in historical fiction than historical setting and details, although the two elements cannot be separated but must be very well interwoven to have 'good' historical fiction. Lillian H. Smith commented on this point more than twenty years before Walsh, in 1953, since she highlighted the precedence of story (what Smith calls 'adventure') over history and the wise combination of the two by means of the author's writing:

To every reading boy or girl a book of fiction is first of all an adventure tale [...].

In historical fiction there is first of all the story the writer is telling. Then there is the fabric of history into which the story must be woven as warp into web. The texture of the book will be fine, coarse, even, or patched according to the skill of the writer in weaving the two into one. The result is a fusion of imagination, chronicle, and writing skill. (L. Smith 124)

Walsh's and Smith's definitions imply that historical fiction should not be criticized because of its fictional component – because “historical fiction is not true” (Walsh 20), precisely because it is a genre combining historical details and the elements of fiction at the same time and, although both fundamental, fiction is more predominant than history (see L. Smith 125).

Historical novels are fiction, not textbooks, therefore they present the historical component in a different way with respect to nonfiction genres. The expectation that historical fiction have the same amount of historical details as a nonfiction work is misplaced and it will inevitably be unfulfilled; moreover, if the historical element is presented in nonfiction-style, the novel will fail as historical fiction, too. As Lillian Smith states, “a frequent cause for [historical fiction] failure with young readers is the sacrifice of plot to period, with consequent loss of interest” (L. Smith 129), therefore “[i]t may be that a good story, competently told, will offset a sparse background as long as it does not betray its period” (*ibidem*). A huge number of historical details does not make good historical fiction, it is the writer's artistic competence and deep knowledge of the period that they represent that make “[t]he great difference between a good historical story and a poor one” (*ibidem* 126). In Smith's view, “good” (*ibidem*) historical fiction is written by an author “who is steeped in the life of a period and finds there a story to tell [and who] claims to be true to the life of the past” (*ibidem*), whereas those who start “with a preconceived idea of a story [and] loo[k] for a

suitably picturesque period for its setting” write an adventure story where the characters act in the past and “not a historical story merely because the characters are clothed in hauberks or in surcoats of silk” (*ibidem*). This kind of adventure story is what Walsh defines “costume nove[l]” (Walsh 19), where history is not really relevant and any historical time would make little difference to the main story, or to the character’s life.

To have historical fiction, history cannot be included only as the background of the story, it must be as relevant as a character. However, how should it be present if abundant details would make the readers lose interest? According to literary scholars, the presence of history and the form in which it is interwoven are part of the aims of historical fiction. By comparing what Walsh had defined “costume novels” (Walsh 19) and great historical novelists like Scott, Conan Doyle, and Stevenson, Lillian Smith claimed that in good historical fiction “there is the nice balance of history and fiction, *the sense of period*, the feeling for the issues that set the age apart; on the other hand a conventional story is projected against a shallowly conceived, picturesque background, described rather than *brought to life*, by a writer who has not understood the real significance of what he writes” (L. Smith 129; my emphasis). Therefore, historical time may be “sparse[ly]” (*ibidem*) described through a few details, because what is paramount is that the writer conveys ‘the sense of the period’. Consequently, good historical fiction enables child readers to ‘feel’ the remediated historical time:

In its finest form, the historical story brings to a child, through imaginative response, an experience of living in other times. It brings a sense of the significance and color of the past in a way that transcends history. That is to say, the facts of history are always interwoven with intangibles, with human thoughts and feelings [...].²⁹³

The writer of historical fiction has first of all a story to tell, which should adhere to all the general rules of good fiction. But since it is also, in intention, *historical* fiction, it is a reconstruction of life in the past, an attempt to recapture the atmosphere or flavor of another time or age. (*ibidem* 124; emphasis in original)

‘Good’ historical fiction presupposes an active interaction with child readers thanks to their ‘imaginative response’ that enables them to connect with the ‘feelings’ of the past about which they are reading. Considering children’s historical fiction representing the Holocaust, the ‘imaginative response’ that young readers have can be considered an example of Hirsch’s

²⁹³ Lillian Smith’s claim that “the historical story brings to a child [...] an experience of living in other times” (L. Smith 124) could be interpreted as the idea that a work of fiction can make the readers experience the Holocaust as witnesses did. However, here young readers’ ‘experience’ is understood in relation to the feelings conveyed during the reading (fear, hatred, rage, suffering) rather than the bodily first-hand living through the Holocaust, which is not repeatable.

“imaginative investment” (Hirsch, *Generation 4*) of non-related individuals who approach the Holocaust. Since the “affiliative” (*ibidem* 36) connection that non-related people can develop is based on a personal-emotional relationship, children’s historical fiction has the potential to enable this link by making readers feel the emotional atmosphere of the period.

Form and aims of historical fiction are strictly linked to each other because “[h]istorical fiction must be a fusion of story and period if it is to enrich and enlarge our picture of the past to the extent that it becomes a part of our experience” (L. Smith 126). In children’s historical fiction regarding the Holocaust the inclusion of the past as ‘part of our experience’ is paramount and represents the essence of the successful transmission of attitudinal postmemory. Children develop a personal link with the past and ‘absorb’ postmemory when historical details and fictional parts collaborate: in order to have “[s]tory and history [...] so joined and interwoven as to form inseparable parts of a single narrative” (*ibidem* 125), the writer is required to have “a mind steeped in the past” (*ibidem* 124), which means that they are highly knowledgeable about the historical period about which they want to write and they “move freely in it with a full awareness of the conditions and issues inherent in it, and sees his characters with sympathy and understanding as the products of those conditions” (*ibidem*).

Scholars’ definitions of children’s historical fiction present recurring characteristics, which can be considered as the most relevant features that the genre must have. These can be divided into methodological requirements and literary and aesthetic elements: the first include to set the story at least twenty years earlier, not to change the historical record for any reason, and to avoid material (such as objects and instruments) and ideological (applying modern concepts to previous historical times) anachronisms.²⁹⁴ The latter refers to the need for children’s historical fiction to enable the reader to ‘feel’ the past portrayed thanks to a fair number of historical details, which are “brought to life” (*ibidem* 129; see also Crawford and Zygouris-Coe 198) by means of literary strategies and the writer’s imagination.

Children’s historical novels about the Holocaust have the above characteristics; in particular, they enable the reader to feel nearer to the characters thanks to the latter’s emotions (see chapters 3 and 7). In chapter 2.3, it was discussed if genres like fiction and if non-related authors can represent the Holocaust to convey postmemory without being disrespectful, and it was claimed that they should be considered as an additional perspective. Therefore, the main point here is to discuss if children’s historical fiction is a genre in conflict with the subject

²⁹⁴ See Haugaard (6-7) on anachronisms.

matter because of the additional requirements imposed by the readership and, as a consequence, if it should not represent the Holocaust. There are issues not only regarding the blend of history and fiction, but also criticisms about the kind of representation offered. For example, since a certain level of didacticism as well as of ‘entertainment’ are embedded in the genre, it is commonly thought that children’s historical fiction cannot represent the Holocaust because it would mean to use the subject matter to give ‘lessons’ and to ‘entertain’ young readers. Similarly, a readership made of children is inherently considered negative because historical facts would be ‘simplified’ and, supposedly, trivialized to make them more ‘readable’ by young readers.

The union of history and fiction causes concerns and criticisms that usually tackle these same constitutive elements. As Walsh states, “objections” (Walsh 17) to the genre are recurrently proposed by “the believers in fiction, who adopt a high aesthetic tone and think that the fiction should not be adulterated with a dross of history; and [by] the historians, who put on the armor of truth and object strenuously to the mingling of anything compounded with the pure ore of historical fact” (*ibidem*). Considering the specific case analyzed in this writing, the issue posed by the combination of literature and historical details of the Holocaust dates back at least to the 1950s, when the Leivick-Mark and the *Di yidishe tsaytung-Di goldene keyt* controversies took place.²⁹⁵ Criticisms against mingling historical data with fiction are strictly linked to Vice’s discussion of accuracy in Holocaust fiction for older readers, a genre where authors are commonly criticized for “dishonestly distorting historical sources” (Vice 161). Her defense of the genre hinges on the claim that there is an inherent contradiction in this kind of remarks, because “[e]xperimenting with form is treated as if it were inaccuracy; in other words, accusing the novel in this way is tantamount to accusing it of fictionality, and is a contradiction in terms” (*ibidem*).

As Vice continues, the accusation of distorting sources

is also a contradictory position. Novelists are expected to keep to the facts, yet doing so too slavishly can be viewed as plagiarism; as novelists they are expected to invent material, yet doing so amounts to inaccuracy. [...] It is as if such responses to Holocaust fiction demand both too much and too little from the novel. On the one hand, Holocaust novels are supposed to convey accurately facts which are not even agreed upon by historians; on the other hand, the novelistic staples of altering viewpoint, playing narrator off against character, testing the reader, are to be eschewed in favour of a limited variety of realism. (*ibidem*)

²⁹⁵ See the beginning of Part Two.

Vice's opinion is in accordance with Smith's idea that children's historical fiction should carefully balance and combine history and fiction but "*adventure* is the first requirement" (L. Smith 125; emphasis in original). Therefore, it is nonsensical to criticize the genre for its fictional elements; in fact, it should be evaluated in terms of how it uses fictional tools to approach the representation of the Holocaust (see Vice 5).

Discussing historical fiction, Walter Scott commented that it is important to have "proportion without sacrifice of detail *and that accuracy of background must not crowd out human interest.* [...]" (L. Smith 125; emphasis in original). However, this is apparently in contrast with the rules regarding Holocaust representations that have been referred to in the previous chapters (see especially ch. 2.3), especially when one considers the widely agreed aims embedded in children's historical fiction, that is teaching and 'entertainment'. The didactic objective refers to the fact that children's historical fiction should teach child readers some historically accurate content while at the same time it 'entertains' them.²⁹⁶ However, it is necessary to discuss what kind of historical knowledge the genre is presupposed to offer because, even though young readers may well be expected to learn some historical details, history-learning as cognitive acquisition of notions, such as when studying a textbook, is both a misplaced expectation and an incoherent request on a genre where the fictional story has precedence. It is the adventure to which Smith refers (see L. Smith 125) that is commonly thought to function as 'recreation' for readers, therefore it is the mostly literary component of the genre that covers this embedded objective.

The teaching of historical contents to child readers was embedded in the genre since Stevenson's times. In *Kidnapped*,

[b]y presenting this material as an adventure story, similar in tone to the more fictional *Treasure Island*, Stevenson was able to construct a narrative that makes the intricacies of geo-political era much more accessible and understandable to young readers. While such elements have helped make historical fiction more popular with child readers, it has also helped make the genre emerge as tool for teaching history in elementary and middle school classrooms. ("Historical" 122)

²⁹⁶ 'Entertains' has two main interpretations. On the one hand, its Latin etymology refers to the idea of 'grasping and maintaining' someone's attention; on the other hand, it may also be understood in terms of spectacle (in a negative sense). One may claim that the criticism against the 'entertaining' expectation of historical fiction, when this represents the Holocaust, mostly refers to the latter idea because it would imply to use the Holocaust to superficially please the audience and it is not expected an emotionally and intellectually deeper involvement on its part (also Green's TV series *Holocaust* and Spielberg's *Schindler's List* gave rise to similar fears and criticism, see ch. 1). Despite being usually considered in a positive way, the first meaning could be understood in similar debatable terms too, for example in case of voyeurism. This dissertation regards 'entertainment' in the first suggested meaning: child readers are drawn to the story because it 'entertains' them in a non-voyeuristic way.

As the above reflections suggest, ‘good’ historical fiction could be productively used by teachers to introduce tough topics or “to help make such difficult abstract concepts—such as war, slavery, and the Holocaust—more palatable and understandable to their students” (*ibidem*).²⁹⁷ Novels like *Johnny Tremain* (1943), *Child of the Holocaust* (1967), *To Be a Slave* (1969), *The Devil in Vienna* (1978) can simultaneously offer a double aid because they provide a tool for teachers to make history “more accessible” (*ibidem*) and they help students to approach difficult subjects.

The use of children’s historical fiction in classrooms is favoured and defended by many sociological and educational scholars,²⁹⁸ but it cannot substitute history classes and nonfiction (like history textbooks).²⁹⁹ Historical fiction has the ability to make history ‘accessible’ to child readers because it makes them ‘feel’ the historical period, which is one of the main reasons why the genre is used at school. According to Rycik and Rosler, the genre should be accepted in history classrooms because its use has many “values” (Rycik and Rosler 163): by reading historical novels, young readers can have “a vicarious experience for places and people they could otherwise never know [and] they are able to see history through a child’s point of view and identify with their emotions” (*ibidem*).³⁰⁰ National Council for the Social Studies “Elementary Teacher of the Year” Terry Lindquist comments that historical fiction “piques kids’ curiosity about historical events, provides them with everyday details that a textbook would miss, [...] gives them multiple perspectives on events and helps students contemplate the complexities of an issue” (*ibidem* 163-65); therefore, the genre “provides an opportunity for children to make both an efferent and aesthetic response to literature” (*ibidem* 165), as it was previously claimed.

Beyond history classes and “provid[ing] readers with ‘lived through’ experiences that enable greater understanding and insight into human nature and historical patterns” (Naylor 16), historical fiction has been regarded useful also to enhance students’ literacy (see *ibidem*) and interest in reading (see Bernadowski 32-33). Writing and reading skills are supposedly improved by reading historical novels thanks to the basic requirement of the genre of a writer

²⁹⁷ Even though adjectives like ‘palatable’ and ‘understandable’ are debatable in the case of historical fiction about the Holocaust, here these words are quoted because attention is on the potential of the genre to make “more accessible” (“Historical” 122) tough historical topics to young readers who may perceive them as ‘too distant’ from their present.

²⁹⁸ Some studies about the use of historical fiction in classrooms are Crawford and Zygouris-Coe’s “Those Were the Days: Learning about History through Literature” (2008), Rycik and Rosler’s “The Return of Historical Fiction” (2009), Bernadowski’s “Literature Circles and Historical Fiction” (2011), and Naylor’s “Teaching Historical Narratives: Not Just a Page Out of History” (2017).

²⁹⁹ See Peter Hunt’s criticism against the use of the genre to teach history in “Fiction” (22-31).

³⁰⁰ More than identification, child readers are invited to empathize with characters’ emotions (cf. ch. 1; see ch. 7).

“who is steeped in the life of a period” (L. Smith 124) and because of the fact that, to make “the world of the story [...] accurate and authentic” (Naylor 16), it is necessary that “authors (students and teachers) [...] do a great deal of credible research about the given time, context and perspectives” (*ibidem*). Therefore, literacy is combined with “integrating and developing important content area knowledge from science, technology, the arts, history and/or geography” (*ibidem*). Similarly, children’s interest in reading can be developed by proposing “accurate” (Bernadowski 32) historical fiction “with believable, authentic characters to which middle grades students can relate” (*ibidem*), and Bernadowski notes that there is an additional drawing force given by the adaptation of historical novels into “popular movies, which lures young readers toward the books themselves” (*ibidem*).³⁰¹

Literary genres can indeed be used in a variety of contexts and for a wide range of scopes, including teaching skills or contents to students. However, considering the specific case of children’s historical fiction representing the Holocaust, Rycik and Rosler’s “vicarious experience” (163) that readers can have while reading historical novels should be understood as a space to enter in contact with the past and to develop a mediated experience. This is based on emotions felt during the reading because they are enabled to see history through the character’s point of view, like Landsberg explained for the TV series *Rosewood* (see ch. 1).

However, it is necessary to ponder on the potential as well as the limits of the genre. The use of historical fiction in classrooms, especially during History classes, can be as much useful as it can turn against teachers and readers. Historical fiction is permeated by the author’s ideology and this may be more evident than in other genres (see Hunt, “Fiction” 22-31). Therefore, using historical novels in an educational setting should be carefully evaluated by teachers; Peter Hunt even considers this possibility “exceedingly hazardous” (“Fiction” 23).

Hunt’s concerns regard the situation of British schools and students, who show a “sharp decline in the[ir] historical knowledge” (*ibidem*). The introduction of a new history curriculum in the UK a few years ago brought critics to comment that “history teaching is a powerful ideological tool with great potential for misuse as a narrow, nationalistic educational weapon” (*ibidem*). Following this view, the use of historical fiction in a school context only adds a power tool that conveys an ideological stance and that can be used as a means of

³⁰¹ The multidisciplinary use of historical fiction in classrooms is highlighted by the fact that novels are used both in English and History classes, although a combined approach is recommended to counter the limitations of time and content imposed by single subject areas: “History teachers do not have the time for pupils to read historical fiction in their lessons and English teachers do not have the time to teach the necessary historical context, but working together they would” (Hicks and Martin 53).

corruption, because “[h]istory is power, children's books are about power – and can be defined by the imbalance of power relations within them - and power corrupts; history is fiction, and fiction is fiction, and fiction distorts - and may corrupt” (*ibidem*). Hunt’s perspective on the potential of historical fiction can be considered like Rigney’s claim that “[s]tories ‘stick’” (Rigney 347; see also Dowswell 1-2) in a negative sense, because he comments that “children’s books are the most effective of invisible persuaders” (Hunt, “Fiction” 23). This is especially dangerous because the main readership is made of young readers who read historical fiction during an age of growth and learning, and therefore they are more easily influenced (see *ibidem* 25).

Since “manipulation [is] inevitable [and] it may be unperceived by both writer and reader; it is also likely to be more influential both in the short and long term” (*ibidem* 25), historical fiction is a genre that is easily “susceptible [...] to ‘distortions’” (*ibidem* 26). Therefore, if it is used to teach history, students will risk to be taught an ideologized version of history that is dangerous in the long term. An example of this is offered by G. A. Henty’s novels conveying the idea of British superiority and the country’s ideals, which should be better read ““from a historical perspective [because] Henty’s stories [...] are of greatest value for what they tell us not of Roman times or eighteenth-century India but of the late nineteenth century when Henty wrote them. They reveal what late Victorian males made of the past and how they wished to interpret it”” (Butts qtd. in *ibidem*).

Historical fiction conveying a certain ideology is linked to one of the main problems of the genre: anachronisms. Haugaard differentiates between “technical faults” (Haugaard 6) and “spiritual” (*ibidem*) errors: the first have fewer implications because they are inconsistencies such as “advancing the discovery of the petroleum lamp by half a century” or “mistake of a date” (*ibidem* 6, 7), whereas the latter “giv[e] people in one century the ideas and opinions of another” (*ibidem* 7). Anachronistic beliefs are highly controversial and, considering Haugaard’s view, novels that present characters living in the past with contemporary thoughts and ideas are not historical but ‘costume novels’, as Walsh intended. Ideological anachronisms are typically found in some of the most popular British historical authors of the golden age of the genre, like Geoffrey Trease, Rosemary Sutcliff, Cynthia Harnett, Ronald Welch, and Henry Treece, who “portray historical characters with essentially modern sensibilities, in the language of middle-class, middle England, and reflect an almost uniform presentation of middle-class values” (Hunt, “Fiction” 28).

According to Hunt, in historical novels depicting war there are “[d]istortions of other kinds” (*ibidem* 29). For example, there are aesthetic issues in some of the most successful

historical novels such as *Goodnight Mr. Tom* (1981), *Blitzcat* (1989), and *Waiting for Anya* (1990), which “are all curiously inauthentic. Both their situations and characters seem to be ersatz, based on the simplifications and stylised atmospherics of popular film” (*ibidem*). There also cases like *Exeter Blitz* (1978) that “manipulate historical events to suit the fictional story” (*ibidem*) and, for this reason, they should not be called historical fiction, since the genre implies the combination of fact and fiction but no alteration of the historical record. At an ethical level, a similar approach to history is far more debatable and condemnable than ‘technical faults’, although writing historical novels that purportedly offer either technical or ‘spiritual’ errors is a dubious action and may reveal the writer’s inability to ‘steep’ enough his or her mind in the past, so that they opt for the easiest way rather than dedicating more efforts to historical research.

Undoubtedly, all these considerations should be confronted with specific novels. For example, if a story contains a ‘technical’ error like the example provided by Haugaard, an anachronistic petroleum lamp, but this lamp is a detail in a description that is likely to pass unobserved by the reader who is not an historian or it is not a major element in the plot, whose presence or absence consistently changes the story, then the error could be considered as a writer’s imprecision. This is not the same of writing wrong dates of war and battles that are likely to be known also by a non-expert audience. ‘Spiritual’ errors, or the deliberate decision to give characters anachronistic thoughts, are debatable, but it is necessary to acknowledge each case where they are present: in the case of time slip novels, it is the kind of literary narrative device that allows modern times characters to travel to the past.

Having said that, cases like *Exeter Blitz* where history is manipulated to ‘fit’ the story are ‘bad’ historical fiction from their bases. The use of historical details and fictional elements should be a co-operation, not an abuse of history; in particular, literary devices should enhance the ‘feel’ of the past, not be enhanced by changing historical details. The “aesthetic difficulties” (Hunt, “Fiction” 29) to which Hunt refers in relation to novels about World War II are correct and they are intensified in novels that refer to or represent the Holocaust. War usually implies two or more main opposing views and it is not an easy task to represent World Wars in children’s historical fiction; the inclusion of the Nazi genocide poses additional issues and ethical problems, as it has been discussed in chapter 1.

It is unlikely that writers can exclude their own ideological stance when they are writing for children. They should attenuate it because, like for technical and spiritual errors, it is not sure that “it is possible to write a novel which gives a totally accurate picture of a time past. But that is a poor excuse for not attempting authenticity” (Haugaard 6). Since ideology

is learnt by individuals during their life and it derives from many factors, including the socio-cultural context, politics, education, family and peers' influence, a writer cannot simply set 'ideology' apart when writing a historical novel, as if they are taking a pair of glasses off. However, they should make the effort of adjusting glasses, or use other lenses, as it were.

Hunt's reflections on ideology and the risk of using historical fiction in classrooms highlight a basilar fact of historical fiction: it cannot be expected – nor used – to teach history. This is the main point of his considerations and it is in accordance with the characteristics of historical fiction as a genre as they have been previously discussed.³⁰² Historical fiction cannot be demanded to provide readers with an approach to history similar to nonfiction because doing so means not to consider the fact that it contains fictional elements. Therefore, Hunt's reflections seem to call for the acknowledgement of the fictional part inherent in the genre that makes historical fiction characteristics, limits, and scopes different to nonfiction.

Historical fiction, either used in classroom or read in other contexts, cannot substitute nonfiction and history classes.³⁰³ It can only be considered like other pedagogical techniques that are useful tools to make history nearer to students by "br[inging] to life" (L. Smith 129) a socio-political and cultural background and atmosphere that are temporally far from them (see *ibidem*; see also Crawford and Zygouris-Coe 198).³⁰⁴ This implies that teachers should be able to recognize 'good' historical fiction and they should suggest novels that present historical accuracy and that do not misuse history for aesthetic scopes. At the same time, children's historical fiction representing the Holocaust is wrongly expected to convey a high number of historical details rather than trying to convey "the atmosphere" (L. Smith 124) of the period, which in this case equals feeling fear, anger, hatred; being aware of dangers, and bearing losses. This does not mean that historical details can be altered, but that it is an inherent contradiction to demand that historical fiction approach Holocaust representation in the same way as nonfiction does (see Vice 161).³⁰⁵ However, it necessary to discuss more

³⁰² Of course, positionality also concerns the individual's position in a specific society (Western or another type), and is influenced by family and other 'institutions' conveying ideologies (see Budick 1-17; see also Seelinger Trites 21-53). Since this writing considers only novels written in English, the intended audience is mainly a Western, Anglophone young readership that it is likely to share the same ideological and cultural influences. Of course, also other young readers who are not native speakers of English read historical novels in English and they are influenced by other thinking patterns and ideologies, but it is beyond the scope of the writing to analyse the reception of the same novels considering these differences.

³⁰³ Textbooks and teachers may convey ideological stances, too, but the scope of textbooks and history classes is, supposedly, teaching or investigating the past, not placing ideology before history.

³⁰⁴ Jackdaws are an example of pedagogical technique to make history 'alive' for students (see Dodd 136-41).

³⁰⁵ Historical fiction didacticism may even be understood as a presumptuous claim to tell what the Holocaust was, as if the genre can provide a 'definitive' interpretation that surpasses witnesses' accounts by 'bringing to life' the Holocaust period. However, this is not the aim of children's historical fiction, nor of non-related authors,

deeply the issues that Holocaust representation poses within children's historical fiction and the inherent limits and misplaced expectations.

Considering the reflections in chapter 1 and the characteristics of the genre, unless the expectations are partially eased, it seems that children's historical fiction about the Holocaust is a paradox and that it cannot exist. Given that historical facts are presented stylistically and narratively in a peculiar way to enhance the 'feel' of the time in child readers, objections to this production can be summed up into criticisms concerning factual knowledge quantity, the correlated issues of exploitation and abuse, simplification, and authorship, readership, and subject appropriateness. The amount of historical details and the concepts of simplification and trivialization are linked to the didactic scope of the genre, while exploitation and abuse refer to the idea of 'recreation' that it offers to child readers.

The first issue to be discussed concerns the amount of factual knowledge included in children's historical fiction. As already claimed, fiction cannot be expected to provide readers with the same historical knowledge that they are given by nonfiction works. According to the 'Holocaust etiquette' rules (see ch. 2.3), the quantity of historical information present in each novel should amount to the complete historiographical knowledge of the Holocaust, since "[t]he Holocaust shall be represented [...] in its totality" (Des Pres 217). This rule goes against the definition of children's historical fiction as a genre, since history is paramount but it is the fictional element (the story) that is more present. As already claimed, representing the Holocaust in its entirety is not possible even in literature for older readers because an element will always lack, be it direct experience or historiographical information (see ch. 2.3). Inevitably, the rule is destined to be unfulfilled in all kinds of representations of the Holocaust; consequently, children's historical fiction cannot be blamed if it does not provide child readers with complete historiographical information, provided that authors do not use it in a way that causes doubts about the facticity of the Nazi genocide.

Offering misleading information, or an insufficient depiction of a historically accurate background, is not the same of conveying partial historical information because it is impossible to write everything. Providing child readers with the same quantity of historiographical information as nonfiction is a task that goes beyond the genre's aims.³⁰⁶ As Budick comments, Holocaust fiction

because the potential of the genre to make readers 'feel' more the Holocaust period is understood as a chance for children to develop empathy and absorb attitudinal postmemory.

³⁰⁶ Moreover, it is widely accepted that textbooks, academic studies, and nonfiction present a definite amount of information; all texts, however extensive, cannot be comprehensive of all knowledge available on the Holocaust, considering the fact that research is always in progress.

certainly does not abandon its commitment to some measure of correlation between the events within the fictive world and the historical record. Nonetheless, whatever Holocaust fiction or any other sort of historical fiction might be imagined to achieve, the one thing it *cannot* be entrusted to do is to preserve the *historical* record of the events it records as pure and unadulterated reliable history. (11-12; emphasis in original)

Therefore, the issue should not be understood in terms of quantity, but as presence or absence of historical information. This means that historical novels for children should give some information about the Holocaust and what happened because this is what historical fiction is expected to do as a genre.³⁰⁷ In addition to the details interwoven in the story, paratexts are a useful means to provide readers with more information as well as suggestions for further reading on the Holocaust. In prefaces, author's notes, and similar texts before or after the narration, the writer can distinguish between what is based on real facts and people (what is historically true) and what is fictional or has been re-elaborated.

In the case studies here considered, historical information is not sufficient to gain Holocaust knowledge as detailed as nonfiction works can offer. Nonetheless, the Holocaust does not seem 'unreal' and readers are not prevented from acquiring attitudinal postmemory. Non-related authors approach the issue of historical information in a variety of ways: for example, Lois Lowry provides just a few lines to contextualize the content, whereas Morris Gleitzman includes paratexts to inspire further research.³⁰⁸

Similarly to historical information quantity, children's historical fiction is wrongly expected to provide readers with the same, or nearly the same, detailed knowledge that textbooks or other nonfiction works do. As Walter Scott claimed, readers' interest in the story should not be hindered by an excess of historical details (see L. Smith 125); these should enhance the readers' interest by helping them to emotionally enter the atmosphere of the represented past.

If one thinks that historical fiction delivers knowledge like nonfiction, it is implied that children's historical novels should be read to gather information. This is a misplaced expectation. Louise Rosenblatt differentiated between two main reading modes: the efferent and the aesthetic reading. These are not incompatible with one another, because "[i]mplicit in this distinction between the two stances of the reader, the two directions in which he focuses his attention, is recognition that the same text may be read either efferently or aesthetically"

³⁰⁷ This need is more urgently perceived in the case of the Holocaust because the subject matter is a historical fact temporally nearer to adults with respect to the Middle Ages and because it has a deeper influence at the ethical, national and international level.

³⁰⁸ See Lowry, *Number the Stars* (135) and Gleitzman, *Once* (152-53).

(Rosenblatt 25). This is why, after initially distinguishing between aesthetic and nonaesthetic readings, she later adopts the Latin-based term *efferent*, which better explains ‘nonaesthetic readings’ since it is doubtful “that all aesthetic reading excludes or is diametrically opposed to an awareness of possible later usefulness or application” (*ibidem* 24).

The two modes are on a linear “spectrum” (*ibidem* 27) as they form “a continuum, a series of gradations between the nonaesthetic and the aesthetic extremes” (*ibidem* 35) and it is possible to have “different aesthetic transactions with the same text”, which also depend on the reader’s life, experiences, and character (*ibidem* 27).³⁰⁹ This means that Rosenblatt thinks that the reader is active (see Landsberg, *Prosthetic* 144-47), at least because the ‘transaction’ with the text also depends on the reader’s own subjectivity, as Landsberg claimed for prosthetic memories, therefore there is interactivity, a dialogue, between the reader’s own mind and feelings and the text. The main difference between the efferent and the aesthetic mode is the readers’ focus during “the reading-event” (Rosenblatt 23);³¹⁰ therefore, also their “activities” (*ibidem*) are different if they read efferently or aesthetically:

In nonaesthetic reading, the reader’s attention is focused primarily on what will remain as the residue *after* the reading—the information to be acquired, the logical solution to a problem, the actions to be carried out. An extreme instance is the mother whose child has just swallowed poisonous liquid and who is frantically reading the label on the bottle to discover the antidote to be administered. [...] [O]f the same nature, is the reading of a history book, a cooking recipe, a newspaper article, an algebraic equation or a chemical formula. [The reader’s] attention is directed outward, [...] toward concepts to be retained, ideas to be tested, actions to be performed after the reading. (*ibidem* 23-24; emphasis in original)

On the contrary,

³⁰⁹ Rosenblatt presupposes the establishment of a “reader’s *relationship* to the text during these various kinds of reading events” (23; my emphasis).

³¹⁰ Rosenblatt’s aesthetic reading may appear controversial in relation to children’s historical fiction representing the Holocaust because the scholar claims that “[t]he benefit to be derived [by aesthetic reading] lies in the reader’s moment-to-moment alertness to what is being activated in his consciousness by this particular pattern of words during the period of actual reading” (26) and further explains that the attention to emotions derived from reading is based “on the essential prerequisite [...] that the reader attend not to the concept of emotion but to the actual experiences that the text signals, as the way of sensing the inner reverberations of Keats’s ‘Ode on Melancholy’; [...] If a literary work of art is to ensue, the reader must turn his attention as fully as possible toward the transaction between himself and the text” (*ibidem* 27-28). Rosenblatt’s words presuppose a rather egocentric approach to aesthetic reading; one could argue that historical novels read in this way are a form of abuse of the Holocaust because it is used to feel emotions. However, it is debatable that someone who is not an expert in literary studies pays more attention to the egotistical kind of relationship established between himself and the text during the reading as says Rosenblatt. Rather, it is more likely that the individual focuses on the emotions felt and the relationship with the text through the characters, in a dialogical form. It could also be added that there is always a kind of emotional “alertness” (*ibidem* 26) during the reading, even in the efferent mode: while reading instructions, the mother is likely to be frustrated, anxious, and impatient towards the text because she cannot find soon enough the information she is looking for. Therefore, if the focus concerns emotions that allow empathy, which enables the readers’ approach to the historical facts, aesthetic reading of children’s historical fiction does not represent a form of abuse of the Holocaust.

[i]n aesthetic reading, [...] the reader's primary concern is with what happens *during* the actual reading event. Though [...] the reader of Frost's "Birches" must decipher the images or concepts or assertions that the words point to, he also pays attention to the associations, feelings, attitudes, and ideas that these words and their referents arouse within him. "Listening to" himself, he synthesizes these elements into a meaningful structure. *In aesthetic reading, the reader's attention is centered directly on what he is living through during his relationship with that particular text.* (*ibidem* 24-25; emphasis in original)

Therefore, in the efferent mode the reader mainly concentrates on retaining some information that they are looking for in the text, or that they consider useful in relation to the outside world because their attention is outward-looking. Aesthetic reading presupposes an inward attention about the reader's feelings and stance during 'the reading event', and the individual establishes a relationship between what they read, themselves, and the text, rather than between the information in the text and the world around them. Therefore, the reading position along the spectrum is near to the efferent of aesthetic pole depending on "what the reader does, the stance that he adopts and the activities he carries out in relation to the text" (*ibidem* 27).

If children's historical novels are read via the efferent mode, there will inevitably be criticisms and disappointment because they are not supposed to provide the same detailed historical information as nonfiction works.³¹¹ Since the story has precedence over history, the genre should be read via an aesthetic reading. However, given that history plays an essential role in 'good' historical fiction and it is inseparable from the fictional component, it is more correct to read historical fiction somewhere between the efferent and the aesthetic poles, with a slight preference for the aesthetic mode. In this way, historical fiction will return to its main range of expectations: 'entertaining' while enabling the young reader to get to know another time and place.

The efferent mode enables young readers to learn historical details and, since historical fiction "piques kids' curiosity" (Rycik and Rosler 163), aesthetic reading, and the 'aesthetic' quality of the genre, are aids that help child readers to enter in contact with the historical topic. The emotions they feel while connecting to the characters' (see *ibidem*) are not self-centered, like Rosenblatt's aesthetic mode presupposes, because they are felt during a dialogue, a relationship with the characters of the story, who are perceived as peers. These emotions are useful for readers to approach the historical content of the novel and, in this specific case, to acquire postmemory. Precisely because there is "an emotional connection

³¹¹ The same can be said also in relation to the previous issue of historical information quantity.

between children of today and their historical counterparts” (*ibidem*) and postmemory is an “affiliative” (Hirsch, *Generation* 36) relationship, young readers can acquire Holocaust postmemory. This is why Rycik and Rosler claim that children “can sense the fear that Monique has when her family hides a girl pretending to be her sister from the Nazis in *The Butterfly* (Polacco, 2001)” (163), not because they are usurping witnesses’ place, or because they can ‘know’ or ‘understand’ what the Holocaust was.

In its extreme position, Rosenblatt’s aesthetic reading is a mode where “the reader’s primary purpose is fulfilled *during* the reading event, as he fixes his attention on the actual experience he is living through” (Rosenblatt 27; emphasis in original). Considered in relation to children’s historical fiction representing the Holocaust, this mode may be understood as an abuse of the subject matter because it encourages the reading of historical novels as an ‘aesthetic activity’ to please readers. This is the approach against which Adorno warned. Historical fiction becomes problematic as a genre both if it is read with an extreme efferent approach³¹² or an equally extreme aesthetic mode. In the first case, fiction would be equaled to historiographical works, which is disrespectful; in the latter case, the genre would be read as if it was fiction, without considering the preceding adjective ‘historical’, and this would bring readers to “historical skepticism” (Budick 3).³¹³ Both approaches are dangerous and harmful, especially when child readers are involved because they are likely to know something about the Holocaust, but they presumably have less knowledge than adult readers to discern what is true from what is fictional. Therefore, the suggested balanced reading mode between the efferent and aesthetic extremes is necessary in children’s historical fiction.

One may claim that children do not know what efferent and aesthetic mean and what reading mode they should adopt when they approach historical fiction. However, it is not necessary that they know these concepts: in Rosenblatt’s example, the mother who reads the

³¹² Cf. Hunt, “Fiction” (22-31).

³¹³ Budick’s reflections of works of Holocaust fiction is based on the foregrounding of the characteristics of fiction as a genre and she does not mean to devalue historical facts: “Until now, most critics of Holocaust fiction [...] have tended to read the fictions as fictionalized histories—that is, as transparencies through which we are able to glimpse the virtually inconceivable and unrepresentable horrors of the Holocaust experience, including the concentration camp. My objective is to restore to these fictions the primary work of fiction itself [...]. Let me be very clear about this: I do not indulge in anything as obscene as Holocaust denial or the kind of revisionist thinking that either reverses the positions of the victims and the victimizers or evens the score. Rather, I employ the same skepticist lens to Holocaust fictions that I apply whenever I read a work of fiction, in order to accord the text its full due as a literary work. By definition a work of fiction is under no obligation whatsoever to stick to the historical facts or, for that matter, external reality. Therefore, by the very fact of its being a fiction— a kind of sanctioned or contractual fabrication or lie—fiction necessarily raises questions concerning the external veracity of its representations. Historical fictions (except for allohistories) very often add certain constraints to this contract” (Budick 1-11). Although possible, her approach to Holocaust fiction does not consider the term Holocaust preceding fiction and I doubt that this is agreeable for the same reason why it is necessary to acknowledge the adjective ‘historical’ in historical fiction, or it would be ‘just’ fiction.

instructions begins reading with a specific purpose, more or less intentionally decided before starting, while in aesthetic reading it is not always the case that an individual starts reading a text aesthetically because they have decided beforehand that they want to be ‘amused’ by it. The reader may start to feel ‘amused’ only after a while because they appreciate the text from an aesthetic and personal point of view, after some time of indecisiveness during which they evaluate their feelings and the aesthetic-emotional reception of the work.

Historical fiction cannot add new historical details, meaning that it cannot integrate information that has not been previously told by witnesses and historians (see Howe 175-99), but it is a genre that enables child readers to emotionally engage with the text through its characters by experiencing empathy and by connecting their emotions to the characters’.³¹⁴ The personal interaction with the novel is the first step towards a personal engagement with the Holocaust, through the acquisition of attitudinal postmemory. Therefore, aesthetic reading is here considered more dynamically as a means through which children emotionally approach the text, rather than as a reading mode with the main aim of causing pleasure. In this perspective, the key elements in the definition of aesthetic reading are the “*relationship with that particular text*” (Rosenblatt 25; emphasis in original) that the reader develops and the “attention to the associations, *feelings*, attitudes, and ideas that these words and their referents arouse within him” (*ibidem*; my emphasis), because they acknowledge that an emotional-personal relationship with the text is possible.

This relationship is central because it makes the establishment of a relationship with the characters, and via the characters, with the Holocaust, possible. The personal engagement with the text represents the aesthetic mode, while the acquisition of attitudinal postmemory, which later develops into behaviour towards others, is the more ‘effere’nt’ part of the reading because it is an action towards the external world that happens afterwards. Consequently, the issue is not how much detailed factual knowledge the genre contains in comparison with nonfiction forms³¹⁵ (a comparison that, inevitably, would be deemed to fail), but how much historical novels are able to cause empathy, through a personal-emotional relationship, and interest in the subject matter.

³¹⁴ As Budick claims, “[...] critics of Holocaust literature [...] have demonstrated how Holocaust fiction and poetry, as well as more historical writing such as memoirs and diaries, have not only augmented our more factual knowledge of the Jewish genocide of the Second World War but also, more importantly, defined the uniqueness of its specific horrors” (4).

³¹⁵ Nonfiction as a ‘model’ genre does not really exist: as claimed in chapter 2.3, it is impossible to convey and represent the Holocaust in its ‘entirety’, despite the rules of “Holocaust etiquette” (Des Pres 218), therefore no amount of information will ever be enough to a comprehensive literary or historiographical representation of the Holocaust.

A young readership is more difficult because they may read historical fiction as a school task, or because they are interested in war and adventure-like stories (see L. Smith 124), or because they are interested in the subject. In the first case, it is likely that they start reading unwillingly, certainly not to be ‘amused’ but because they must; in fact, each of these cases is problematic when the novels represent the Holocaust and all of them could be criticized. If a historical novel is a ‘school task’, this may be considered as diminishing Holocaust relevance to a historical topic to be studied like many others; similarly, if children start reading a novel because they are interested in war-adventure stories, it might be said that the Holocaust is set aside. Interest in the Holocaust may also be understood equivocally as a voyeuristic approach.

As it was claimed in chapter 2.2, it is counterproductive to dismiss the potential of other modes to represent the Holocaust. Since children’s historical fiction is one of these forms, children’s interest should not be considered as suspect, nor the novel as school assignment means that readers would not develop an interest in the subject matter; in fact, this is one of the consequences of ‘good’ historical fiction. Similarly, even if young readers are drawn to historical novels because they are interested in war-adventure stories, this does not prevent them from acquiring attitudinal postmemory and a more genuine interest in the subject, such as in the case of the egocentric viewer of *Rosewood* (see ch. 1).

Strictly linked to the quantity of factual information, the issue of exploitation and abuse of the Holocaust should be discussed by referring to the idea of child readers’ ‘entertainment’ or ‘recreation’. One of the main concerns in Holocaust Studies is the risk of misuses and abuses of history, which explains Pascale Bos’s call for reflecting about one’s own positionality when studying and researching the Nazi genocide (see ch. 2.3). The idea that the horrors of the Holocaust could ‘teach’ lessons is quite common, but it is also criticized by scholars because it may imply that the Holocaust is ‘useful’ and that it had a ‘rational’ scope beyond the destruction of target groups of human beings. It is often thought that if an historical event enters mass culture, it suffers from a process of ‘downsizing’ and ‘vulgarisation’, so as to enable non-expert masses to better ‘understand’ it. According to this view, the mediated experience to which Landsberg refers is understood not at the ethical level, but as a ‘recreative’ activity, which at most gives ‘pleasure’ to the audience. The belittling process and the reference to recreation rather than acquisition of prosthetic memories highlight the potential negative consequences of mass-mediated and acquired memories; however, as previously claimed, it is more useful to consider both the negative and the positive potential of Holocaust representations.

New forms of representation do not necessarily equal a diminishing process and ‘recreation’. As previously discussed, Vice considers Holocaust fiction as another ‘approach’ to the Holocaust, with its own specific characteristics, potential, and limits (see Vice 5). However, given that Holocaust fiction is often considered as ‘suspect’ as its authors (see *ibidem* 4-9; see also Sherman 156-61), children’s historical fiction is likely to be accused in the same way and, considering its additional limits, it could be thought that it ‘exploits’ the Holocaust. This is the reason why I will discuss each of the above criticisms referring to exploitation and abuse by positing positionality, ‘usefulness’, vulgarisation and popularisation, commodification, and ‘pleasure’ in the context of children’s historical fiction.

Firstly, positionality can refer to the author’s or the child reader’s position with respect to the Holocaust and the historical novel. As already discussed in chapter 2.3, non-related authors should be granted access to writing about the Holocaust because their perspective conveyed through their artistic works can help foster memory. Their works represent the artistic elaboration of their own postmemorial position towards the Holocaust, they are means to convey postmemory to young generations, and they enable children to acquire, develop, and then produce and spread their postmemory. Therefore, contemporary young readers occupy the position of (potential) postmemorial individuals towards the Holocaust, and of readers towards historical fiction. If historical novels by non-related authors enable them to develop a personal link to the Holocaust through empathy, rejecting the genre means to deprive children of a means through which they can acquire postmemory. Hindering postmemory acquisition runs counter to the commonly agreed aim to spread Holocaust memory, therefore children’s historical fiction should be accepted.

One may say that there is an overlapping between the idea that the Holocaust may have a kind of ‘usefulness’ and how children’s historical fiction is useful. Of course, the Holocaust was not ‘useful’, nor it happened *so that* today it is possible to teach ethical ‘lessons’ to young generations, have international laws about human rights and the respect to all human beings, or have authors writing historical fiction about it. This is a wrong perspective from which to discuss the ‘usefulness’ issue. It is because the Holocaust happened that contemporary authors and readers are ethically called to remembrance and to foster postmemory, as human beings like those targeted; writing historical novels has an inherent ethical responsibility and it is an attempt to prevent what was done then. ‘Good’ historical fiction representing the Holocaust is a successful form of ethical responsibility to exhort young generations to develop attitudinal postmemory, which later converts into respectful

behaviour towards others. Therefore, it is historical fiction as literary genre that is useful to represent the Holocaust, not the opposite.

Widening the audience that acquires Holocaust postmemory is easily misconceived because it may be associated to a ‘vulgarisation’ of the Holocaust and its memory. Vulgarisation implies a process of degradation and banalization, which is problematic because it also presupposes anesthetization³¹⁶ and a negative kind of simplification of the Holocaust and of its severity. Therefore, increasing the number of postmemorial individuals is tricky. Adopting Landsberg’s positive approach, the process does not necessarily mean vulgarisation because at its basis it implies popularization, that is, enlarging the number of Holocaust memory-holders by means of cultural works that facilitate the audience’s approach to it, which is what historical fiction does.

Another common criticism against widening the audience through a variety of forms and mass cultural technologies is that it causes commodification of the Holocaust. An example of this is Gourevitch’s perspective about the USHMM, which he defines as “just another ‘theme park’” (qtd. in Rothberg, *Traumatic* 251). Since Western countries are consumerist cultures, knowledge and memory are often followed by commodification, as Leavy shows for “contained” (see Leavy, Kindle edition, ch. One) events. However, granting access to knowledge and memory of the Holocaust not only within experts does not inevitably equal commodification because the implied scope may not coincide. On the one hand, commodification involves the exploitation of a historical fact for aims that have little to do with it and its original context; on the other hand, popularization may point to higher aims, such as preserving postmemory. Commodification is a form of abuse of the Holocaust such as it occurs in novels that only make a quick reference to it and do not provide any additional contextual or factual information, or tools to know more. In this case, the author does not have a real interest in representing the subject and it is unlikely that the reference is made for other reasons beyond economic forces and the fact that it is considered ‘due’. ‘Mediators of memory’ (see A. Assmann, “Canon” 97-107), even those made possible by “commodity culture” (Landsberg, “Prosthetic” 150), are not by definition exploitative: they are means, it is the kind of representation conveyed through them that is disrespectful towards the Holocaust. Therefore, children’s historical fiction is not a form of abuse of the Holocaust in its partial representation when its scope is to convey postmemory (and in particular attitudinal postmemory).

³¹⁶ For a discussion of a form of ‘anesthetization’ that contemporary individuals may feel, see Mitschke (431-54). Mitschke calls it “Holocaust fatigue” (440).

The issue of ‘pleasure’ with respect to literary works about the Holocaust has already been discussed in chapter 2.2. When it is considered in relation to children’s historical fiction, it becomes more difficult because scholars’ definitions of the genre imply that it often has plots filled with adventures and action (see L. Smith 125) and that it should provide ‘recreation’, and both these characteristics presuppose a level of ‘pleasant’ reading. Considering Friedländer’s view that facts ‘tell themselves’ (see Broszat and Friedländer 264-300; see also ch. 1), the Holocaust should be considered ‘interesting’ (meaning that it should catch the reader’s attention as human being) without literary artifices. Therefore, all stylistic and narrative interventions are disrespectful and unethical because they imply that the subject matter is not ‘interesting’ enough on its own. However, there is confusion between these ideas and the ‘pleasure’ that child readers may feel while reading historical fiction. They like reading about other peers who encounter difficulties and feel emotions that they are able to understand, and about good/evil dynamics, typical to most children’s literature; these themes are ‘recreation’ for young readers, it is not reading about Holocaust horrors that constitutes ‘entertainment’ or a kind of ‘pleasure’ for them.

Although children’s historical fiction is a useful genre to enable child readers to approach the Holocaust and it does not necessarily imply exploitation and abuse, not all literary works are ‘good’ historical fiction and some can be perceived as disrespectful, for stylistic or narrative reasons. As it will be discussed in chapter 8, Michael Morpurgo’s *Waiting for Anya* (1990) offers a debatable literary representation of the protagonist’s meetings with Jewish people and Nazi soldiers and does not provide readers with any paratextual contextualization or reference to sources. As a consequence, it is unlikely that children will be able to understand the implied references to concentration camps in the novel. Similar criticisms have been made to other genres of children’s literature, for example picture books like *Let the Celebrations Begin!* (1991).³¹⁷

Despite controversial works, authors of children’s historical fiction cannot be blamed to be the first to exploit the subject matter because there had already been examples in literature for older readers, like Wilkomirski’s and Defonseca’s false memoirs (see ch. 2.1). The parallel presence of these literary abuses of the Holocaust is not an excuse for children’s historical fiction authors to be less respectful or to escape the task of ‘steeping’ their mind in the past as required by the genre (see L. Smith 126). Works that represent the Holocaust disrespectfully by offering an insufficiently historically-reliable background, or by making

³¹⁷ See Roberts Baer (378-401) and note 287.

only a quick reference, do not share the aim to promote Holocaust postmemory. In addition to this, they also fail as historical fiction, because they do not balance historical details and literary tools to enable child readers to ‘feel’ the atmosphere of the period (see L. Smith 124), and they are not a good example of remediation of the Holocaust while taking into consideration children’s sensitivity. They are exploitative fiction that claims to be historical fiction.

Kimberley Reynolds has proposed a division of literature for young people in three groups, depending on the empowerment and the space they provide readers with to grow their ‘radical potential’ to change the social status quo.³¹⁸ Although her reflections refer to readers a few years older than the ones considered here and they are not specifically on historical novels, the characteristics of the first group can be used also regarding historical fiction. According to Reynolds, literary works of this group represent “popular forms of adolescent fiction [that] encourage complacency and quiescence” (*Radical* 131) by producing “useful idiots” (*ibidem* 68), young people that refuse to use their power to change the social status quo and do not care about serious social issues (see Pini 87-90). The “chick lit” (Cart 93) developed in the 1990s is an example of disempowering, superficial, and simplistic literary production, which works in favour of “the dominant ideology” (Reynolds, *Radical* 87) because it does not provide readers with socio-political issues to think upon and encourages them to believe that they should accept the society as it is and that they “have no responsibility for it” (*ibidem*).

Historical novels that offer readers a stereotyped representation of war and the Holocaust without providing more information (for example, in paratexts) can be considered in a similar way because they depict an unrealistic version of the past, which does not make children aware of their ethical responsibility and postmemorial role. Their representation may suggest that the Holocaust is something past and that has nothing to do with them. Hunt’s remarks about *Waiting for Anya* as being “inauthentic” (“Fiction” 29) can be interpreted within this framework. Stories with superficial or no prompts to discuss good and evil do a disservice towards history, the Holocaust and its complexity, and also the readers. As Budick claims, “Nazism might be defined as just that attempt to reduce the world into the good guys and the bad guys” (7). Contemporary young generations with attitudinal postmemory have the potential to form a society that overcomes cultural, racial, ethnic prejudices while promoting

³¹⁸ For a discussion of young people’s ‘radical potential’ to change the social status quo through reading children’s literature and for more information regarding the three groups individuated by the scholar, see Reynolds’ study *Radical Children’s Literature* (2007).

socio-cultural ideals that go beyond limited black-and-white perspectives. Therefore, while being respectful of history, historical novels should help young readers to position themselves in a curious, alert position towards the past and should give them the chance to grow by knowing it to improve the present.³¹⁹ As a consequence, historical novels would fail to convey attitudinal postmemory.

Even though it is important to acknowledge the presence of controversial works, there are indeed good examples of children's historical fiction with the potential to convey Holocaust postmemory. Novels like Gleitzman's *Once* series are 'mediators of memory' (see A. Assmann, "Canon" 97-107) that propose attitudinal postmemory while not renouncing to provide children with the elements of fiction and adventure that they need. A successful approach to history, neither too didactic nor excessively privileging fiction, is not a form of abuse because it enables young readers to 'feel' the atmosphere of the past without perceiving reading as a school task; consequently, the 'pleasure' in reading does not hinder the ability to 'feel' the historical period, on the contrary this is enhanced and, in turn, it facilitates the transmission of attitudinal postmemory.

The concepts of exploitation and abuse are relevant also in relation to the third criticism against children's historical fiction representing the Holocaust, since the process of widening the audience who retains Holocaust memory through historical fiction is often connected with the idea of simplification. To better discuss these interrelated issues, it is useful to reflect upon the kinds of simplification that are possible in the children's historical fiction: it may concern the amount of information given in a novel, the level of details when this information is given, or the means used to give it. Considering historical novels concerning the Holocaust, the three kinds can be delineated as follows: the amount of historically accurate information about the Holocaust that a novel provides readers with, the details of atrocities and horrors introduced into the story, the literary (narrative and stylistic) strategies used to convey historical information.

Inevitably, the amount and detail of historical contents have already been discussed in this chapter in relation to the criticisms posed to children's historical fiction within the history-fiction dialogue. Concerning simplification, a supplementary reflection refers to the specific controversial themes and details that are usually considered 'unsuitable' for child

³¹⁹ Considering this, it is basilar that young people know about the presence (and persistence) of anti-Semitism in Europe well before World War II, a knowledge that should be offered in schools rather than historical fiction. Bickford, Schuette, and Rich's examination of the presence of information about Anti-Semitism and the history of Anti-Semitism in Europe by analysing fiction and nonfiction at the same time does not consider qualities and limits of each genre (see Bickford III et al. 4-50).

readers, like death and concentration camps. Adults commonly think that children's literature should spare young readers getting in contact with harsh realities that could traumatize them,³²⁰ not only with reference to the Holocaust, but also to general themes like violence and death.³²¹ However, this is true only in part.

The Holocaust representation rules of the 1980s stated that “[r]epresentations of the Holocaust shall be as accurate and faithful as possible to the facts and conditions of the event, without change or manipulation for any reason—artistic reasons included” (Des Pres 217). As claimed in chapter 2.3, also literary works for older readers cannot represent the Holocaust in its ‘entirety’ and cannot convey all historiographical details available today. Therefore, this is an equally misplaced expectation for children's historical fiction. Paradoxically, the idea that just one novel can convey the Holocaust in its ‘entirety’ is dangerous, because it would imply that after reading the work the individual thinks that he has gained a comprehensive representation of the Holocaust and that he does not need to read anything else because he “feel[s] that exposure to just one of these constitutes an adequate encounter” (Mitschke 440), which is the premise to “Holocaust fatigue” (*ibidem*).

Although it is usually considered among the genre's disadvantages, the impossibility to convey an exhaustive representation of the Holocaust reveals the magnitude and severity of the historical fact, which are perceived through the inevitable fragmentary representation by children's authors. Each literary work for children, from fiction to nonfiction, represents or focuses on some aspects of the Holocaust so that it is possible to trace a linear ‘spectrum’, where at one extreme there are works telling stories far from concentration camps, and at the opposite extreme there are narratives representing them. Works nearer to the first extreme tell readers about being a refugee in England or being caught by Nazis in France like in Judith Kerr's *When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit* (1971) and Marilyn Sachs's *A Pocketful of Seeds* (1973), both based on real events (see Sherman 158); novels daring to talk about concentration camps propose first-hand sources, like Milton Meltzer's *Never to Forget* (1976), or they try to represent them by using fiction based on witnesses' works and words, like Chester Aaron in *Gideon* (1982), where “[t]he Nazi system of extermination in the ‘killing’ camps is described in full detail [and t]he author uses eyewitness texts as sources” (Sherman 161).³²²

³²⁰ Regarding children's literature about Nazism and the Holocaust and the ways it spares child readers, see for example Bosmajian's monograph *Sparing the Child* (2002).

³²¹ More on this will be discussed later in the chapter.

³²² Sherman also discusses “*I Never Saw Another Butterfly*, a well-known collection of art and poetry by the children of Camp Terezin, the Nazi ‘show camp,’ [as] a tribute to the dedicated teachers who enabled the

In Sherman's considerations, concentration camps and the representation of their horrors become the centre of evil in children's fiction and nonfiction: it is impossible and unethical to represent their 'inside', unless the depiction is made by including witnesses' accounts, or by elaborating them like in *Gideon*. Authors' attitude towards them is evidence in favour of this view: among the non-related writers here considered, only Jane Yolen tells a story partially from inside a concentration camp in *The Arithmetic* and *Mapping the Bones*. John Boyne and Morris Gleitzman try to do the same, but the depiction of a concentration camp and the story told from 'inside' constitute a shorter part of the novel if compared to Yolen's. Boyne's and Gleitzman's representation adopt distancing techniques so as not to disrespect witnesses: Boyne's protagonist, a German child, enters the concentration camp only for a brief period that is not comparable at all with the experience of his Jewish friend, whereas Gleitzman's character enters it only after the liberation.

Although not all historical novels try to represent the inside of concentration camps, or offer highly detailed descriptions of their horrors, this is not a kind of negative simplification: instead, it is a necessarily fragmented representation. It is only through the reading of more than one historical novel, many witnesses' accounts, education at school, nonfiction works, and other materials, that children can have a better view on the complexity of the Holocaust. Therefore, the partial representation of the Holocaust in children's historical fiction should be considered in a more 'positive', or at least productive, way than it usually is because the genre is part of a greater dialogue between generations, witnesses and non-related people, forms and genres promoting Holocaust memory. In this way, it could be considered an encouragement towards the acquisition of a broader awareness of the traumatic event, in turn fostering civic awareness as well active civic conscience.

The third suggested form of simplification concerns the use of literary strategies to convey historical information or, as it may be criticized, to shift away from the task to represent the harshest details of the Holocaust. As Sherman noted, historiographical material can be included, such as quotations and documents (see Sherman 160-61). However, authors of children's historical fiction also use other stylistic and narrative strategies to enable readers to 'feel' the past. For example, rather than through direct description, death and violence can

children to express what was in their hearts. A very special book, it is most accessible to young readers through teachers" (160). As the scholar notes, "[f]ew mainstream publishers bring the full horror before young people's eyes" (*ibidem*), but she does not believe that fiction is able to convey it because "[a] writer would have to have the literary talents of a Dante and the artistic genius of a Hieronymus Bosch to do justice to the subject" (*ibidem*). Her thought is similar to Howe's position in claiming that "if a child is old enough, or interested enough, and needs to know, he or she should read eyewitness reports. To write a concentration camp novel, so that children, or young adults, may be able to read about those facts, seems a contradiction in terms, and nothing is gained by substituting an invention for the truth" (*ibidem* 161).

be told with framed “informational gaps” (Kokkola, *Representing* 25), corresponding to silence. These help readers to picture what is implied because the latter are enabled to ‘fill in’ the gaps thanks to the surrounding information (see *ibidem* 25-27). Therefore, these gaps are not meant to ‘simplify’ the author’s task by making him or her avoid a specific detail, they balance the need to tell with the children’s coping skills. In picture books, there are distancing strategies like those adopted by Roberto Innocenti in *Rose Blanche* (1985) and other stories that work in the same way (see L. Myers, “What” 33-39): they show, but not ‘too much’. Inferences, gaps, and ‘safe’ distance techniques are a way to (partially) represent atrocities and to avoid the risk to traumatize children. Similarly, more metaphorical strategies provide young readers with images that are likely to be more familiar to them, such as the depiction of Nazis as the Bogeyman (see Kokkola 132-65).

Rejecting a detailed, graphic description of Holocaust horrors cannot be reduced to a negative kind of ‘simplification’. It is inherently relevant and influential that the main readership is constituted by children; if it were not so, there would be no differences in the characteristics and expectations of the genre regardless of the readers’ age. Narrative strategies, such as the use of metaphors or animals to talk about death, or make it happen “off-stage” (Seelinger Trites 118),³²³ are not a banalization of the Holocaust as historical fact because they are not proposed with this aim: they try to reach a balance between respect for the Holocaust and the need to represent it in a way that is accessible to children. They are also part of historical fiction as a genre, because they belong to the fictional – meaning literary – tools it can use. Adopting similar techniques supports Holocaust memory because if child readers are traumatized by historical novels, they are likely to refuse to read and know further about the subject matter; therefore, Holocaust memory would be hindered.

The issues of simplification regarding the amount of historically accurate information about the Holocaust, the inclusion of details of atrocities, and the use of literary strategies all concern the reduction of information quantity, not the downsizing of the severity and magnitude of the Holocaust. Therefore, children’s historical fiction does not offer a

³²³ As Seelinger Trites claims in *Disturbing the Universe* (2000), death is a theme common both to children’s and young adult literature, but it is represented in very different ways: in the first case, death is off-stage, meaning that the child reader does not see the moment in which it happens but its consequences, while, in the latter case, it is usually presented more directly and can happen at various levels, including the metaphorical, physical, moral, etc. The scholar proposes the idea that the different representation of death coincides with different sociological aims: for children, it is a way to perceive themselves as individuals separated from their parents, while for adolescents it has the metaphoric meaning of growth into adulthood. However, in children’s historical fiction representing the Holocaust, death may happen off-stage because it may be too traumatizing for the implied readers, considering the previous reflections, and it is debatable that has the same sociological function.

simplification, meaning banalization, *per se* of the historical fact because of the readership's age.

Simplification is commonly linked to the concepts of fictionalization and trivialization. As Vice notes, “[t]o judge by what many critics have to say, to write Holocaust fictions is tantamount to making a fiction of the Holocaust” (1). Fictionalization is feared because it is thought that, unless a novel provides enough historical information, child readers will be misguided to think that the Holocaust is not ‘true’ like the fictional elements in the story. Inevitably, this is a major issue and it is necessary to differentiate between fictionalization and trivialization. ‘Fictionalize’ means “to write a book or make a film about a true story, but changing some of the details, characters, etc.” (“fictionalize”, accessed 08.11.2021),³²⁴ which is acceptable only in part when referred to the Holocaust. If ‘changing some of the details’ means simplification in terms of reduced quantity of information, this is to be expected; however, it is unethical if this means to alter historical truths so as to offer a ‘more compelling’ story or a misleading representation of what really happened, in fact risking to turn into revisionist perspectives. As already claimed, literary strategies should be used in historical fiction to enhance the reader’s chances to ‘feel’ the historical period, not to exploit the readers’ limited knowledge to misinform them by proposing a form of abuse of the Holocaust. The combination of historical elements and the author’s imaginary, non-anachronistic, sensible details, is the key characteristic of historical fiction as a genre and ‘approach’ (see Vice 5) and it represents a specific quality, if they exhort readers’ empathy.

It is not possible to suggest a definitive answer to the question whether children would think that the Holocaust is not ‘real’ like the added fictional details because it is impossible to foresee the audience’s response (see Landsberg, *Prosthetic* 25-140; see also ch. 3). Given that the suggested age for the works here considered is late childhood and early adolescence, young readers presumably have some knowledge of the Holocaust thanks to education at school and media. Therefore, their reading of historical novels is surrounded by other sources of information and it is likely that they do not run this risk. However, historical fiction cannot count only on external information that child readers might have access to before starting a novel. As previously discussed, the inclusion of some kind of paratext is highly useful because in this way readers are provided with tools inside the novel that prevent them from thinking that true historical details and the Holocaust are not ‘real’. Writers who do not provide paratexts, or who do not make use of other means to explain historical contents, do

³²⁴ Definitions to which it is referred to are from *Oxford Learner’s Dictionaries*.

not pay due attention to their huge ethical responsibility. They may even be accused of purposely writing a blurred representation that, as said, is a form of abuse of the Holocaust; such kind of writing is also an exploitation of children's inferior socio-cultural position, because adult authors influence them with their writing.³²⁵

Since fictionalization as 'addition of fictional constituents' is comprised in the definition of the genre, it should not be considered inherently negative. At its opposite there is trivialization, which is an unethical and disrespectful approach to the Holocaust by means of banalization, disparagement, and arrogance. Writers offering a trivialized representation of the subject matter do not aim to foster Holocaust postmemory and they are not even sufficiently knowledgeable about the past to be entitled to write historical fiction. If literary imagination goes against those who suffered and the Holocaust, then authors must find another way to present the subject matter, or leave it.

Simplification can also be discussed with regard to readers and marketing strategies. As already claimed,³²⁶ if children read historical novels representing the Holocaust because they are interested in adventure-like plots, this is an issue that involves publishing houses rather than children. Publishers that market historical novels concerning the Holocaust are likely to simplify the content, or the historical references, to war stories, adventure novels, and the like to have more readers. This kind of simplification is instantiated in two ways: they avoid to make a clear reference to the Holocaust while highlighting the action-filled plot and its suspense, or they include highly stereotypical references to the Holocaust. In both cases, simplification has to do with editorial and marketing policies.

Covers are a good example to discuss simplification in the above terms since it is very common to find a child image that refers to the young protagonist(s) and one or more stereotyped written or visual reference(s). For example, there may be lines stating that the novel is based on real facts, or referring to the suspense-action element of the plot. Covers usually represent recurrently used symbols that, albeit being historically true, inevitably simplify the subject matter (and evil) to a stereotypical visual representation. The most common symbols on children's novels are the yellow star, barbed wire, and something referring to Nazis, like an eagle, a swastika, or the colors of the party flag. Symbolic reference may be repeated in written form: phrasings like 'A novel of the Holocaust' try to 'prove' that

³²⁵ On the author's influence on children's reading, see for example Hunt, "Fiction Writing History: Truth, Illusion and Ideology in English Language Historical Fiction for Children" (22-31).

³²⁶ Picture books or other illustrated novels for younger children need a separate discussion because there are many other issues involved, such as the canon and reactions to the canon in depicting images about the Holocaust, death, and atrocities, and the presence of one or more mediators (parents and adults in general) who decide(s) the books to read and when to read them.

visual symbols are not being used inappropriately, to catch the reader's attention, or to advertise the plot.

The repeated use of a limited number of symbols can be understood in similar terms to Hirsch's discussion about the 'obsessive' use (see Hirsch, *Generation* 107) of some Holocaust photos (for example, the Warsaw child) so that, eventually, the initial context and original content are lost (see *ibidem* 107-28). Although publishing houses use visual and written strategies to attract readers, their invitation to 'guess' the plot from the book cover is dangerous, because it negatively simplifies the author's own representation in the historical novel to 'another story' about the Holocaust, similar to all others. Therefore, these techniques may develop 'Holocaust fatigue' in children's historical fiction (see ch. 2.3).

The fourth main criticism against historical novels representing the Holocaust concerns the issue of authorship, readership, and subject appropriateness. Who can write historical fiction about the Holocaust? Who reads it? Is the Holocaust an 'appropriate' subject for child readers?

In fact, most of these questions have been answered in general terms in chapter 1. Authorship of works about the Holocaust has been considered in terms of relatedness to the historical fact (see chapters 2.2-2.3): when their scope is to foster postmemory, non-related writers' novels do not diminish the relevance of the Holocaust, or witnesses and descendants' invaluable contribution, and they should be considered as an additional perspective. Rather than being criticized for their limits in comparison with other literary genres, historical novels for children should (also) be valued in terms of scope and of how they convey attitudinal postmemory.

Like authorship, the readership issue was discussed in chapter 4. Children can read the historical novels analysed here on their own because they are old enough not to need an adult acting as mediator. Since the implied readers are independent, the issue of subject appropriateness is especially relevant. As already noted, adults usually spare children entering in contact with graphic descriptions of death, violence, and similar tough topics. Even if death is represented in children's literature, it is commonly claimed that the Holocaust is different because it represents human death caused by other human beings, therefore it is too shocking and traumatizing for young readers.

Children do 'know' what death means (see Grilli, "Letteratura per l'infanzia" academic course); it is different to say that children and adults have a different view on death because of their age and amount of knowledge and to claim that children do not know what death is. Death is represented in what is considered to be the best children's literature: for

example, in *Duck, Death and the Tulip* (2008) by Wolf Erlbruch, who won the Andersen Prize, or in the 2009 Newbery Medal winner *The Graveyard Book* (2008) by Neil Gaiman. It may be claimed that in historical fiction representing the Holocaust death should be represented as it was, meaning that there should not be metaphors ‘covering’ dead people and that the historically abhorring conditions should be included. As previously discussed in this chapter, historical fiction presupposes the use of literary strategies, including metaphors, to represent the Holocaust. If there are excessively graphic descriptions, readers could be shocked in a way that distances them from the Holocaust, and at the same time references to death cannot be avoided to convey a respectful representation. Authors use literary techniques to combine the two aspects and they usually provide child readers with scenes of death that show its irrationality and the grief felt by the characters.

Since the implied readers learn about the Holocaust at school between late childhood and early adolescence, they are likely to see photos, watch documentaries, and visit museums where human death among all the degradation imposed by Nazis is not spared. Therefore, historical fiction is surrounded by many different sources, each of which presents the subject in a specific form. Considering that death and other tough topics are present in children’s literature³²⁷ and the fact that “[i]n children’s literature, too, what happened to the Jews of Europe was considered appropriate reading material for the young” (Roskies 178) even before the 1961 trial, the Holocaust should be accepted as an appropriate subject for the readers here considered.

To conclude, writing children’s historical fiction about the Holocaust in order to convey attitudinal postmemory is not a form of abuse. Historical novels should be evaluated for how they promote, provide space for, or reinforce the development of postmemory together with how they ‘point at’ the Holocaust (see ch. 2.3). Rather than by focusing only on its flaws, children’s historical fiction should be acknowledged as a ‘mediator of memory’ (see A. Assmann, “Canon” 97-107) that is unable to convey a representation of the Holocaust in its ‘entirety’ as other mediators cannot.

The main expectations of the two wide areas of study that this kind of literary works combines, historical fiction and Holocaust Studies, are maintained. The didactic scope of the genre is fulfilled because child readers are enabled to ‘feel’ the period and it partially shifts from teaching historical details to teaching another form of behaviour. This aim works in combination with the fact that children enjoy reading about good/evil dynamics (see L.

³²⁷ For example, in ‘problem novels’, discussed by Campbell in *Campbell’s Scoop: Reflections on Young Adult Literature* (2010).

Myers, “What” 32) to convey attitudinal postmemory that contributes to Holocaust remembrance. Therefore, there is not a paradox between children’s literature and the Holocaust; the paradox is to expect that children’s historical fiction can offer a comprehensive representation of the Holocaust or in the same modes as literature for older readers or nonfiction do. Despite some controversial, superficial references to the Holocaust like in Morpurgo’s *Waiting for Anya*, there are literary examples that successfully balance story, history, and the tough task to represent the Holocaust in a way that promotes the development of a personal relationship to it (see ch. 8).

Chapter 7

Representing Evil and the Role of Empathy

Before focusing on the case studies, it is necessary to briefly reflect upon the representation of evil, which is inseparable from the subject matter given that the Holocaust is considered “the master symbol of evil” (Alexander, “Social Construction” 49; see also ch. 1) today, at least in Western countries. Representing evil, and the many correlated issues, constitutes one of the major issues in Holocaust representation (see chapters 1-2). For example, authors must find a way to depict the magnitude of evil while avoiding to downsize it and they must carefully balance the narrative space given to perpetrators, the focus, and the kind of description they offer so as not to shift attention from the victims. Indeed, the representation of perpetrators evokes concerns regarding the right to speak because giving voice to them may be considered unethical, almost a literary way to allow them to state their thoughts whereas the victims are twice denied this possibility (historically, and in the literary remediation of the past).

Representing evil embodied in Nazi perpetrators also concerns the historical-philosophical debate about the uniqueness of the Holocaust in comparison with other mass killings, since it is inevitably linked to a discussion about the kind of evil: was the evil committed during the Holocaust unique? How is it worse with respect to what was done during other genocides? In these terms, evil is a constant presence in the definition of the Holocaust and its uniqueness (see ch. 2.1) and, for this reason, there is an ever-present double risk to attenuate the magnitude and severity of the Holocaust or to disrespect victims of other mass killings. However, in this dissertation the main point to discuss is the representation of evil in relation to postmemory, rather than differentiating between ‘grades’ of evil to form a hierarchy of mass killings (see ch. 2.3; cf. Rothberg, *Multidirectional* 9). As discussed in chapter 3, Hirsch claims that postmemory is a concept that may well be applied also to generations born after other mass killings (see Hirsch, “Mourning” 416), and this may be considered an indirect call for avoiding a differentiation between people who are weighted with Nazi evil and postgenerations oppressed by ‘non-Nazi’ evil of other mass killings.³²⁸

Since representational problems arise in Holocaust fiction for adult readers, it is likely that the problem is even greater in children’s literature, considering the readers’ limited knowledge of history and literary techniques. Some recent novels for an older readership

³²⁸ ‘Non-Nazi’ here refers to general evil perpetrated during other mass killings by other culprits; for example, ‘Non-Nazi’ could be substituted by ‘Western’ (towards Aboriginals and Native Americans) or ‘French’ (towards Algeria). It does not intend to separate Nazis from other perpetrators in the sense that the first are on the top of an ‘evil hierarchy’ in mass killings.

daringly approach the representation issue by picturing Nazis as evil human beings rather than (literally) inhuman monsters, as Joanne Pettitt discusses in her study on ‘perpetrator fiction’.³²⁹ Pettitt deconstructs the risks of writing about perpetrators by claiming that they should not be represented as monsters: in this way, readers are enabled to realise that evil is inside all individuals³³⁰ and they cannot distance themselves from Nazi evil by thinking that it was done by monsters that have nothing to do with them because they are not human beings like the audience. To avoid representing perpetrators as monsters allows readers to acquire awareness that evil can be part of the ‘human nature’ even though it leads to cruel deeds which are, in fact, inhumane; at the same time, it emphasises the inhumane nature of Nazi and of their brutal actions. According to Pettitt’s theory, if Nazis are presented as human beings doing monstrous actions, this is worse than describing them as monsters doing horrible things, because this is what monsters usually do in literature since it is part of their essence and definition (see *ibidem* chapters 1-5). Therefore, there is nothing ‘exceptional’ if a monster does evil deeds, whereas a human being performing the same is undoubtedly monstrous.

Alexander’s discourse on the social construction of the Holocaust as symbol of evil and its use can be understood in similar terms. The ‘engorging’ process (see Alexander, *Trauma* 77; see also Alexander, “Social Construction” 46-47) that the Holocaust has undergone may be conceived like the ‘monsterization’ of Nazi perpetrators. By constantly referring to it, even in contexts that have little to do with the historical fact, or by using it in a symbolical-rhetorical way, what is at stake is not only a form of abuse. There is also a risk in such a recurring representation of the ‘unique’ evil of the Holocaust in that it might reach a point of ‘abstraction’ that makes people consider it as something separated from real individuals. It may risk to become an (almost mythical) example of extreme evil that has nothing to do with contemporary society – as if it just happened rather than being thought, planned, and realized by human beings with the same potential for evil as current people. Therefore, abstraction and avoiding to define perpetrators as evil *people* do not seem useful to convey the severity of the Holocaust, historical knowledge, and memory through literature.

However, this seems to apply mostly to narratives for older readers. Lydia Kokkola’s research on Holocaust representations proves that in many works of children’s literature the Bogeyman, the classical monster of children stories, is often used to epitomise the Nazi evil (Kokkola, *Representing* 130-44). Therefore, perpetrators are often shown according to representational standards and stereotypes that make them contemporary Bogeymen of flat

³²⁹ Pettitt’s study is *Perpetrators in Holocaust Narratives* (2017).

³³⁰ A position that recalls Hannah Arendt’s concept of the banality of evil.

villains.³³¹ Indeed, there is evidence of this trend also in the novels herein considered, especially when the author adopts a fairy tale-style literary frame (for example, in Lois Lowry's *Number the Stars*).

As discussed in chapter 6, good historical fiction is supposed to meet two expectations: teaching basic historical knowledge and entertaining child readers. In the novels here considered, the aim of conveying attitudinal postmemory is reached through an informed narrative and literary devices both known and appreciated by children, like fairy-tale style and encounters with evil without the presence of adults. Also, some storytelling techniques that may be unknown to children but that can be recognized by literary scholars do convey to readers the feeling that the separation between good and evil is not always clear and it is upon us to decide how to behave towards others; for example, this happens in the *Once* series, when the protagonist meets both Jewish children and members of the Hitler Youth in a bombed village and must decide whom to help. In this case, what is most relevant is the problematization of evil that calls for the reader's active involvement with what he or she is reading, rather than his or her ability to identify the narrative techniques adopted.

Discussing the problem that children do not have extensive knowledge of literary devices, Kokkola notes that children's literature about the Holocaust uses silence both as narrative and informative technique that prevents readers from being traumatized by the harshest realities of the Nazi genocide. In her opinion, such framed 'gaps' – missing direct, graphic representations surrounded by bits of historically accurate information – are a suitable storytelling device to guide children towards the acquisition of the desired knowledge through inference (Kokkola, *Representing* 25-46). Following her reflections, framed silence is supposedly the best way to tell the Holocaust and its evil to children. However, to claim the relevance of silence Kokkola takes into consideration a wide range of works, from picture books to novels, but children's literary and deductive skills vary depending on their age. The same can be said of the kind of relationships they have: during infancy, babies do not perceive themselves as separate, independent human beings, and they establish a positive relationship with food; in childhood, children's relationships are limited to the restricted family circle and

³³¹ A reason may be that children have limited historical knowledge and literary skills that do not enable them to understand the author's depiction of a perpetrator's point of view as an adult reader can (see Kokkola, *Representing* 129-49); thus, they would risk to misunderstand the narrative scope and even to 'sympathize' with Nazis. Despite the scholar does not specifically discuss Nazi representation, Emer O'Sullivan provides a comprehensive study of the representation and perception of Germans in British fiction for children before, during, and after the two World Wars (see O'Sullivan 77-89).

a few, close friendships,³³² while during adolescence they widen their contacts by adding more friends (at school, in recreational activities, etc), sentimental relationships, and involvement with the society and its institutions (see Seelinger Trites 21-53). Therefore, establishing, testing, abandoning and forming again relationships is important in children's development as individuals and as future members of the society.

The novels considered in this dissertation are marketed for children aged in-between childhood and pre-adolescence (see ch. 4), when relationships with peers are highly relevant; dialogue with other children, with similar or different character, is common; and when distinction between good and evil is comprised in a developing sense of moral and ethics. Therefore, the personal-emotional link that children should develop to acquire attitudinal postmemory is constructed via the characters' relationships with peers, adults, and evil, just as readers experience in their life. Although I do not wish to challenge Kokkola's conclusions regarding Holocaust representation – framed gaps are a compelling and useful expedient for authors – I am convinced that works for the above reading age should in fact focus also on emotions and relationships and not simply on framed gaps to convey postmemory because it enables children to feel nearer to what is being told. Kokkola's claims regarding the use and the inferential interpretation of framed gaps are possible for a scholar (or, generally speaking, an average-informed adult), but it cannot be taken for granted that child readers will reach the same conclusions without the help of an adult.³³³ It is not possible to foresee the audience's response to a cultural product (see Landsberg, *Prosthetic* 25-140; see also ch. 3) because the consumer is never passive (see Landsberg, "Prosthetic" 150-51; see also ch. 1) and his or her personal life and experiences influence the response. Since one cannot be sure of what children will understand by reading framed silences, it is advisable to make reference not to information given *within* the text (around the 'gaps'), but to situations and emotions *outside* the text that could be familiar to child readers because it is highly likely that they have experienced them in their life. For example, they may know what it feels to quarrel with peers, or to be worried for someone whom they loved when he or she is sick.

Moreover, since the Holocaust is a historical fact that happened outside child readers' living memory (see Adamson xix-xx; see also ch. 6) which cannot be told in its entirety (see

³³² On children's relationships, see for example "Social and Emotional Development" (accessed 15.06.2021), Morin (accessed 15.06.2021), and Trentacosta and Izard (accessed 15.06.2021).

³³³ According to some scholars (for example, as discussed in the seminar "Theory of Childhood Studies" by Prof Karin Lesnik-Oberstein at the CIRCL, University of Reading), it is impossible even to know what the child really thinks because all people around him or her (from the author to the critic) are outsiders to his or her mind; even if they believe that they can 'read' it and get acquainted with his or her thoughts, or deduce them, this is a delusion.

ch. 2.3), historical fiction should make reference to the outside reality of children's own historical present so as not to 'frame' the Holocaust within the boundaries of the story, limiting it inside the text. On the contrary, the genre has the potentialities to enable a web of connections between the Nazi genocide and the readers' own life and time. For example, they may be able to link it with other persecutions occurring in the world and about which they hear in the news. In this way, the Holocaust becomes "resonant" (Hirsch, *Generation* 33) within the individual's historical present and experiences rather than being a subject whose skilful literary depiction does not use the potentials of creative writing to weave history into the personal lives of non-related people.³³⁴

Empathy brings the Holocaust 'outside' historical fiction and, at the same time, it accompanies young readers 'inside' the text. Children start developing socio-emotional skills from their infancy: at 6 months of age babies "[c]an [already] respond to other people's emotions by crying, smiling, or laughing" (Trentacosta and Izard, accessed 15.06.2021). These skills become more complex as they grow (see Morin, accessed 15.06.2021). Emotional development in dialogue with one's own socio-cultural context continues even after adolescence, since it is defined as the "emergence of the experience, expression, understanding, and regulation of emotions from birth and the growth and change in these capacities throughout childhood, adolescence, and adulthood [...] occur[ring] in conjunction with neural, cognitive, and behavioral development" (Trentacosta and Izard, accessed 15.06.2021).

Six to twelve-months-old infants "gain rudimentary cognitive and memory capacities, they begin to express particular emotions based on context" (*ibidem*) and between 18 months and 2 years they "[b]ecome interested in having other kids around" (Morin, accessed 15.06.2021) when they play, even though they may not interact with them yet in "cooperative play" (*ibidem*). In this period, toddlers develop "[t]he ability to differentiate the self from others [that] promotes basic empathetic behaviour and moral understanding. By the end of the second year of life, toddlers respond to negative signals from others, and they have specific emotional responses to their own negative actions" (Trentacosta and Izard, accessed 15.06.2021). In early childhood (pre-school age), children acquire the ability to differentiate

³³⁴ Discussing Roberto Innocenti's works about war, Lindsay Myers claims: "Battles between good and evil, whether real or imaginary, are a fundamental part of the human psyche, [...] and there is little doubt that a large part of the appeal of [...] texts [depicting battles] stems from the manner in which they enable children to become intellectually involved in issues of warfare ordinarily reserved for adults. But what should we be teaching children about war? [...] Roberto Innocenti, winner of the Hans Christian Andersen Illustrator Medal in 2008, firmly believes that *children should be afforded access to history and, more importantly, that the child's place in history should be acknowledged*" (L. Myers, "What" 32-33; my emphasis).

their own emotions and family is the fundamental source of information and guidance to understand them (see *ibidem*; see also Morin, accessed 15.06.2021). Positive emotions are the first to be recognized; then, children “begin to distinguish negative emotions such as sadness, anger, and fear from each other [and] to recognize these emotions in facial expressions[;] [...] as they enter middle childhood, they begin to understand situational determinants of emotions” (Trentacosta and Izard, accessed 15.06.2021). However, family interactions are not the only guide to learn “emotional self-regulation” (*ibidem*): relationships with other children have a relevant role because “[c]hildren gain emotional understanding and the *capacity for empathetic and helping behaviour* from well-regulated emotional exchanges with peers” (*ibidem*; my emphasis). These acquired skills are further developed during middle and late-childhood, since older children understand that a situation can cause or be linked to multiple, mixed emotions, an acknowledgment that parallels their cognitive ability to grasp various aspects of the same situation (see *ibidem*).³³⁵ This is evident, for example, in the learning of “emotional display rules” (*ibidem*), which imply to show an emotion even if what is felt is different, as in the case of reacting to an undesired gift, a skill that parallels the recognition of “what consequences their actions may have for others” (*ibidem*).³³⁶

Thus, at the child readers’ suggested age for the novels here analysed, emotions (the readers’ and their peers’ as well) and a sense of right and wrong begin to emerge as very important elements, since children “[a]re more aware of others’ perceptions[,] [m]ay complain about friendships and other kids’ reactions[,] [w]ant to behave well, but aren’t as attentive to directions[,] [t]ry to express feelings with words, but may resort to aggression when upset” (Morin, accessed 15.06.2021).

Quite importantly, “peer friendships start to become very important in [children’s] social and emotional development” (“Social and Emotional Development”, accessed 15.06.2021): for example, children prefer playing with peers rather than alone and thus learn to cooperate, also in group activities that pursue a common interest; they establish lasting friendships, experience peer pressure, and talk a lot with peers (see *ibidem*). Children also become more able to voice subtle emotions and more critical of what they do and how, they value what others think of them and if adults approve them, they start developing their own point of view, which may differ

³³⁵ This ability is called “decentration” (Trentacosta and Izard, accessed 15.06.2021).

³³⁶ However, “[d]isplay rules are used judiciously, and the likelihood of suppressing negative emotion depends on a number of factors, including the child’s gender, the likely recipients of the expression, the specific context, and the child’s cultural milieu” (Trentacosta and Izard, accessed 15.06.2021).

from their parents’, and they want to be more ‘adult’ and have more responsibilities (see *ibidem*).³³⁷

The relevance of peer friends and their opinions continues and intensifies in pre-adolescence (Morin, accessed 15.06.202) and continues afterwards, since individuals tend to spend more time with friends and less with their family (see Trentacosta and Izard, accessed 15.06.2021). Young adolescents have an increased experience of negative emotions that parallels their improved skills for abstract thinking and, again, successful peer relationships are fundamental for a correct and balanced emotional and psychological growth:

As adolescents grapple with increasingly abstract and complex social problems, they often seek a stable peer group as the context for emotional management. Positive peer relationships emerge from the recognition of equality and the tendency to offer emotional support. [...] Overall, positive and supportive peer relations during adolescence promote healthy emotional development and mental health as the adolescent enters adulthood. (*ibidem*)

Since young people start to experience emotions and to acquire socio-relational skills as early as during their first months of age, one may say that they can easily associate the fictional characters’ experiences with those that they have personally lived thanks to the emotions that both felt. This means that the relationship between readers’ and characters’ emotions is enabled by empathy.

However, empathy is far from being a unanimous concept. Recent studies in the social sciences, psychology, and neuroimaging have posed the problematic issue of the lack of a unique and shared definition of empathy.³³⁸ For example, Daniel Batson differentiates between eight phenomena that are commonly defined ‘empathy’ (or with other words), which “are related to one another, but they are not elements, aspects, facets, or components of a single thing that is empathy[;] [on the contrary,] each is a conceptually distinct, stand-alone psychological state” (Batson 3). The scholar defines them as:

Concept 1: Knowing Another Person’s Internal State, Including His or Her Thoughts and Feelings [...]

Concept 2: Adopting the Posture or Matching the Neural Responses of an Observed Other [...]

³³⁷ Notably, some of the suggestions provided to parents to care for their children from eight years old onwards highlight the importance of relationships with peers and the acknowledgement of emotions. For example: “Talk with your child about respecting others and helping others, thereby developing a sense of empathy and understanding[,] [e]ncourage your child to think about possible consequences before acting[,] [...] [t]alk to your child about what to do when others are disrespectful or unkind[,] [...] [h]elp your child develop their sense of right or wrong. Caution them about risky things friends might try to coax them to do” (“Social and Emotional Development”, accessed 15.06.2021).

³³⁸ For example, Batson (3-15), Decety and Cowell (525-37), and Harrison (255-88) have proposed different definitions of empathy, depending on their specific area of studies.

- Concept 3: Coming to Feel as Another Person Feels [...]
- Concept 4: Intuiting or Projecting Oneself into Another's Situation [...]
- Concept 5: Imagining How Another Is Thinking and Feeling [...]
- Concept 6: Imagining How One Would Think and Feel in the Other's Place [...]
- Concept 7: Feeling Distress at Witnessing Another Person's Suffering [...]
- Concept 8: Feeling for Another Person Who Is Suffering [...].³³⁹ (*ibidem* 4-8)

Even though the scholar admits that the differences between the concepts above are “sometimes subtle” (*ibidem* 11) and that individuals are likely to be acquainted with most of them because they are “familiar experiences” (*ibidem*), nonetheless he considers this distinction necessary not only because they are different emotional activities, but also because it helps “to understand these phenomena and how they relate to one another [...] to advance our understanding of how it is possible to know the internal states of others and to respond with sensitivity to their suffering” (*ibidem* 12).³⁴⁰

Agreeing with Batson's distinction, Jean Decety and Jason M. Cowell call for the separation between empathy and morality and they propose an understanding of empathy that comprises three elements: emotional sharing, empathic concern, and perspective taking (see Decety and Cowell 525-34). Despite the common use of empathy and morality as synonyms, the scholars claim that they should not be considered as interchangeable and that their relationship – empathy brings about morality – is not as direct as it is traditionally thought. Morality is a concept linked to the idea of right and wrong and it is socially-constructed,³⁴¹ whereas empathy is felt both by human beings and animals and it is “a multidimensional construct comprising dissociable components that interact and operate in parallel fashion, including affective, motivational, and cognitive components” (Decety and Cowell 529).³⁴² According to the scholars, these components correspond to emotional sharing, empathic concern, and perspective taking:³⁴³ the first has also been called ‘empathic arousal’ or

³³⁹ Since each phenomenon has been variously called by scholars – for example, what Batson defines “Knowing Another Person's Internal State, Including His or Her Thoughts and Feelings” (Batson 4) has been referred to as “cognitive empathy” (*ibidem*) as well as “empathic accuracy” (*ibidem*) – to avoid confusion I quote Batson's description defining each concept rather than all the lexical variants associated to the same idea.

³⁴⁰ Recent research in social neuroscience has showed the neural substrates at the basis of each phenomenon (see Batson 12), and what specific brain areas are activated during one or the other emotional activity (see Decety and Cowell 525-37).

³⁴¹ See Decety and Cowell: “Morality has been theorized to encompass notions of justice, fairness, and rights as well as maxims regarding interpersonal relation. [...] [R]egardless of the definition, a central focus of morality is the judgement of the rightness or wrongness of acts or behaviors that knowingly cause harm to people. [...] Morality is also a social institution, and many moral codes redirect or even oppose our evolved tendencies, such as in-group favoritism” (526-27).

³⁴² At least within developmental and affective and social neuroscience studies. Other definitions of empathy are available, given the wide debate about it.

³⁴³ According to Decety and Cowell, scholars should use these terms rather than the “muddy” (534) concept of ‘empathy’ because they are more precise, also in the kind of relation they have with morality.

‘emotional contagion’ and it “plays a fundamental role in generating the motivation to care and help another individual in distress” (*ibidem*), while empathic concern is caring for others’ welfare and it extends to “conspecifics” (*ibidem* 530) and other creatures as well. Among the components of empathy, perspective taking seems to be the most useful one in terms of positive consequences for intergroup relations, since it

refers to the ability to consciously put oneself into the mind of another individual and imagine what that person is thinking or feeling [...] and *can be used as a strategy for reducing group biases*. [...] [A]ffective perspective taking is a powerful way to elicit empathy and concern for others and to reduce prejudice and intergroup bias. For instance, taking the perspective of an out-group member leads to a decrease in the use of explicit and implicit stereotypes for that individual and to more positive evaluations of that group [...]. (*ibidem*; my emphasis)

What is most interesting is that Decety and Cowell make reference to the case of rescuers of Jewish people during World War II by claiming that something like perspective taking must have occurred:

involvement in rescue activity frequently began with concern for a specific individual or individuals for whom compassion was felt—often individuals known previously. This initial involvement subsequently led to further contact and rescue activity, and to a concern for justice, that extended well beyond the bounds of the initial empathic concern. Assuming the perspective of another [...] brings about changes in the way we see the other, and these changes generalize to people similar to them, notably members of the same social groups to which they belong. The long-lasting effects of such interventions have been documented in some studies. (*ibidem* 530-31)

Since the “changes in the way we see the other” have “long-lasting effects” (*ibidem* 531), one may assume that the scholars consider perspective taking as the component that is most likely to have positive consequences for individuals who are outside the social group of those who feel empathy – more useful, at least, than empathic concern. This seems to be validated by the fact that

[a]lthough empathic concern is one of the earliest social emotional competencies that develops, children do not display empathy and concern toward all people equally. Instead, they show bias toward individuals and members of groups with which they identify. For instance, 2-year-old children display more empathy-related behaviors toward their mother than toward an unfamiliar individual. In line with the in-group hypothesis, 8-year-old children were more likely to be emotionally reactive toward their in-group members compared with members of the out-group [...].³⁴⁴ (*ibidem*)

³⁴⁴ Another example provided by Decety and Cowell on the influence that empathic concern has on the individual’s decision is a study on college students “who were required to assign a good and bad task to two individuals[.] [Students] overwhelmingly endorsed random assignment (i.e., a coin flip) as the most fair (sic) means for deciding who would be assigned with the bad task. However, when asked to consider the feelings of a

In-group biases for empathic concern have been proved by social and affective neuroscience, which have shown how “interpersonal variables, implicit attitudes, and group preferences” (*ibidem* 532) all influence the activity of the neural network concerned with empathy for other individuals in pain, and how the individual’s brain “[a]ctivity in the pain neural network is significantly enhanced when individuals view or imagine their loved ones in pain compared with strangers” (*ibidem*). This means that pain is felt for in-group members’ failures, while if the same happens to out-group members, individuals feel pleasure, a feeling that may bring to harming rivals (see *ibidem*).

Since empathy is neurobiologically linked to “affective communication, social attachment, and parental care” (*ibidem* 533), empathic concern is inevitably spotted by “a variety of group biases that can certainly affect people’s moral behavior [...]” (*ibidem*), for example by privileging self-interest on some occasions rather than preferring an action based only on moral considerations. For this reason, Decety and Cowell claim that empathy should not be considered unavoidably linked to morality, or that the two concepts can be interchanged.

However, human beings “can and often do act prosocially toward strangers and can extend concern beyond kind or own social group [and] have enlarged the range of beings whose interests they value as they value their own, from direct offspring, to relatives, to affiliates, and finally to strangers” (*ibidem*); this is evident, for example, in the institution of social structures extended to all mankind, such as human rights and the International Criminal Court (see *ibidem*). This means that, despite the fact that empathic concern and prosocial behaviour are influenced by “the degree of affiliation” (*ibidem*) towards the individuals who would benefit from them, they can be in turn influenced by some activities that help enlarge “nurture [...] to current and future generations” (*ibidem*). This possibility has been considered a “complex behavior that depends on high cognitive capacities, social modeling, and *cultural transmission*” (*ibidem* 533-34; my emphasis); not by chance, one of the useful activities to extend concern, caring for others, and reduce group-belonging biases, at least temporarily, is reading literary fiction (see *ibidem* 534), as well as “language, the arts, and the media[,] [which] provide rich cultural input that triggers internal simulation processes” (*ibidem*).³⁴⁵

worker who had recently suffered hardship, students readily offered the good task to the worker rather than using random assignment” (532).

³⁴⁵ For example, “Bal and Veltkamp investigated the influence of fictional narrative experience on empathy over time, and their results indicate that self-reported empathic skills significantly changed over the course of 1 week for readers of fictional stories. Another line of research implies that arts intervention - training in acting -

Of a rather different understanding is Suzanne Keen, who claims that “the case for altruism stemming from novel reading [is] inconclusive at best and nearly always exaggerated in favor of the beneficial effects of novel reading” (*Empathy* vii). According to Keen, the widespread hypothesis correlating empathy with altruism, namely, the idea that “empathy [is] the feeling precursor to and prerequisite for liberal aspirations to greater humanitarianism” (“Theory” 208; see also Keen, *Empathy* vii-xxv) has little to none veracity. Applying it within literature, the empathy-altruism hypothesis “holds that novel reading, by eliciting empathy, encourages prosocial action and good world citizenship” (Keen, “Theory” 224).³⁴⁶ Despite acknowledging that readers feel empathy and sympathy while reading about fictional characters (see Keen, *Empathy* vii), the scholar does not believe in a direct correlation between narrative empathy and an improved altruism or prosocial behaviour in readers after reading; at most, writers’ and readers’ empathy during reading has marketing and economic consequences in that it “contributes to the emotional resonance of fiction, its success in the marketplace, and its character-improving reputation” (Keen, *Empathy* vii).

Studies in the neuroscience have demonstrated that people with a high empathy have busier mirror neuron systems; therefore, it is likely that fiction writers are more empathetic than other people and that, at the same time, fiction writing trains and enhances their innate predisposition to empathy (see Keen, “Theory” 221). However, this does not imply that fiction writers’ behavior is better than the rest of the society – that they act more prosocially (see *ibidem*), nor that they are ‘morally better’ in their actions: it only means that they are more empathetic individuals. Similarly, despite “writers’ conviction that novels can make something happen, [and the fact that they] exercise their empathic imaginations in acts of world creation, in the hope of reaching readers and changing hearts and minds” (Keen, *Empathy* xxii), their high empathy does not imply that what they write necessarily causes readers’ empathy, or that their own empathy is passed onto readers – “transacted” (Keen, “Theory” 221) – through the narrative by means of narrative empathy.

leads to growth in empathy and theory of mind” (Decety and Cowell 534). Even if Decety and Cowell write that “[p]reliminary research suggests that reading literary fiction *temporarily* improves the capacity to identify and understand others’ subjective affective and cognitive mental states” (*ibidem*; my emphasis), Harrison’s discussion of narrative empathy seems to open to the possibility to extend similar positive effects in the long term: “narrative empathy supplants criteria based on demographic similarity, like race or class, with criteria based on shared emotional responses, changing the categories by which individuals subsequently judge similitude and difference. It stands to reason that *repeated exposure to characters from particular social groups would magnify these results*” (Harrison 270; my emphasis). ‘Repeated exposure’ can be understood both as reading multiple works invoking narrative empathy, or as a prolonged reading of fictional texts over time.

³⁴⁶ As Keens contends, “[i]f indeed such a link could be substantiated (it has not yet been verified), then investigation of the effects of narrative techniques on real readers would have to extend beyond generalizations about character identification and a small subset of narrative situations” (“Theory” 224).

Despite conceding the fact that empathy “appears [...] to be a key element in our responsiveness to others” (*ibidem* 212), Keen claims that when readers approach fiction and are aware of the fictionality of the text,³⁴⁷ it is this awareness that may cause narrative empathy because “fiction does disarm readers of some of the protective layers of cautious reasoning that may inhibit empathy in the real world” (*ibidem*), while the supposedly corresponding prosocial behaviour is not a direct consequence because

[f]or a novel reader who experiences either empathy or personal distress, there can be no expectancy of reciprocation involved in the aesthetic response. The very nature of fictionality renders social contracts between people and person-like characters null and void. [...] We may feel intense interest in characters, but incurring obligations towards them violates the terms of fictionality.³⁴⁸ (*ibidem*)

Scholars have tried to identify narrative techniques and devices that cause empathy in readers and, traditionally, it is thought that “the use of first person (sic) narration and the interior representation of characters’ consciousness and emotional states [...] contribut[e] to empathetic experiences, ope[n] readers’ minds to others, chang[e] attitudes, and even predispose[e] readers to altruism” (*ibidem* 213). What Keen contests is that these (or other) literary techniques have not yet tested in terms of being able to go beyond the neurobiological predisposition to feel empathy more easily towards those individuals belonging to the reader’s same group, or that the reader feels more similar to himself or herself, and to overcome the resistance towards others who are considered different (see *ibidem* 214; see also Decety and Cowell discussed above). This is why Keen does not believe “that empathetic reading experiences can contribute to changing a reader’s disposition, motivations, and attitudes” (Keen, “Theory” 214) nor that fiction could change readers’ approaches to other human beings in a broader sense than what is allowed by the already known limits.

Readers may react differently to the same narrative, and they do not have the same empathic dispositions: not only there is an inherent predisposition (or lack of) to empathy, but

³⁴⁷ For example, thanks to paratexts (see Keen, “Theory” 220).

³⁴⁸ Keen defines personal distress as “an aversive emotional response also characterized by apprehension of another’s emotion, [...] it focuses on the self and leads [...] to avoidance” (“Theory” 208). Empathy is often mistaken or considered synonymous to sympathy, but empathy is “feeling *with* another” (J. Smith 716, emphasis in original) while sympathy is “feeling *for* them” (*ibidem*, emphasis in original; see also Harrison 256 and Keen, “Theory” 208-09). The *Oxford Learner’s Dictionary* provides a definition of sympathy in line with this idea: “the feeling of being sorry for somebody; showing that you understand and care about somebody’s problems” (“sympathy”, accessed 17.01.2022), while another relevant feeling, compassion, is different from empathy and it is more linked to sympathy as “compassion (for somebody) [is] a strong feeling of sympathy for people or animals who are suffering and a desire to help them” (“compassion”, accessed 17.01.2022).

empathic response is also influenced by other factors like the timing and the context of the reading experience (see *ibidem*), since

the capacity of novels to invoke readers' empathy changes over time, and some novels may only activate the empathy of their first, immediate audience, while others must survive to reach a later generation of readers in order to garner an emotionally resonant reading. Readers' empathy for situations depicted in fiction may be enhanced by chance relevance to particular historical, economic, cultural, or social circumstances, either in the moment of first publication or in later times [...]. (Keen, *Empathy* xii)

Given that the readers' own experiences are relevant in the feeling of empathy while reading, it seems safe to say that "empathy with characters doesn't always occur as a result of reading an emotionally evocative fiction" (Keen, "Theory" 214), regardless of the author's skillfully-crafted work and his or her own high empathy. In other words, Keen claims that even though novels may be "designed to elicit empathic responses from readers[,] there is no guarantee that an individual reader will respond empathetically to a particular representation" (*ibidem* 221); therefore, narrative techniques cannot assure of making readers feel or grasp exactly what the characters are feeling (see *ibidem* 222). Indeed, the same can be said of narrative styles and genres since for some readers formulaic conventions "would increase empathetic resonance" (*ibidem* 215), while for others the same effect may be reached through "unusual or striking representations" (*ibidem*).³⁴⁹

Keen warns about the fact that "[b]y using their powers of empathetic projection, authors may attempt to persuade readers to feel with them on politically charged subjects. Readers, in turn, may experience narrative empathy in ways not anticipated or intended by authors" (*ibidem* 223); therefore, since the author's empathy and the reader's empathetic response may differ, narrative empathy is rhetorical. In the scholar's view, there is a risk that narrative empathy "becom[es] yet another example of the western imagination's imposition of its own values on cultures and peoples that it scarcely knows, but presumes to feel with, in a cultural imperialism of the emotions" (*ibidem*; see also Keen, *Empathy* xx) and that it forms a

³⁴⁹ In Keen's opinion, not only readers may not have an empathetic response to fiction, but they may even feel discomfort and this may be followed by "misunderstanding or worse" ("Theory" 222). The scholar proposes the term 'empathic inaccuracy' to identify "a strong conviction of empathy that incorrectly identifies the feeling of a literary persona" (*ibidem*; emphasis in original), which may occur when readers feel a kind of narrative empathy that does not correspond to the writer's intentions, or when the author unintentionally evokes empathy. To avoid empathic inaccuracy, authors should handle its two main components, failure and falsity, the first of which occurs when "author's empathy may be an intrinsic element of successful fictional worldmaking, its exercise does not always transmit to readers without interference" (*ibidem*; emphasis in original), whereas falsity "expresses the concern that experiencing narrative empathy short-circuits the impulse to act compassionately or to respond with political engagement" (*ibidem* 223); as a consequence of failure or falsity, narrative empathy is seen in a negative lens.

“hierarchical model of empathy” (Keen, “Theory” 223) because there is still a lack of transnational studies of reader response that would balance the tendency to consider “white, western, educated readers[’]” reactions (*ibidem*) sufficient to draw general conclusions. Her considerations evoke many of the issues debated in the previous chapters, such as negative appropriation (see ch. 2.3), Rothberg’s “hierarchy of suffering” (*Multidirectional* 9; see also ch. 2.3), Goldberg and Hazan’s criticism against cosmopolitan memory (see ch. 3), as well as Bos’ idea of positionality (see ch. 2.3; see also note 199) when Keen calls for more self-consciousness on one’s own narrative empathy by identifying one’s positionality within the wide range of audiences reached by the author’s work (see Keen, “Theory” 224).

In the scholar’s opinion, only by abandoning the common interpreting framework that privileges white and Western perspectives it is possible to convert “the apparent condescension of empathy [...] by its strategic use” (Keen “Theory” 224). In this way, what emerges is “strategic empathy” (*ibidem*), a particular kind “of authors’ empathy, by which authors attempt to direct an emotional transaction through a fictional work aimed at a particular audience, not necessarily including every reader who happens upon the text” (*ibidem*). Among the three distinct types of strategic empathy, ‘broadcast strategic empathy’ seems the most interesting in the context of this dissertation, since it “*calls upon every reader to feel with members of a group, by emphasizing our common vulnerabilities and hopes*” (*ibidem*; emphasis in original).³⁵⁰

Keen’s discussion is compelling; nonetheless, considering the reflections made in the previous chapters, I do not share her untrust on narrative empathy and its potentials for socially positive consequences. It is indeed true that readers’ response to reading fiction is not predictable (see Landsberg, *Prosthetic* 25-140; see also ch. 3), nor empathic involvement and response. Nonetheless, it seems that Keen’s implied request to narrative theorists – to find a set of narrative techniques that surely cause readers’ empathy to prove that narrative empathy is a means to change their attitude towards the external world – is purposeless for the same ideas that she proposes to prove that narrative empathy is rhetorical. Readers are not machines: they may have different response to the same narrative, as well as the same reader may feel differently on a second occasion because his or her own life and experiences are factors influencing his or her reaction. Even provided that a novel be read within a specific group of people – whose members are part of the same in-group – one cannot state that all

³⁵⁰ The other two types of strategic empathy are ‘bounded strategic empathy’, which “*occurs within an in-group, stemming from experiences of mutuality, and leading to feeling with familiar others*” (Keen, “Theory” 224; emphasis in original), and ‘ambassadorial strategic empathy’, which “*addresses chosen others with the aim of cultivating their empathy for the in-group, often to a specific end*” (*ibidem*; emphasis in original).

those readers will feel, react, and appreciate or reject the novel in exactly the same way. Therefore, it is paradoxical to look for a set of narrative techniques that supposedly assure readers' empathy, because what may work for some may have the opposite reaction for others. Authors cannot write a novel that fits each reader's high or low personal predisposition to empathy and literary devices are not switches that 'turn on' readers' empathetic response, but it is possible to test what techniques are statistically more useful and fruitful in reaching this aim.

The unpredictability of readers' reaction to fiction does not imply that authors should not try to make them approach the themes or social groups at the centre of narration. The idea that narrative content and narrative empathy should be 'appropriate' to, or 'suit', the authors' personal life (their religion, nationality, etc), meaning that, for example, only writers belonging to a certain national group can write about that social group, deeply limits the potentialities of creative fiction. Under the same lens, bounded strategic empathy and ambassadorial strategic empathy are problematic, since they are both based on, and refer to, in-groups, rather than cultivating a broader sense of sharing as broadcast strategic empathy seems to entail.³⁵¹ This does not mean that writers who silence other cultures or adopt a paternalistic approach towards them should be accepted. As claimed in this dissertation, considering the scope of the narration may be useful so as not to discard all works written by authors who do not belong to a given culture and not to regard their narrative techniques to help feeling empathy as a socio-cultural and literary imposition on the culture or social group described.

Narratives written by out-group authors, even white Western authors, should not be necessarily understood in contrast with other cultures' literary production. The basis for this perspective lies in considering literature only as a means either to reiterate an 'us-them' division or as a tool that acknowledges cultural differences but is eventually unable to build a bridge devoid of suspects of paternalistic and condescending traits. Indeed, "[b]ooks can't make change by themselves" (Keen, *Empathy* xiv), but, as it is conceived herein, literature should inspire readers to change, discard, or acquire ideas, and it should enable writers to do the same, rather than cynically defending incommunicability between cultures. To apply a mental and ethical framework based on division to literature means to deny its potential to generate positive approaches and dialogue and it is contrary to Keen's own acknowledgement

³⁵¹ In this sense, they sound exclusive and, one may say, even 'elitist'.

that human beings are “story-sharing creatures” (Keen, “Theory” 209): storytelling – literature – is first of all an activity that human beings share, not that divides them.³⁵²

Mary-Catherine Harrison offers a response to the key question at the basis of Keen’s discussion – whether empathy with fictional characters cause changes in the real world by having an effect on readers – with her “synechdocal theory of narrative empathy” (Harrison 257). In contrast with Keen’s view, Harrison claims that “empathy for fictional individuals can prompt improved attitudes and helping behaviors toward the relevant social group” (*ibidem* 269); therefore, empathy does have a positive effect on readers, it may eventually bring about a prosocial-altruistic behaviour, and it also overcomes the division between in-group and out-group by enhancing intergroup relations (see *ibidem* 256). While acknowledging that research on empathy has proved that individuals tend to feel empathy firstly towards those whom they regard as similar to them, and that they have more difficulties to do the same with members of an out-group “as defined by sociological difference” (*ibidem* 255),³⁵³ the scholar thinks that “narrative empathy is uniquely capable of circumventing the similarity bias through compositional strategies related to foregrounding and perspective” (*ibidem*).³⁵⁴

Harrison’s idea is that narrative empathy allows readers to “identify resemblances” (*ibidem* 270) they would not otherwise note between them and the members of an outgroup; by recognizing these previously unseen similarities, readers are encouraged to leave traditional concepts of sociological difference behind and to substitute them with other “criteria based on shared emotional responses” (*ibidem*), which will form their new framework to judge others, preventing future biases (see *ibidem* 255). Narrative empathy is fundamental in contemporary multicultural societies because it goes beyond the similarity bias and its emotional limits, which can even cause an aggravation of conflicts (see *ibidem* 257); as a consequence, fiction has a key role in facilitating cross-cultural empathy (see *ibidem*).

³⁵² This does not mean that one should have a naïve view of literature: narratives may divide, cause tensions, and there are many examples of paternalistic representations of colonial subjects written by colonialists, for example (cf. Albertazzi’s study *La letteratura post-coloniale*, 2013). However, not all present and future literary works will continue this oppressive tradition, and “it is unfortunate that modern reading habits often reflect the assumption that one should write, and read, about people ‘like’ oneself” (Harrison 271).

³⁵³ In Harrison’s discussion, ‘sociological difference’ refers to race or class, for example, and she proposes Victorian social-problem literature as example (see Harrison 270-71). In the context of this dissertation, if belonging to the Jewish culture and religion is considered a ‘sociological difference’, opting for an exclusive meaning of the term Holocaust (see ch. 2.1) may be detrimental to the possibility of non-related child readers to experience narrative empathy.

³⁵⁴ Martin Hoffman defined the ‘similarity bias’ as “our unwillingness or inability to empathize with people who are not like ourselves” (Harrison 257), which implies a decreased propensity to help others.

This theory does not propose a white Western perspective, as Keen may term it, because it acknowledges “empathy across difference” (*ibidem* 255) as well as “the self-conscious treatment of cultural difference [as] particularly helpful for overcoming similarity bias” (*ibidem*). In other words, there is not a negation of cultural specificities in comparison with other cultures, nor there is the imposition of a Western perspective in terms of negative appropriation (see ch. 2.3); instead, this approach acknowledges cultural differences and similarities at the same time.

Unlike Keen’s view, Harrison’s synechdocal model considers that narrative empathy has an ethical impact on readers and, consequently, on the world outside the text (see *ibidem* 257). Readers, narrative empathy, and ethical behaviour are interwoven in a three-phased process:

First, we imagine ourselves in the spatiotemporal and emotional place of a fictional character; second, that character is interpreted as part of a larger social category (for example, a poor character is interpreted more broadly as part of “the poor”); third, empathy for the fictional individual prompts—at least potentially—helping behavior for the social group.³⁵⁵ (*ibidem*)

According to Harrison, empathy can overcome the similarity bias through “compositional strategies” (*ibidem* 258) like foregrounding and perspective that modulate the relationship between readers and characters. Foregrounding is the “narrative focus on particular characters [that] helps orient readers’ empathy toward protagonists while providing the necessary informational cues about a character’s cognitive and affective states” (*ibidem*), while perspective refers to the fact that readers “are naturally drawn to protagonists, and [...] [they] typically adopt their spatial and emotional perspective” (*ibidem* 262).³⁵⁶ As an alternative to protagonists, readers preferably adopt “an internal perspective, or one from within the narrative space, which is consistent with the position of a central character” (*ibidem*).³⁵⁷ In more complex literary narratives, possibly with multiple protagonists and a narrator guiding the reader’s perspective on the characters, readers “might simultaneously imagine [themselves] in multiple perspectives—not only protagonist and/or narrator but also other minor characters, narratee, and narrative audience—all the while remaining cognizant of

³⁵⁵ See also Decety and Cowell (530-31).

³⁵⁶ See Harrison: “Narrative theorists have come to similar conclusions about first-person narration and internal perspective more broadly, including free indirect discourse/narrated monologue and narrative omniscience that moves inside characters’ minds” (261).

³⁵⁷ As Harrison notes, this idea has been validated by research findings showing that “readers process or encode the emotional (as well as the spatial) implications of narratives from the perspective of a protagonist” (263). Therefore, a “clearly demarcated protagonist with whom the reader can empathize” (*ibidem* 262), or a similar internal perspective, is central in Harrison’s theory.

[their] own spatiotemporal and emotional perspective as [...] actual reader[s]” (*ibidem* 264); this is possible also thanks to compositional strategies that drive the reader’s perspective and pose more than one character as central, protagonist-like (see *ibidem* 265).

The last words of the previous quote foreground a quite relevant idea in Harrison’s theory, that is, the parallel presence of readers’ own subjectivity ‘as readers’ while they share the protagonist’s perspective. This is what I previously claimed to be the main difference between empathy and identification (see ch. 1). According to research findings, children acquire narrative perspective-taking skills at an early age, at least since they are three years old (see Harrison 262). Given that the main readership considered in this dissertation is made of children who are developing their own subjectivity and perspective on the world, it is advisable to privilege empathy rather than identification as the former allows them to “accompany” (*ibidem* 260) protagonists by “aligning” (*ibidem*) themselves with them rather than substituting them, and at the same time this does not “preclude bringing [their] own perspective to bear on a narrative or its characters” (*ibidem*).

The scholar’s synecdochal theory of narrative empathy and the use of foregrounding and perspective enable the formation of “relationships with fictional characters [that] can help overcome psychological and sociological obstacles that define and restrict our relationships with other people” (*ibidem* 258) while respecting the readers’ and the characters’ separate individualities. Thus, her theory is based on a dialogue between readers and characters during the act of reading as well as on a better dialogue between readers and other people after the experience of narrative empathy. This can be seen as a third positive consequence of narrative empathy that adds to the long-term ethical outcomes consisting of improved attitudes, increased prosocial behaviour, and reconfigured criteria for similarity that emphasize commonalities between social groups (see *ibidem* 270).³⁵⁸

Although not discussing empathy strictly in terms of ethical behaviour towards others, Joel Smith’s reflections can be considered a useful and, in part, a matching addition to Harrison’s idea. Smith tries to define empathy by focusing on what it is for because, as the scholar states, empathy has reason to be differentiated by other phenomena and terms like simulation and emotional contagion only if it “make[s] a distinctive contribution to our lives[,] [that is,] if there is something that it and only it allows us to do” (J. Smith 710). As Smith claims, this “distinctive role” (709) of empathy is epistemological, since empathy

³⁵⁸ This recalls Keen’s broadcast strategic empathy.

“alone allows us to know how others feel. [...] [E]mpathy, so conceived, may also play a distinctive social role, enabling [...] ‘transparent fellow-feeling’” (*ibidem*).

The concept of ‘fellow-feeling’ derives from Adam Smith’s discussion on empathy in his moral theory: in 1759, he wrote that “‘nothing pleases us more than to observe in other men a fellow-feeling with all the emotions of our own breast’” (qtd. in J. Smith 720). As Harrison’s colleague explains,

[o]ne of the things we value is feeling *with* others [...]. Whilst merely feeling as another does is of value, I suggest that we place a higher value on knowing that the other feels the same, and knowing that the other knows that one feels the same, etc. [...] We might call this complex state of affairs ‘transparent fellow-feeling’.

[Since] it is only through empathy that a person can know how another feels[,] [and] transparent fellow-feeling involves knowing how another feels, it follows that empathy is necessary for transparent fellow-feeling. (*ibidem*; emphasis in original)

Transparent fellow-feeling is valued “as an end in itself” (*ibidem*) because we value the fact that we feel with others and, one may say, individuals value feeling with others because they value establishing and having relationships with them. Knowing how others feel is fundamental for prosocial behaviour, but, following Smith’s reasoning, prosocial actions are a further step to which empathy may bring after fellow-feeling.

Empathy researchers agree in defining empathy as “sharing in another’s mental state” (*ibidem* 712) and Smith thinks that this is possible only if three conditions are met, that is, “A empathises with *B* if and only if (1) *A* is consciously aware that *B* is ψ [:]; (2) *A* (sic) is consciously aware of what being ψ feels like[:]; (3) On the basis of (1) and (2), *A* is consciously aware of how *B* feels” (*ibidem* 713). However, one must draw a line between a “functional concept” (*ibidem*) of a feeling and knowing how that feeling feels. I will quote Smith’s own consequential explanation:

Empathy provides us with knowledge of *how others feel*. Betty may tell Anita that she is afraid. Or Anita may infer that Betty is afraid from the look on Betty’s face. Or Anita may see that Betty is afraid. Each of these can constitute, in my view, Anita’s coming to know *that* Betty is afraid. However, unless Anita empathises with Betty, Anita will not know *how* Betty feels. For that, Anita must share in Betty’s affective state. [...]

What is involved in knowing how another person feels? One might suppose that [...] Anita’s knowing *that* Betty is afraid is sufficient for knowing *how* she feels. But this is wrong. Anita may possess a functional concept of fear, indeed she may have complete descriptive knowledge of fear, but if she has never experienced anything that shares an affective character, a way of feeling, with Anita’s fear (sic) then she won’t know how Anita’s (sic) fear feels [...]. [G]eneralizing for any affective psychological state ψ (whether positive or negative), I suggest that *A* knows how *B* feels only if she knows that *B* is ψ and how it feels to be ψ . Further, *A* knows how it feels to be ψ if and only if *A* knows that ψ feels like *this*. [...] Thus, *A* must be

in, or perhaps have been in, some affectively matching conscious state. That is, A must share in B's affective state.

Never having experienced fear, or some affectively matching state, Anita has only a partial understanding of fear. Specifically, she doesn't know how fear feels. So, whilst Anita may know *that* Betty is afraid, say on testimonial grounds, there is a certain piece of knowledge that she lacks. This is a consequence of the fact that it is only through feeling fear that Anita can become acquainted with the feel of fear, with the affective character of that emotion.³⁵⁹ (712-13; emphasis in original)

What Smith considers relevant is not that A feels or has felt the same, identical emotion that B feels (or, rather, for exactly the same reason), but that A feels or has felt that emotion or an 'affectively matching conscious state'. If B feels fear, A can know what B feels like only if he or she feels or has felt fear. If A has never felt fear, he or she cannot understand what B really feels: A may get to know that B feels fear, but A does not have the emotional cognition or awareness that allows him or her to feel empathy that, in turn, allows him or her to state that he or she knows what feeling fear feels like. This might also be explained by considering that A and B share the condition of human beings, but they are indeed separate individuals: both can feel a certain feeling ψ , but each of them will feel it in his or her distinct way. This is true even if they react to exactly the same situation (for example, they are travelling together by bus to work, and the bus is delayed) and their affective conscious states may be very similar (they may both experience frustration, anger, anxiety, and so on).

According to Smith, the first two conditions (1) and (2) that are necessary during an empathic experience may be satisfied as follows: "A is consciously aware that B is ψ " (*ibidem* 714) by many means, for example B tells A that she feels ψ , A infers that B feels ψ from other elements, A simulates B's condition and deduces that B is likely to feel ψ , and so on. The second condition, "A is consciously aware of what being ψ feels like" (*ibidem*), is satisfied if A "[is] acquainted with the feel of ψ , for she must be able to think, ' ψ feels like this'. To be acquainted with the feel of ψ , A *must have experienced some state that feels that way*" (*ibidem* 714; my emphasis). It is not necessary for A to feel ψ in the same moment when B feels ψ to be consciously aware of what ψ feels like, as there are at least three more cases that allow A to do so: firstly, A "picks out the affective character of ψ preserved in episodic memory" (*ibidem*), which means that A empathises with B feeling fear, for example, because A felt fear at an earlier time, even though A is not currently feeling fear (see *ibidem*). Secondly, "A may empathise with B's being ψ even if A has *never* been ψ . All that is required is that A is, or has been, in some state that affectively matches ψ " (*ibidem* 715; emphasis in original). Supposing that ψ is shame, a state that "affectively matches ψ " (*ibidem*) may be

³⁵⁹ For a discussion of what contemporary authors lack, see chapter 2.3.

gained by having felt shame, but it may also happen that “in some instances of imaginatively representing oneself as ashamed, the affective character ‘carries over’. [...] [I]magining performing a shameful act can in some cases feel the way shame does, to some degree at least [...]” (*ibidem*). Thirdly, A can empathise with B feeling ψ even if A has never been ψ because A may have felt a state that is affectively “similar enough” (*ibidem*) and what is different is the level of determinacy of the feeling.³⁶⁰

What follows is that A can empathise with B feeling ψ even if the “intentional objec[t]” (*ibidem*) that provokes the feeling is different between A and B. Supposing that the object is one’s child being bullied at school, A can empathise with B who is feeling ψ for her child being bullied because A feels, or has felt, ψ for her own child being bullied; therefore, “[i]n order that A empathise with B in such a case, it need not be that she has ever been upset about B’s child being bullied at school” (*ibidem*). In other words, A may know how feeling ψ for one’s child being bullied feels like even if B feels ψ for her own child and A feels, or has felt, ψ for her own child. Inevitably, there is an affinity, a “similarity of content” (*ibidem*), but the object causing ψ is different (the two children are different).

Smith’s reflections are useful in understanding how contemporary child readers can experience empathy – narrative empathy, in particular – towards characters and, through them, towards people who experienced the Holocaust. As discussed in chapter 2.3, young generations cannot ‘experience’ the Holocaust in exactly the same way as victims and witnesses did, because they do not live during that historical time and because they are different individuals. However, children can empathise with fictional characters because it is likely that they know what feelings like fear, anger, hatred, loneliness, and so on feel like because they have experienced these feelings or “affectively matching” (*ibidem*) states in their own life on other occasions. An example might better explain the idea: in historical novels, if a character feels fear because he or she is hiding from Nazis, or is alone or with strangers in the darkness because of the curfew and there is the risk of being caught or bombed, readers can empathise with the character because they may have felt fear or an affectively matching

³⁶⁰ See Keen for details at the level of brain areas activated during a personal, direct experience of a feeling and when seeing another experiencing the same feeling: “Singer compared what happened in a subject’s brain when she was actually shocked, when pain regions in the limbic system [...] lit up on the fMRI, with what the brain looked like during observation of another’s pain. When watching a loved one in the same room receiving a sharp shock, subjects showed active responses in the *affective* parts of the brain’s pain [...], but not in the somatosensory cortices of the brain. The affective brain areas responded to both real and imagined pain. A person not actually experiencing pain but observing a loved one being shocked showed brain activation of matching emotional areas, though not the sensory areas. Empathy alone did not light up the sensory areas for pain. Singer and her colleagues conclude that empathy is mediated by the part of the pain network associated with pain’s affective qualities, but not its sensory qualities” (“Theory” 211).

state, for example when they are alone in darkness at night, without their parents like the character, and they are afraid of what darkness may hide. Indeed, readers are not in a life-threatening situation like the character, but at least two considerations may be offered: firstly, to presuppose that readers cannot empathise with the character's fear because they are not in a life-threatening situation implies that, for the readers to be acknowledged to feel 'that same' fear, they should be collocated in life danger, which is rather brutal. Secondly, the notion that 'there is nothing to fear in darkness at night' is an adult perspective of the fear of darkness, whereas the child reader is likely to dread the unknown dangers and threats hidden in darkness,³⁶¹ and he or she may even feel to be in a life-threatening situation because he or she does not know yet that 'there is nothing to fear in darkness at night'. Undoubtedly, from an adult point of view, historical life danger posed by Nazis and life threats posed by monsters lying in darkness are not the same; as Smith explains, though, empathy presupposes that the reader (*A*) knows how feeling fear feels to know how the character (*B*) feels fear for the curfew or the risk of being caught. Even though the object causing fear is different (Nazis and monsters), they are similar, 'affectively matching' feelings that could be generalized by saying that they are 'fear for some threat posed by an evil subject' (ψ). Therefore, the reader's personal experience of fear as illustrated here is the means through which he or she can 'touch', reach, 'understand' how characters, and therefore witnesses, felt like; it is also the nearest affectively matching state that the reader can have to empathise with the characters. A similar reasoning can be made for other feelings and experiences as well, for example child readers' loneliness (either because parents are not near them or because they long for friendly peer relationships), desire for revenge after being wronged in some way, attraction for power, the difficulty in deciding between good and evil, or generic indecisiveness in how to react towards evil.

Another example might consider bullying and Nazi persecution. The encounter with historical evil (Nazi persecution) caused specific emotions that cannot be felt in the same way and with the same object by young readers. Nonetheless, an affectively matching state might arise if one considers bullying as object. Children who suffer, or have suffered,³⁶² bullying know what feeling picked on, targeted, unsafe, fear to meet certain individuals feels like. Are Nazi persecution (and murdering) and various forms of bullying at the same level, as far as

³⁶¹ In Neil Gaiman's picture book *The Wolves in the Walls* (2007), illustrated by Dave McKean, the protagonist Lucy hears noises like howling and growling in the walls of her house and, although she cannot see them, she is persuaded that there are wolves, but her family does not believe her until the wolves – shadows on the walls – appear.

³⁶² The same applies if children see, or have seen a peer being bullied.

life danger is concerned? They are not, but the latter is one of the most similar affective experiences that children may have had in their life to enable them to empathise with characters. It is what children can refer to when they are called to empathise with feelings like uncertainty, fear for themselves, or fear of someone in the remediated representation of the past offered in historical novels.³⁶³

Harrison's and Smith's opinions on empathy are both useful in this dissertation. The similarity bias overcome by narrative empathy could be the cultural-religious belonging to the Jewish people: readers may feel narrative empathy with Jewish characters (or Gypsy, or political opponents, or homosexuals, and so on) and, therefore, with witnesses even if they are not part of the in-group as well as non-related authors may feel empathy in the same way. Smith's claim that empathy is to know how others feel and that individuals – readers – can feel, or have felt, the same emotion, or an affectively matching state, reasonably allows to say that non-related authors and readers can feel, or have felt, emotions similar to the ones experienced by characters. By means of this, readers know how witnesses 'felt like'. Recognizing the affective affinity of both feelings allows to acknowledge, on the one hand, the formation of a first relationship between readers and characters and, on the other hand, the formation of a second relationship between readers, witnesses, and the Holocaust. Therefore, child readers have a personal-emotional link that is necessary to gain postmemory (see ch. 3). Eventually, if readers experience narrative empathy, they can adopt a prosocial behaviour that, in this dissertation, is represented by attitudinal postmemory.

One may generalize by saying that readers can know what characters feel like because both of them share the same condition of being children – childhood positions them at the same level, regardless of socio-cultural, national, religious, or other forms of belonging to an

³⁶³ However, Myers discusses Roberto Innocenti's different approach in representing the Holocaust in picture books like *Rose Blanche* (1985), *Leda e il Mago* (2002), and *Erika's Story* (2003), which nonetheless assures readers' active engagement with the story, according to the scholar. As Myers claims, the illustrator "always employs complementary *distancing strategies in his works for children which serve to separate his readers emotionally from the subject matter being portrayed*. In *Erika's Story*, he distances his readers from the full horror of the deportation scene by placing a fence in the foreground of the image. This fence not only closes off the scene, it also cleverly obstructs the faces of the characters, sparing readers the fear and horror of the victims. [...] Innocenti often avoids depicting the faces of both victims and oppressors in his illustrations for children. [...] In all of the aforementioned cases, the emotions of the characters are never experienced directly by the reader, but rather are implied through Innocenti's various distancing techniques. [...] His readers can thus empathize with the anguish of Erika's mother, the horror of Rose Blanche, or the fear of Leda, on their own terms, to the extent they feel comfortable" (L. Myers, "What" 34-35; my emphasis). Myers' considerations are relevant as they discuss in detail a specific children's literature form, picture books, which I think has different expectations, impact, and conventions with respect to novels because storytelling is made of words and images as well (see ch. 4). However, what is more difficult to agree with is the idea that the distancing strategies should "separate [...] readers emotionally from the subject matter being portrayed" (*ibidem* 34): while they may be used so as not to traumatize child readers with the harshest realities of the Holocaust, this is a rather different scope than to willingly distance them from a deeper emotional involvement.

in-group. Children experience difficulties in discerning between good and evil and in establishing and managing relationships with peers; therefore, they share what I have previously referred to as peer-ness, which is similar to Smith's fellow-feeling. On this basis, it is sensible to claim that it is not a matter of finding a specific set of narrative techniques that assure readers' empathy. If readers have felt an affectively matching state, empathy highly depends on the experiences they have had, while the text cannot be empathic *per se* and literary techniques are not the primary cause for the reader's empathy; however, they can play a role in helping, reducing, or magnifying narrative empathy.³⁶⁴ Therefore, the reader's own experiences and narrative techniques form a mutually strengthening couple and complement each other.

Empathy is more easily felt for negative emotions, for example towards characters in distress, tough situations, or who are suffering (see Keen, "Theory" 214); similarly, empathy has a significant "ethical force" (Harrison 256) in these cases and it "is most strongly correlated with helping behavior" (*ibidem*).³⁶⁵ As a consequence, it stands to reason to expect that child readers will be able to experience narrative empathy when reading historical fiction about the Holocaust, given the many situations in which characters feel negative emotions or encounter evil.

A working definition of evil seems necessary to better understand the analysis of the novels herein considered. On the basis of what was discussed earlier in this chapter, a problematized approach to evil in children's historical fiction is advisable. In particular, considering the many forms it had during the Holocaust, evil is here associated to an ideology and a kind of behaviour against, or disrespectful towards, other human beings. Therefore, both 'physical' and metaphorical examples, such as Nazi characters and a force that corrupts the protagonist's ethics and relationships, are equally considered representation of evil.

Flat descriptions of evil characters are not scarce, but they can be understood either as the author's willingness not to give voice to Nazi perpetrators, or as part of a metaphorical narrative, like in *Number the Stars*. Very good historical fiction offers a round description of evil characters, or the representation of multiple faces of evil during the Holocaust beyond

³⁶⁴ Keen seems to refer to a similar case when talking about 'situational empathy': "Empathy for a fictional character does not invariably correspond with what the author appears to set up or invite. Situational empathy, which responds primarily to aspects of plot and circumstance, involves less self-extension in imaginative role taking and more recognition of prior (or current) experience. A novelist invoking situational empathy can only hope to reach readers with appropriately correlating experiences" ("Theory" 214-15).

³⁶⁵ As Harrison continues: "Inversely, the lack of empathy has been associated with psychopathy, criminality, aggression, and antisocial behavior. [...] [W]ithout the ability or propensity to imagine ourselves in another's place and feel with his or her emotions, our sense of ethical responsibility to others is severely diminished" (256).

Nazis, which encourage children to engage with the story at a more profound level and to wonder who the real enemy is, or what evil is. These are the questions that both protagonists and child readers should answer. As Lindsay Myers claims while discussing war and the Holocaust in works for children,

[n]ow that almost all the adult participants of the Second World War have passed away and children can no longer hear about the war from parents or relatives, it is more important than ever that they be introduced to these topics through literature, and that the books that address these issues do not oversimplify or sentimentalize the facts. If they are made with the right care and attention, books can be powerful agents of social change. Teaching children about war [...] is not so much about explaining the past as it is about inciting questions [...]. (“What” 39)

Reflecting upon evil and enemies is part of children’s growth and of the development of attitudinal postmemory. Since they experience emotions and acquire socio-relational skills as early as during their first months, they may associate more easily the protagonists’ experiences with the ones they have lived by means of shared emotions and “affectively matching state[s]” (J. Smith 713). Considering the fact that the above skills become more complex as children grow, one may say that historical fiction gives an opportunity to them to integrate notions of good and evil and ethical attitude to adopt in interpersonal relationships or in difficult situations. For example, readers may compare their own decisions with what protagonists do, disapprove characters’ choices, or learn that arrogant, rude, and disrespectful behaviour is not accepted. Thus, narrative empathy presupposes, or at least is an input for, a critical stance towards the protagonists’ as well as their own behaviour.³⁶⁶

More importantly, the suggested readership age for the novels here considered is a time frame of great changes when children acquire more complex relational skills with peers and when they learn historical contents about the Holocaust at school. Therefore, when child readers develop a personal-emotional link to it through historical fiction, they integrate interpersonal skills with Holocaust memory because the Holocaust becomes part of their daily life in their approach to others and in their ethical stance towards evil – or, attitudinal postmemory becomes postmemorial attitude.

³⁶⁶ The acquisition of good basic interpersonal relational skills is highly important at this age because during adolescence individuals will interact more frequently with the society at large, for example through power institutions. For a discussion of power relationships between adolescents and the society, see Seelinger Trites’ volume *Disturbing the Universe* (2000).

Chapter 8

Evil and Relationships in Historical Fiction

Following the theoretical investigations offered in the previous chapters, this last chapter will propose an indicative, comparative analysis of the novels considered as case studies. I have chosen works published in the last three decades, from the end of the 1980s to 2021, whose authors are from Anglophone countries:³⁶⁷

UK: Morpurgo, Michael. *Waiting for Anya* (1990)

Ireland: Boyne, John. *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* (2006)

The Boy at the Top of the Mountain (2015)

Dillon, Eilís. *Children of Bach* (1993)

Australia: French, Jackie. *Hitler's Daughter* (1999)

Pennies for Hitler (2012)

Goodbye, Mr Hitler (2017)

Gleitzman, Morris.³⁶⁸ *Once* (2005)

Then (2008)

Now (2010)

After (2012)

Soon (2015)

Maybe (2017)

Always (2021)

USA: Lowry, Lois. *Number the Stars* (1989)

Spinelli, Jerry. *Milkweed* (2003)

Yolen, Jane.³⁶⁹ *The Devil's Arithmetic* (1988)

³⁶⁷ Morris Gleitzman's *Always* has been published in 2021: although it is fiction telling a story in the present time, like *Now*, it forms part of the *Once* series and it is useful to consider all the works in relation to each other apart from focusing on the proper historical novels (*Once*, *Then*, and *After*, which take place during the war years; *Soon* and *Maybe*, which refer to the years immediately after the end of the war). For the criteria used to decide works and authors to consider as case studies, see chapter 4.

³⁶⁸ Morris Gleitzman states that one of his grandfathers was a Polish Jew (see "Then we ran", accessed 25.01.2022). However, in this dissertation he is considered as 'non-related' because the Jewish religion and culture do not seem an active part of his life, as he admits: "I embrace aspects of Jewish culture enthusiastically. Salt beef bagels, for example, and irony" (see "Then we ran", accessed 25.01.2022).

³⁶⁹ Jane Yolen belongs to a Jewish family, as one infers from her afterword in *The Devil's Arithmetic* (Yolen, *The Devil's Arithmetic* 167-70); nonetheless, as in Gleitzman's case, Jewish culture and religion do not seem to be an active part of her life. In an interview, she reveals: "I grew up in a totally nonreligious household. If we did anything [religious] it was to go to a Jewish uncle's house for a Seder. But other than that, we were totally nontraditional. I'm fascinated with religion. I'd minored in religion at Smith College, and I'd done one novel

Some of these works have been popularized through multimedia, film or stage adaptations, therefore becoming well-known to the audience albeit in a different ‘form’ (such as, for instance, *Waiting for Anya* and *The Devil’s Arithmetic*).³⁷¹ In addition, most of these works have won literary awards. To name but a few:

- *The Devil’s Arithmetic*: Sydney Taylor Book Award for Older Readers in 1988, National Jewish Book Award for Children’s Literature in 1989 (see “The Devil’s Arithmetic”, accessed 25.01.2022); Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) Popular Paperbacks for Young Adults list under “Books for the Soul” in 1988, Maud Hart Lovelace Book Award in 1997 (see “Devil’s Arithmetic, The”, accessed 25.01.2022).
- *Number the Stars*: in 1989, Sydney Taylor Book Award for Older Readers; in 1990, Newbery Medal, National Jewish Book Award for Children’s Literature; in 1991, Vermont Golden Dome Book Award; in 1992, Charlotte Award, Charlie May Simon Children’s Book Award, Rebecca Caudill Young Readers’ Book Award (see “Number the Stars”, accessed 25.01.2022)
- *Hitler’s Daughter*: Children’s Book Council of Australia (CBCA) Award for Book of the Year - Younger Readers in 2000 (see “Hitler’s Daughter”, accessed 25.01.2022).
- *Milkweed*: Carolyn W. Field Award for Fiction in 2003, Society of Children’s Book Writers and Illustrators Golden Kite Award for Fiction in 2004 (see “Milkweed”, accessed 25.01.2022).
- *Once*: in 2007, Kids Own Australian Literature Awards (KOALA), Young Australians’ Best Book Award (YABBA); in 2011, Australian Book Industry Awards,

about Shakers. I was talking to my editor [Deborah Brodie], who was a rabbi’s wife, about what to write, and she said, ‘Why don’t you write a Jewish novel?’ I told her, ‘I don’t know anything about being Jewish.’ She told me it was time I learned, and she wanted to know what about being Jewish interested me. I was a science fiction writer and I said, ‘What if a girl opens the door for Elijah and finds herself in the Holocaust?’ Then I went back and sent her a proposal” (Freitas, accessed 25.01.2022). From this quote, one understands that it was her editor who advised her to start writing a ‘Jewish novel’, therefore it seems that Yolen was not interested in writing about the Holocaust because she is Jewish, or because her relatives are; at most, she combines her qualities as science fiction writer with a topic usually considered Jewish. Thus, she is herein considered as ‘non-related’.

³⁷⁰ Before *Mapping the Bones*, Yolen published another novel concerning the Holocaust, *Briar Rose* (1992), which is not considered in this dissertation because it is mainly fiction rather than historical fiction.

³⁷¹ The cinematographic adaptation of *The Devil’s Arithmetic* won the Fabulous Films for Young Adults Award in 2013 (see “Devil’s Arithmetic”, accessed 22.01.2022).

Sydney Taylor Jewish Award - Honour Award (see “Once. Morris Gleitzman”, accessed 25.01.2022).

- *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*: Bord Gáis Energy Irish Book Award for John Murray Show Listeners’ Choice Award in 2007, Premi Protagonista Jove for Categoria 15-16 anys in 2008, Pacific Northwest Library Association Young Reader’s Choice Award for Intermediate in 2009 (see “The Boy in the Striped Pajamas”, accessed 25.01.2022).
- *Then*: in 2009, KOALA Children’s Choice Awards Honour Award, Kids Reading Oz Choice Awards (KROC), YABBA Children’s Choice Awards; in 2010, UK Literacy Association Award – Age 3-11 (see “Then”, accessed 25.01.2022).
- *After*: in 2013, KOALA Children’s Choice Awards Honour Award, KROC Children’s Choice Awards, Speech Pathology Australia Book of the Year Awards, CBCA Book of the Year Awards Notable Book (see “After. Morris Gleitzman”, accessed 25.01.2022).
- *Soon*: in 2016, CBCA Book of the Year Awards, KOALA Children’s Choice Awards, YABBA Children’s Choice Awards (see “Soon”, accessed 25.01.2022).
- *The Boy at the top of the Mountain*: Buxtehuder Bulle in 2017 (see “The Boy at the Top of the Mountain”, accessed 25.01.2022).
- *Mapping the Bones*: Junior Literary Guild selection in 2018 (see “Mapping the Bones”, accessed 25.01.2022).

However, in addition to the popularity and the official recognition proven by the above awards, what is important here is to investigate how these novels tell the Holocaust to child readers (and, perhaps, both fame and literary recognition might be linked also to how these works narrate the Holocaust trauma). In particular, I am interested to probe if it is possible to claim that they contribute to Holocaust postmemory and to highlight potential common trends in Anglophone countries with respect to the previous point, rather than offering an in-depth narratological analysis.³⁷² For this reason, these novels will be comparatively analyzed by focusing on the two topics discussed in the previous chapter, namely: the representation of evil (and enemies) and the characters’ encounter and relationship with it; the protagonists’ relationships with peers. Before doing this, a brief reflection on the protagonists will prove that their being Jewish or non-Jewish, referring to their belonging to a socio-cultural ‘in-group’, is not important when considering their encounter with evil because they all share the

³⁷² As explained in chapter 4, the aim of investigating the possibility of common patterns has informed the decision of the novels and authors herein considered.

same problematic situation – what to do in front of Nazi evil. The traits regarding the characters' relationship with evil and with peers will be taken as the basis to eventually claim that child readers are enabled to empathise with them – regardless of 'in-groups' – and, in some cases, to develop attitudinal postmemory, whereas some works will not prove good enough in encouraging the readers' active involvement with what they read.

8.1 Jewish and Non-Jewish Child Protagonists and Co-Protagonists to Convey Attitudinal Postmemory

From a bird's-eye view, more than a half of the mentioned novels represents Jewish protagonists or co-protagonists. A case in point is Morris Gleitzman's *Once* series, focusing on a Jewish child, Felix Salinger, whom the reader accompanies throughout his childhood during the war years and after the war, until his old age in *Always*. Most of Gleitzman's novels (five out of seven works) feature him as a ten-year-old child and then as a young adolescent, always as the first-person narrator, but in the series Felix has many co-protagonists. On the contrary, as an adult Felix is a co-protagonist in *Now*, where it is her granddaughter Margaret Zelda who tells the story. The same applies to *Always*, where the co-presence is further highlighted by a double first-person narrator, given that chapters are alternatively told by Felix and Wassim, a ten-year-old Black boy who, as the reader will find out, is the grandson of a Hitler Youth child who was kind to Felix during the war.

Despite not acting as narrative voice, some of Felix's co-protagonists are Zelda, Genia, Gabriek, and Anya, who are all Polish and not Jewish. Little Zelda³⁷³ is a six-year-old orphan whom Felix saves from her burning house after finding her parents killed in the family garden. Only afterwards he and the readers will discover that her parents were Nazi sympathizers, given that Zelda's locket holds a photo with her father in a Nazi uniform. Zelda will be physically present only in the first two novels of the series because she is killed by Nazis at the end of *Then*, but her memory crosses all the works as Felix always makes reference to her, her courage, and her good heart.

Felix and Zelda both decide to go beyond prejudices and what they were supposed to do – to hate each other because of the circumstances. Conversely, they 'adopt' each another as siblings. Even though Felix says that he is older and can see things a six-year-old cannot – taking care and protecting her – they are both children and they recognize each other as such,

³⁷³ Zelda is Felix's six-year-old Polish friend, who will be murdered by Nazis. Margaret Zelda is Felix's granddaughter, who bears the same name not by chance, and she is present in *Now* and *Always*, when Felix is old, many decades after Zelda's death.

as readers do. Zelda will positively influence Felix's life, acting in a way that allows readers realize that hate is a choice, as well as love and respect are. Even though Zelda's parents decided to follow an ideology based on hate, Zelda considers Felix as family. Therefore, Gleitzman's narrative does not merely represent her as the daughter of Nazi sympathizers, but mostly as a child who has become an orphan like Felix due to Nazi ideology. Hate does not spare her, and, as a child, she is a victim, too; what is to oppose, the writer seems to imply, is the evil ideology that has made both Felix and Zelda orphans, rather than someone who, as a peer, suffered the consequences of the adult's world. Since Zelda is not Jewish, child readers realize that hate overflows and it is up to Felix and Zelda not to accept it and go another way.

Therefore, Gleitzman's does not represent either good or evil characters based on their religion or nationality, as he presents goodness or wickedness based on each character's actions, to emphasize the relevance of each individual choice. Such a strategy is further highlighted through other co-protagonists living during the war, like Genia (in *Then*), or in the present time, like Tonya and her brother (in *Now*), or Wassim (in *Always*). Genia is a Polish farmer who does not like Jewish people and is critical towards Jewish traditions, such as when she is bathing Felix and inevitably acknowledges that he is circumcised, "staring at [his] private part like it's the most annoying thing she's ever seen" (Gleitzman, *Then* 44). Yet, despite she was brought up hating Jewish people, she sincerely cares about Felix, protects him and Zelda from the Nazis, and will eventually be hanged by the Nazi troops.

As stated, *Now* and *Always* are not historical novels, but they form a continuum with the stories where Felix narrates as a child during the war; therefore, they play a strategic narratological role as they invite readers to link the Holocaust and contemporary forms of prejudices among young people, as well as forms of racism. Felix's granddaughter Margaret Zelda tells her story as a young teenager who is living with her grandfather because her parents left for Africa to help the local population as doctors. Gleitzman never specifies if Margaret Zelda is Jewish like Felix; she is just 'the new girl' at school. As it happens in the novels narrated by Felix, the readers get acquainted with Margaret Zelda's character and thoughts thanks to the first-person narrator; she stands out as a brave, just, and friendly girl who nonetheless misses her parents and fears some classmates in her new school. Readers can easily share her feelings and her desire to feel braver than what she thinks she is. She wants to be as brave as little Zelda, although she later acknowledges that this is impossible. Margaret Zelda is tormented by a schoolmate, Tonya, a bully who leads a small group of girls obeying her orders. Tonya and the others usually send her nasty, deriding text messages on her mobile

phone and they even use physical violence. Margaret Zelda refuses to tell Felix because she does not want to worry him; moreover, she would like to manage the situation on her own.

One day, on her way home from the post office, Margaret Zelda is bullied by Tonya and her gang but she is helped by a kind boy in her class. The protagonist and the readers will later find out that the boy is Tonya's younger brother, who suffers from severe asthma. He tries to act as a moderator between his sister and his friend by telling Margaret Zelda that "Tonya's not a bad person [...]" (Gleitzman, *Now* 55); as Tonya will eventually admit, she picked on Margaret Zelda because children were being nasty towards and were bullying her brother, so she wanted to find someone else to focus their attention on instead of him.

As Tonya's brother, Josh undoubtedly has a difficult kinship to someone who is evil towards Margaret Zelda; yet Gleitzman does not represent him in any way intent on having the same disrespectful behaviour towards peers. On the contrary, he is always kind and willing to befriend Margaret Zelda. Even though he has a bully sister, as an individual he is not defined only by this relationship and by her evil; instead, what defines him are his kind actions towards Margaret Zelda. Similarly, Felix's adopted sister Zelda was not defined only by her parents' decisions but by her affection and concern for Felix. Therefore, the author's core message is repeated across his novels: a familial relationship with someone who is evil does not prevent the individual to act in a respectful and friendly manner towards others. Hate is neither inherited, nor comes through blood relations, but is rooted in a broader context that each individual can process differently.

The fact that Tonya has been bullying Margaret Zelda because she wanted to protect her brother from the same situation does not justify her behavior in any way. However, Gleitzman's narrative and insight in her life prevent readers from perceiving her as a flat character, as someone who is evil just because 'there should be someone evil' at the narrative level. In this way, Margaret Zelda and Tonya are not simply represented on opposite sides, but they are presented as children who both care about their family relationships. They differ in the how, and that is an important difference that the writer implicitly suggests to his readers through a narrative that avoids the divisive black and white logic. As a matter of fact, Gleitzman's problematization of evil does not prevent readers to condemn Tonya's behaviour; yet, he invites them to acknowledge that the protagonist and her supposed enemy both love and care about a relative and that Tonya has opted for a wrong way to protect her brother. Bullying Margaret Zelda might have temporarily taken pressure off her brother, but it does not prevent him from being bullied again later or in another context; what is wrong is the

ideology of not recognizing the other as a peer at the basis of bullying and this cannot be fixed by perpetrating further bullying.

A parallel with another character may be useful to further investigate Gleitzman's approach to this controversial issue. Cyril Szynsky is a Polish child introduced in *Then* as a negative, evil character in Gleitzman's series. Not only he is pleased by sneering, despising, and disrespecting Jewish people, but he is also responsible for Zelda and Genia's death. When he meets Felix as a child, he can be considered as a bully and he can still be defined so when both of them are more than eighty years old in *Always*. As a child, Cyril does not value any relationship with his peers or adults as he is only interested in personal success and power: he despises his sister, who is "worse than Jews" (Gleitzman, *Then* 72), he compares Jewish people to rats, he jokes on the price of goods that Jewish people gave to his family in exchange of "[...] bits of food" (*ibidem* 71), and he is the boss of a gang. He is interested in having and maintaining power over others, be they the members of his gang or external people like Felix, and he is ready to sacrifice personal relationships to obtain it. Cyril will do just the same as an adult, since in *Always* he is the boss of a neo-Nazi gang in Eastern Europe that uses violence, torture, and murder to have more power. In open contrast with Cyril, Felix forces himself to accept his enemy's (fake) offer of help in *Always*, even though he finds it extremely difficult, because he decides to focus on the greatest aim – to protect young Wassim. Although the readers will be informed that it was Cyril and his gang who threatened Wassim and his uncle as they are a danger for Felix, Gleitzman depicts two characters who are opposed not because of their religion or nationality, but because of their behaviour and their consideration of others. Cyril was and will always be fascinated by the power given by evil, never questions his actions, and does nothing to embrace more positive relationships with his peers; on the contrary, he willingly and completely embraces evil. This is why he seeks revenge on Felix, even after more than seventy years: in *Always*, Cyril lies to Felix about his willingness to help Wassim because he wants to retaliate since, as the reader is informed, when he was a child he lost a hand that got infected after Felix had bitten it. Years do not count if someone is poisoned by evil and his behaviour remains just the same as it was during the war. The sustained misrecognition of others and the disrespect towards Felix make Cyril an evil character who has little in common with Tonya, who is aware of her bullying behaviour, or Boyne's Pierrot in *The Boy at the Top of the Mountain*, who acknowledges, at least implicitly, that his behaviour towards others was wrong.

Like Tonya's brother, Wassim has a problematic family relationship because he is Amon's grandson – Amon being the Hitler Youth boy who kindly approached Felix because

they were both fan of Richmal Crompton's books and who helped him and Zelda. As the readers learn in *Then*, Amon is not evil, even though he wears a Hitler Youth uniform (see ch. 8.2): he recognizes Felix and Zelda as peers, cares about them, and decides on his own what to do, regardless of his orders.

The claim that a problematic family relationship with evil does not make the bearer of the relationship necessary evil can also be considered from the opposite point of view: the fact that Amon was not evil does not presuppose that his grandson is the same. Truly enough, characters must do good to be good. Wassim is a positive character not because his grandfather was kind to Felix, but because he has nothing to do with Nazi ideology. He does not perpetrate evil; he cares about Felix when they meet as well as about his family relationships. For example, he constantly worries about his uncle with whom he lives because Cyril's gang has threatened him many times and he regularly visits his parents' grave. Therefore, Wassim is a protagonist bullied by neo-Nazis, rather than being a neo-Nazi perpetrator himself.

Gleitzman represents Wassim as a ten-year-old boy whose irony, wit, optimism, and caring for others, child naivety and perspicacity at the same time greatly resemble Felix's. Child readers easily establish a parallel between the two and they feel at ease with Wassim's as narrator because they are used to Felix's first-person narration in the previous novels. In *Always*, Felix's adult voice is more present than in *Now*, since he is the co-narrator. Even though he still has his wit and kindness, he is much wiser now and his older age might be considered as an obstacle for child readers to fully empathise with him. However, this is not true because Gleitzman refers to some peculiar characteristics that inevitably remind readers of young Felix, including his love for Zelda, his passion for medicine and surgery, and his beloved dog Jumble, named after Richmal Crompton's stories. Thus, the double narrating voice becomes a strategic literary device to further highlight the parallel between the two protagonists. It makes Felix's voice resonate thanks to young Wassim and it represents a 'handover' between the two. This should not be considered as a disrespectful literary representation – given Wassim's family relationship – because, as already discussed, Wassim is represented as a child more than as 'Amon's grandson'.

The connection between the various story lines – Felix's, Amon's, Wassim's – is the literary structural device that enables Gleitzman to invite child readers to reflect on how the Holocaust and the hatred at its basis are still widely present today due to both the presence of neo-Nazi gangs like Cyril's, and because of new forms of racism (in the novel represented by the hatred shown against Wassim as a dark-skinned child, as well as against the football

player of African origins Daouda Ndione, who scores despite the bananas the spectators throw at him). Through that connection, Gleitzman further underlines that ten-year-old Felix and Wassim are similar to each other because they are both children in life danger: they are detested for specific cultural reasons (Felix for his religion, Wassim for his skin colour), they are victimized, they have lost their parents, and they protect their positive relationships. Thus, both young Felix and Wassim are children – peers – like the readers, and they must decide on their own how to act and respond to evil; a choice that also their contemporary readers must make. This is what Gleitzman's novels imply and what makes them an excellent example of historical fiction conveying attitudinal postmemory.

At the empathic level, child readers are invited to empathise with Margaret Zelda and Wassim because, like Felix, they try to do good and be good towards others despite being bullied and fearing for their relatives' and their own safety. As protagonists, they are loyal and respectful towards their peers and they care about their relationships with them and with their own relatives. At the narrative level, Gleitzman helps young readers to empathise with the protagonists through the depiction of some scenes: in *Now*, Felix is about to lose his self-control when he listens to Tonya's words towards Margaret Zelda, which reminds him of the same "stupid vicious talk" (Gleitzman, *Now* 68) he had to bear as a child. He temporarily loses sight of the present time and it seems that he is back to the war years. By doing so, Gleitzman establishes a direct link between Margaret Zelda's present and Felix's past, and between Tonya's bullying and Nazi persecution. Margaret Zelda herself connects with Felix's past by wearing or bringing with her Zelda's locket, as if it is a talisman that can make her braver. As already discussed, since child readers are used to a single narrative voice with a child perspective, the double narrator in *Always* strictly connects Felix and Wassim and represents the handover between the two. At the same time, it metaphorically stands for the handover between Felix and contemporary child readers, who share Wassim's age and historical context. Not by chance, *Always* ends with Felix's death at the hospital, surrounded by his friends, Margaret Zelda, and Wassim. Felix's death means that he will not be again a narrative voice telling what happened in the past, but this does not mean that the past and his story will be forgotten. Through the double narrator and his death, Gleitzman makes Felix transmit his story and that of the characters he has met during his life to readers. Thus, child readers become torchbearers of the historical and ethical memory; they become agents of attitudinal postmemory.

Although Gleitzman's series has a happy ending because Felix succeeded and became a surgeon, Wassim is safe, and Cyril is defeated, this does not delete Felix's suffering and

pain for the past. In *Now*, Margaret Zelda refers to his grandfather's habit of wearing a light jumper even during summer "because he was cold a lot when he was young" (*ibidem* 17). Similarly, she acknowledges that he feels and looks better after meeting other witnesses from the Holocaust survivors group. In *Always*, Felix is annoyed when Wassim spits on Zelda's locket to wash it, and thinks that "Zelda would also have been very good at telling off people who spit on other people's most precious possessions" (Gleitzman, *Always* 71). Gleitzman does not banalize history and Felix's story, he is able to weave historical truth, good and evil characters, and his own fictional elements into a convincing narrative so that readers meet characters who are positive or negative depending on their decisions and actions. This moves the Holocaust and the Nazi ideology of death, disrespect, and misrecognition of others nearer to the readers' time and helps them to absorb attitudinal postmemory. By doing so, they remember what happened in history also through Felix's story.

It is necessary to make one more consideration on the kind of relationship between Felix and Wassim, and between Felix and child readers. The 'voice handover' between Felix and Wassim answers the need to preserve memory that is at the basis of Holocaust Studies. It occurs between Felix, who belongs to the first generation, and characters belonging to postgenerations, who are not linked to him by family relationships. Wassim is like an adopted relative to Felix, like little Zelda, and Margaret Zelda is his granddaughter in law, because Felix never had any children and married a woman who already had a son, that is, Margaret Zelda's father. All the grateful and loving characters who appear in *Always* and thank Felix for having saved them through surgery can also be considered part of a large family. Despite the lack of direct kinship, Felix has welcomed all of them in his life and they are part of mutually nurturing relationships. Margaret Zelda and Wassim are the best representatives of Felix's web of affiliative relationships, as per Hirsch's concept (see Hirsch, *Generation* 36; see also ch. 3), and that is a reliable repository of memory.

Gleitzman's works convey attitudinal postmemory because they make readers aware of the value of relationships, the need to respect others and to do good even though the external situation is imbued by evil, and they are invited to do the same. Peers are more important as individuals than their single characteristics regarding religion, nationality, or genealogical links. As said, Margaret Zelda and Wassim pose readers in contact with contemporary forms of disrespect towards others – from bullying to neo-Nazi gangs. They also prove that everyone can be picked on for some reason (be it cultural, physical, or of another sphere) and characters are defined at the ethical level by their actions and relationships towards others.

Also Jane Yolen's and Eilís Dillon's protagonists are brave Jewish children. In *The Devil's Arithmetic*, Yolen depicts a contemporary twelve-year-old girl who travels back in time to the war years and there meets other Jewish girls of her same age, thanks to the time-slip novel technique (see ch. 5); while the main characters in *Mapping the Bones* are Chaim and Gittel, who narrate their experiences strictly linked to their co-protagonists' lives (Bruno and Sophie).

I will further discuss *The Devil's Arithmetic* in chapter 8.3; however, it is useful to anticipate here that, when Hannah travels back in time to Poland, she assumes the physical appearance of her aunt's Jewish friend Chaya. There, Hannah slowly befriends other Jewish girls, including Rivka, whom she meets when they are all forced into a concentration camp. Despite Hannah's knows what will happen in the concentration camp (she comes from the future), her knowledge is not useful at all to her, nor to her peers. On the contrary, it is Rivka's first-hand, practical knowledge of the concentration camp that is essential to all of them to 'adapt' to it.

Rivka and Hannah are peers who respectively embody past and present and, despite this, they are not against each other; Rivka lends a helping hand to Hannah and Hannah accepts it. Past and present help each other to survive in the concentration camp and, therefore, to remember what happened: Chaya will die to save Rivka and Hannah will then return to her reality remembering what she has experienced. The nurturing friendship between the two allows child readers to enter the story, to empathise with the characters – even though it remains almost impossible to fully imagine life in a concentration camp – and to acquire attitudinal postmemory.

Yolen uses a first-person narrator in *The Devil's Arithmetic* and a double narrating voice in *Mapping the Bones*, where Gittel directly tells what she remembers to child readers, while Chaim's focalization is offered by a third-person narrator. Chaim and Gittel are twins and through their relationship and narration past and present are in dialogue like in *The Devil's Arithmetic*. As the title "Gittel Remembers" always signals at the beginning of her chapters, Gittel tells her memories as an adult who has more knowledge of what happened and she presumably lives in the contemporary era like the readers, while the chapters offering Chaim's focalization tell the story of the two siblings at the same time when they are living the experiences through a child's point of view. The novel combines their voices whose different temporal perspectives are as inseparable as Chaim and Gittel to get a better picture of what they experienced and how they felt.

Undoubtedly, Yolen's novels are those that could more easily respond to the criticisms regarding the excessive amount of historical information in children's historical fiction (see ch. 6). However, child readers have the chance to empathise with Yolen's protagonists because Hannah is a contemporary girl like them and they may share her 'tiredness' and 'annoyance' at family gatherings, religious celebrations, and the need to remember the past, since children are commonly said to be more interested in the present and what they can do now rather than in a past that they do not know. Like Hannah, also contemporary readers may be focused only on their own reality, on themselves, and on their own life, without realizing that the adults they are surrounded by once were their same age. The time-slip narrative allows Yolen to make Hannah more aware of her aunt's past as a child of her age: she had a friend, she worried about her brother while in the concentration camp, she lost family members, and she tried to help her peers despite the evil that was surrounding her. Therefore, Yolen's novel not only portrays girls who recognize other girls as peers; but it also presents an intergenerational recognition between the protagonist and her aunt, who are narratively represented as peers for most of the story. In this way, Yolen establishes a bridge between Hannah and the other girls in the past as well as between past and present, thanks to Hannah's aunt. It is important to underline that such a bridge is based on peer-ness and the care for positive relationships transcending the familial link. Since the passage of memory occurs thanks to the friendship with Rivka and the other girls more than through the family relationship, readers are invited to acquire attitudinal postmemory in the same way. In this sense, Hannah's 'first-hand' memory, made possible by the time-slip novel, can be passed to child readers in the form of attitudinal postmemory thanks to readers' empathy towards her and her peers.

In *Mapping the Bones*, readers have a double opportunity to understand and empathise with the protagonists as they are presented with the nurturing family relationships between Chaim and Gittel and the conflicts in Bruno and Sophie's kinship, which negatively mirrors the first pair's. Initially, the children are hostile to each other because of their socio-cultural belonging: Chaim and Gittel are Jewish, while Bruno and Sophie are *Mischlings* and their parents seem to consider themselves superior to Chaim and Gittel's family because of their German origin. However, they later befriend each other, apart from Bruno, who constantly prefers to stay apart, complain, and think only about himself (see ch. 8.2). Yolen depicts a progressively deeper relationship between the children, who have to help each other to survive with the partisans and then in the concentration camp where they are sent after all the partisans are killed. Chaim and Gittel, despite some difficulties, remain loyal to their mutual

affection and they care about Sophie, who sincerely loves them. By translating for them, Bruno only looks for Nazi soldiers' approval in the concentration camp to become their 'favorite' and to be treated 'better' – for example, the guards sometimes give him sweets – but he never improves his relationships with his peers. I will further discuss this point in chapter 8.3.

Child readers can acquire attitudinal postmemory by empathizing with the protagonists thanks to their family relationships between siblings as well as their friendship with peers. However, the inclusion of other non-Jewish children in the narrative (as it is the case with Gleitzman's novels) might have further helped readers to understand that everyone, regardless of religious or cultural belonging, should have and maintain Holocaust postmemory. Nonetheless, Yolen represents the protagonists' relationships based not on religion or culture, but on the siblings' shared habits, the deep knowledge they have of each other's character, strength, and weaknesses, and their affect for their parents. Since relationships are based on emotions, personal knowledge of the other, and external circumstances, friendship is at the centre of *Mapping the Bones*.

Similarly to the first part of the previous novel, where the protagonists escape from the ghetto with Chaim and Gittel's parents and then they hide in a forest, Dillon's *Children of Bach* tells the story of three siblings, Pali (the youngest), Suzy, and Peter (the oldest), who escape Nazi threat and persecution in Hungary with their aunt Eva, their nosy neighbour Mrs Nagy, and with a friend, David, after their parents are caught. All the children are Jewish, including David, while their neighbour is in danger because one of her grandmothers was Jewish, although she is not said to be Jewish herself. Like in *Mapping the Bones*, child readers can empathise with the three siblings mainly through their kinship, whereas the relationship with their friend is not sufficiently developed to be relevant. As I will discuss in chapter 8.2, Dillon's narrative seems to be excessively simplistic, sparing protagonists more serious threats, as well as extremely violent scenes.

Apart from the presence of evil, Dillon's simplistic approach also concerns the protagonists' representation. While David is scarcely described at all, Pali, Suzy, and Peter are all presented in their positive qualities at the beginning of the novel, which also hints at a quarrel between them about who should play in the music room on a certain day. However, Dillon's insistence on their qualities seems an excessive simplification of their character and may even be considered as a stereotypical representation. Considering Yolen's representation of Chaim and Gittel, the author assigns them peculiar 'defects' as conceived by the protagonists: Chaim stutters and does not like speaking for long, while Gittel is too open and

trusts people too easily. In Dillon's story, the three protagonists become closer to each other, Peter feels responsible for the younger ones, which is understandable, but they never really offer any deeper insights on what they feel and think apart from occasional dialogues and reflections; they seem just a cohesive group following their aunt and Mrs Nagy. For example, when Peter looks at his little brother Pali, he feels "rage dart through him, at the thought that such a small boy should have had to endure what Pali had" (Dillon 167). On the contrary, Chaim and Gittel become more distant for a while due to Gittel's sense of loss and despair, despite their profound link, and then they become close again, showing more emotional depth.

Child readers have less prompts than in Yolen's narratives to approach and empathise with the protagonists. This could depend on the fact that the latter are always with adult characters who help them, coordinate their escape, and act as model for them to follow, both in what to do not to be caught and in trying not to be emotionally overwhelmed. Only at the beginning of the novel the three children and their friend have to manage on their own because their parents and aunt have been caught, but soon Mrs Nagy hands them some notes to buy food; after that, a kind neighbour, Mrs Rossi, brings them a cake, and then their aunt returns. In all the other novels herein considered, child protagonists usually have to oppose evil and to decide to do good on their own on more occasions. As previously noted, in *Mapping the Bones* the protagonists manage to escape from the ghetto with Chaim and Gittel's parents, who made the plan, but after that they are alone. Apart from Nazis, the only other adults they meet are the unknown partisans and they do not know if they can rely on them. Therefore, in Dillon's work the presence of adults accompanying child protagonists has a strong influence on their representation and actions.

Dillon's decision not to represent children alone could be a way to spare child readers by telling them a 'safer' story. It could also be a narrative device to make their escape more plausible, since critics (or a more experienced readership) could regard the long journey by van that eventually assures the protagonists a safer place where to hide as too difficult and risky for children on their own to be narrated in a credible way. Nonetheless, this representation diminishes the protagonists' skills and, as a consequence, it degrades them. At the same time, it reduces child readers' chances to empathise with more fully developed characters who interact with each other in a threatening situation and who befriend other peers. Pali, Suzy, Peter, and David meet other, non-Jewish children only at the end of the story. When they reach the village, they are warmly welcomed by its inhabitants, but the village children are described superficially.

Does Dillon's novel convey attitudinal postmemory thanks to her protagonists' representation? If compared with the other works herein analyzed, Dillon's story is the less convincing in this sense because child readers can empathise with the protagonists only through familial relationships and these could have been developed more deeply. The presence of adults impedes child protagonists to fully develop their potential to oppose evil. When they meet non-Jewish peers, Dillon does not represent any scene where the children exchange information about their past, their life, their own character. Therefore, Jewish protagonists and non-Jewish children do not share any relevant moment together, apart from a scene when Pali asks if there is a cow in the village, since he once milked one, and the other children let him see the animal. It is Aunt Eva who tells to the villagers what happened to them, but the author relates this in a few lines, without establishing a real dialogue between the villagers and the group:

Aunt Eva had already told the story of the terrible night when the priest and Peter had played the Bach Double Concerto and had been overheard [by the Nazis in the village]. Now while everyone thanked Peter and Pali for the concert, she had to tell the story to the whole company. While this was going on, Pali had time to get out his handkerchief and dry the tears that had fallen on his violin, and put it safely on top of the piano. (Dillon 174)

Jewish and non-Jewish characters remain two separate groups whose relationships may have been further developed, since the villagers are all extremely – and a bit stereotypically – kind to them. The only means of contact between the two is music: one of their hosts plays “mountain music” (*ibidem*) with his georgina, while Pali, Suzy, Peter, and David play the piano that they find in their new house and the two violins they were able to bring with them. As Dillon tells, the first concert they gave on the day they arrived at the village “was the first of many concerts. They always began with Serafino taking out the georgina [...]” (*ibidem*).

However, this point of contact is not developed further, since the novel ends after a few pages on a hopeful note but leaving readers without any prompts towards empathy, even though Dillon has hinted at the importance of relationships a couple of times. When Mrs Nagy complains in Hungarian that the villagers' music is “peasant noise” (*ibidem* 171) and goes to her room, “one man said after a moment: ‘She's upset at having to leave her home, I think. She looks much more miserable than the rest of you.’ ‘That will improve as time goes on,’ another said, nodding wisely. ‘She'll settle down when she finds that she's with friends’” (*ibidem*). Mrs Nagy lived alone and is a lonely person, she does not like talking with and befriending people. Apparently, she only likes playing chess, as the children find out during their escape; it is the only activity that absorbs all her attention and that even makes her give

her playmate David “a pleased smile” (*ibidem* 103). The fact that the villager says that she looks ‘more miserable’ highlights the fact that the children and Aunt Eva do not look the same because they rely on and care about the positive relationships that connect them.

The second scene where Dillon hints at the relevance of relationships is when Aunt Eva refers to them at the end of the novel, while speaking with David:

“After all,” she said, “[...] Some day (sic) the war will be over and we’ll have to carry on as usual.”

“How can we carry on, after the things that have happened?” David said. “I have no home, no family now.”

“You don’t know that, for certain. We must live in hope. They may come back. And if they don’t you still have a family. You belong to us. You must learn to forget the bad things and remember the good ones.”

“Is that possible?”

“I think so. At least, it’s what I’ve done all my life,” Aunt Eva said.

“Will Suzy be able to forget?”

“Yes, if you help her. We’ll all have to help each other”. (*ibidem* 175)

Aunt Eva refers to the nurturing positive relationships that they all have already established between themselves, and foregrounds their importance in opposing evil (‘to forget the bad things’, as she says). However, the representation of their relationships with the villagers would have been of further assistance in conveying attitudinal postmemory to child readers.

Depending on the author’s literary skills in weaving the plot structure, non-Jewish protagonists can be part of stories that either successfully or scarcely convey attitudinal postmemory. French, Lowry, Boyne, and Morpurgo are examples in case. Michael Morpurgo’s *Waiting for Anya* has a third person narrator and privileges the internal focalization of Jo, a French child shepherd. He interacts both with Jewish people, in particular Benjamin and Léah, as well as German soldiers. Similarly, Lois Lowry’s *Number the Stars* features a Danish Lutheran girl as protagonist, who helps her Jewish friend Ellen and her family to escape from Nazis, while French’s protagonists are Australian (Anna, Mark, Tracey, and Ben), German (Heidi, Georg, and Frau Marks), and Polish (Johannes). Both John Boyne’s novels, *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* and *The Boy at the Top of the Mountain*, are based on the dualism formed by a German, non-Jewish protagonist (Bruno and Pierrot) and a persecuted Jewish child (Shmuel and Anshel) with whom they are friends, at least for some chapters; nonetheless, the reader is told the story through Bruno’s and Pierrot’s focalization. French’s and Lowry’s historical novels skillfully tell a story with non-Jewish protagonists that is able to raise child readers’ empathy and to pass attitudinal postmemory to them thanks to the relationships that the former establish. On the contrary, Boyne and Morpurgo’s works

show some difficulties in balancing the influence of evil on the protagonists' life and their defense of positive relationships with peers, and they offer just a few hints to make readers acknowledge that evil has ruined the characters' friendships.

Morpurgo's non-Jewish protagonist, Jo, meets many Jewish co-protagonists, in particular Benjamin (an adult) and Léah (a little girl). As Dillon will do too three years later in her historical novel, Morpurgo tends to represent Jewish co-protagonists as a group separated from the other children in the village. Of course, they are hiding and they do not want the villagers to know that they are in Lescun, waiting for an opportunity to cross the border with Spain. However, Jo meets quite early in the story Benjamin (in chapter 1) and Léah (in chapter 2, although he does not know she is Léah until the following chapter), and the narrative would be more convincing in conveying attitudinal postmemory if the author had included some more scenes of interaction between Jo and the Jewish children. One may say that the main topic in Morpurgo's novel is to represent the way Jo gets to form a personal understanding of the concept of 'enemy' and evil; however, as I will further discuss in the following chapter, the author also fails to provide an acceptable representation and problematization of evil and this impacts on child readers' empathy and acquisition of attitudinal postmemory.

The only scene where the hidden Jewish children and the other children in the village, including Jo, really and literally mix is at the end of the story, when the first are hosted for one night in the villagers' homes and the day after they take part in the festive transhumance of the flocks towards the mountains. Before that, Benjamin and Léah were hidden in Widow Horcada's barn in the hills, far from the village, and then, when there were many Jewish children, they moved to a hidden cave in the mountains. After the scene with the other children, they are again alone and separated from their peers because they stay at Jo's family hut near the border, while the rest of the children goes back to the village.

Despite this, it seems that Morpurgo tries to make Jewish co-protagonists and Jo nearer at least through a potential friendship. Distances – both real and for different religion and culture – vanish in the hidden cave when Jo accepts a Jewish boy's invitation to play chess with him:

Michael fell on his knees in the bracken and set out the pieces on a flat rock that served as a chessboard. The squares were marked. He held out his clenched fists and Jo knelt down and tapped his right hand. Black. Jo was happy he always won with black. Jo was good at chess, [o]nly Monsieur Audap beat his regularly. Suddenly he was aware of shadows crowding in around him; all the other children were coming to watch. Michael never looked up at him once during the game. [...] Every piece [Jo] lost provoked a sigh of pleasure from the audience and

when a few minutes later Jo found himself checkmate, Michael looked up for the first time and smiled. Jo saw that when he smiled his ears moved and he could not help but smile back. (Morpurgo, *Waiting* 100-01)

There seems to be space for friendship, but Morpurgo does not develop it further. Indeed, if Jo went too often to the cave alone, other villagers might have become suspicious. However, Morpurgo explains that Jo does not befriend the other children because they are too fearful and wary to approach him. Therefore, Morpurgo seems to tell that it was their missed approach to make friendship difficult or impossible, since “Jo would have liked to have made friends with the children in the cave. They all knew who he was by now but they still treated him like a stranger and hid themselves behind their dark eyes – all except Michael who never let him leave without beating him at chess” (*ibidem* 105). What is troubling in Morpurgo’s narrative is that there is an apparent lack of communication between the children and Jo and it is as if the latter should not reproach himself in any way, even though he really does not ask anything to them nor to Michael, and does not do anything to befriend them, apart from going to the cave:

The games were always held in complete silence [...]. Jo still chose black, believing and hoping that one day it would bring him luck, but it never did him any good. Widow Horcada would never let him stay very long after the game so there was not much time for talking, and when they did Michael was full of questions about Jo, about his family, about the animals on the farm, about his school. He would say little about himself, only that he could speak four languages, Polish, French, German and a little English. “I want to speak ten,” he said. But he never once spoke of his family. Jo asked Widow Horcada where they all were and she would not tell him. “There’s somethings better not to think about,” she said and nothing more was said about it; and Grandpère was no more forthcoming. Either they didn’t know or they didn’t want to talk about it, Jo was not sure which. [...] He wondered why. (*ibidem* 106)

On the night before all the Jewish and the village children reach the mountains with the sheep, Jo goes to his family’s hayloft, where Benjamin, Léah, and Michael will spend the night, and it is Michael who again approaches him as a friendly peer. Quite amazingly, Jo does not say anything to him after receiving his present:

“Here,” [Michael] said. “I brought you this.” He was trying to thrust something into Jo’s hand. “It’s something you always wanted,” he said. “Something you could never win. Squeeze it,” he said, “and it’ll bring you good luck.” It was a chess piece, a white queen.

“I’ve told him, Jo,” said Benjamin. “I’ve told him that for tomorrow he’s your brother. And do you what he told me, this horrible boy, he said if you were his brother he’d have taught you to play chess a lot better than you do.”

And then Jo saw Benjamin’s face silhouetted for a moment against the window behind him. (*ibidem* 143)

Even though Benjamin is talking jokingly, Jo's missed reply highlights the lack of communication between the two children, since Léah is already asleep and cannot participate in the dialogue. It also shows Jo's lack of initiative to befriend Michael, who is the only one who actively tries to approach him.

The white queen is a visual and material symbol of the potential friendship between the two and, at the same time, of the fact that they are at the same level – they are both children who like playing together. In this sense, one of them is a child in danger and the other one is trying to help him, rather than being a hidden Jewish boy and a village child. Morpurgo surely could have written a more coherent narrative, but my analysis in the following chapter will discuss how child readers are invited to acquire attitudinal postmemory through empathy towards Jo and the difficulties he has in deciding who his enemy is and what evil is. At the same time, Jo's inability to sincerely befriend another child does not help readers to acquire attitudinal postmemory, although it is important to note that this is because of his inability rather than his being non-Jewish. Rather than evolving in a more positive sense in the narrative, these inconsistencies signal Morpurgo's incoherence in presenting his protagonist, since it is difficult to find a narrative reason for this representation.

The difficulty in representing friendship and peer-ness between non-Jewish and Jewish children is also present in both Boyne's novels herein analyzed. Like Morpurgo, Boyne prefers telling a story with a non-Jewish protagonist who meets and is 'friend' with a Jewish co-protagonist. However, Bruno in *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* and Pierrot in *The Boy at the Top of the Mountain* are potentially more problematic characters because they are German, at least in part as Pierrot was born in France and his father was German. I specified 'potentially' because having non-Jewish German or Polish protagonists in historical novels does not necessarily mean that they are unable to refuse evil or to acknowledge later on that evil is to be condemned and discarded. For example, this happens in *Once*, where Zelda refuses Nazi ideology despite her parents did not, and *Then*, where Amon recognizes Felix and Zelda as peers despite his Hitler Youth uniform. French's works will prove the same, especially in *Hitler's Daughter*. Nonetheless, Boyne seems to refuse to make the characters acknowledge the danger represented by Nazi evil and its power on their lives; at the same time, child protagonists are equally unaware of the profound, positive potential that relationships with friends can have, especially with Jewish peers (Shmuel and Anshel), if they nurtured them.

Rather than representing the protagonists' recognition of Jewish characters as peers, Boyne seems to depict a basilar incommunicability between them. In *The Boy in the Striped*

Pyjamas, Shmuel tries to start and maintain a friendship with Bruno, despite being incarcerated at ‘Out With’³⁷⁴ and knowing whom Bruno’s father is – the Commandant – but it cannot be said the same for Bruno. Boyne establishes a metaphorical and visual parallel between the two children by making reference to their common characteristics, such as the fact that they share the same birthday and that they look like each other, especially when Bruno has his hair shaved, even though Shmuel’s hands do not look as healthy as Bruno’s. However, these attempts are feebly persuasive if compared to the overall narrative, which represents Shmuel’s behaviour as kind and friendly and Bruno’s as selfish and naïve. This literary decision highlights more the incommunicability between the two rather than their peer-ness, therefore it underlines the division between the two, literarily and visually represented by the fence that separates them and their different perspectives. Boyne seems unsure about the direction his narrative should take; it is as if he takes two opposed directions at once, without being able to convincingly weave one into the other. Despite the potential of the story and of the friendship between the two children, *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* does not persuasively link Bruno and Shmuel’s supposed death with the evil surrounding them and with the actions perpetrated by Bruno’s father, and it does not portray Bruno’s understanding and refusal of evil to nurture the only positive relationship he had.

In *The Boy at the Top of the Mountain*, incommunicability between the protagonist, Pierrot, and his co-protagonists is even worse because Pierrot could rely on more positive relationships than Bruno and yet he does not nurture any of them (see ch. 8.2). For example, he willingly discards his lifetime friendship with his Jewish neighbour Anshel, he spies on his aunt despite the fact that she is his only relative still alive, he also spies on Ernst, a driver who could have been a positive model for him, and he ruins his friendship with his classmate Katarina by not considering her point of view and by almost raping her. In this novel, child readers have more prompts to acknowledge that those who do not respect and recognize peers and who do not defend their relationships because they prefer evil and its corrupted power eventually get crushed by the latter. Boyne depicts a few scenes where the opposition between the evil-infected Pierrot and good, positive characters is evident, for example when he meets again Katarina after the war and she can stare at him without blinking her eyes, while he cannot bear her gaze for long (see ch. 8.2). However, these moments are not quite as many as the narration needs to more convincingly portray the destructive power of evil on good relationships. *The Boy at the Top of the Mountain* does not have the same psychological and

³⁷⁴ ‘Out With’ is Bruno’s mispronunciation of Auschwitz.

literary depth of Gleitzman's or French's works. French constantly offers examples to problematize evil and its connection to nationality: for example, in *Pennies* the protagonist Georg declares that he is a German boy, first in English and then also speaking in German, and he worries that his hosting family in Australia and his Australian peers would condemn him for being German. On the contrary, Bruno and Pierrot always have a strong focus on themselves and their own perspective on the surrounding reality and never acknowledge someone else's point of view. In *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, Bruno's supposed naivety regarding what happens at 'Out With' and what his father's role is in it converts to selfish stubbornness and inability to listen to the Other, since Shmuel tries to tell him what he has seen and experienced but Bruno seems not to believe him. Similarly, in *The Boy at the Top of the Mountain*, Pierrot stubbornly refuses to listen to Anshel, his aunt, and Katarina alerting him of the threatening and inhuman side of power given by evil, which he refuses to acknowledge, so he is ultimately unable to truly communicate with others.

Does having a non-Jewish German (or Polish, or any other nationality) protagonist prevent the passage and acquisition of attitudinal postmemory? Certainly not, as it cannot be said that German, Polish, or protagonists of other countries hinder child readers' absorption of attitudinal postmemory because of their nationality. In Boyne's narratives, the passage of attitudinal postmemory is made difficult by the scarce problematization of evil, the few scenes in which positive co-protagonists (both Jewish and non-Jewish) are present and oppose it, and the fact that his protagonists withdraw from others into a selfish and despising ideology that makes them unable to acknowledge peers and nurture positive relationships. Nonetheless, as further discussed in the following chapter, child readers may acquire attitudinal postmemory through Boyne's works. Therefore, despite Boyne's difficulties in handling the two narratives, these do not mean that the protagonists of historical novels should not be German (or Polish). One of Bruno's main scopes within his 'friendship' with Shmuel is being right, while Pierrot's aim throughout the novel is to gain more power over others and to command them. In both cases, the protagonists are negative because they refuse to acknowledge peer-ness, to nurture positive relationships, and to condemn evil, not because they are non-Jewish German children.

While the recognition of peer-ness scarcely or never occurs in Morpurgo's and Boyne's works, in Lowry's novel *Number the Stars* friendships prevail. Lowry's protagonist, Annemarie, is a Danish Lutheran girl who helps her Danish Jewish friend and co-protagonist Ellen and her parents to escape Nazi persecution. Their positive relationship is not scattered by the war, Nazi occupation, or Nazi threats to Annemarie and her own family while they are

hiding Ellen. Ellen's necklace, a Star of David, visually renders the recognized peer-ness and the strengthening of their friendship. Her necklace has two main functions: it is a visual symbol of Ellen's identity and it is a metaphorical symbol of Annemarie's 'adoption' within the Jewish community. This mirrors Ellen's temporary 'adoption' into Annemarie's family, when she spends one night with them before reuniting with her parents again. These symbolical 'adoptions' represent the solid relationship between the protagonist and Ellen as well as between their respective parents, since Ellen and her family are friends in difficult times and Annemarie's family readily offer their help to make them escape towards Sweden.

Ellen's 'adoption' into the protagonist's family is narratively rendered by her using the name of Annemarie's sister,³⁷⁵ who had dark hair like Ellen's when she was an infant. This detail is crucial to save Ellen because the Nazis inspecting Annemarie's apartment suspect that her family is hiding a Jewish girl, given that she is the only one with dark hair. Since Annemarie's sister had dark hair too until she grew up, Lowry shows how Nazis use hair colour to judge Ellen's identity and, by doing so, how they are driven by prejudices to persecute Jewish people. Characteristics like dark hair do not define Ellen as being Jewish; nonetheless, Nazi ideology does so. The protagonist's friendship and her family's 'adoption' go beyond prejudices and are able to defeat the Nazi ideology.

Similarly, just before the soldiers enter their room, Annemarie tears Ellen's necklace off her friend's neck because she knows that, for the soldiers, it would be a proof of Ellen's identity as a Jewish girl. Annemarie holds it so tightly in her hand while the Nazis are interrogating them that, after they are gone, she has the star impressed on her palm when she opens her hand. Despite the fact that it is Annemarie, not Ellen, who has the necklace when the Nazis are in the room, certainly Ellen is still Jewish and Annemarie is still Lutheran: the necklace is just a symbol – a symbol that is enough for Nazis to identify and despise Ellen, even though the necklace does not define her entirely. Had they found the necklace in Annemarie's hand, maybe they would have accused her to be a Jewish girl. Lowry gives an evident visual and metaphorical meaning to the necklace: the exchange of this symbol between the two girls helps child readers perceive them as peers rather than as 'a Jewish girl' and 'a Lutheran girl'; they are friends who are opposing evil.

Until Ellen's return, Annemarie will safeguard her necklace and "[she] will wear it [her]self" (Lowry 132). Lowry does not tell child readers whether Ellen and her parents will safely go back to Denmark after the war, although the hopeful ending seems to hint at the fact

³⁷⁵ Annemarie's sister is dead.

that it will be so. By getting the necklace around her neck, the protagonist cements their friendship, her ‘adoption’ into the Jewish community, and her role to maintain an active memory, which she has been performing by discarding evil and remaining loyal to her friend. Therefore, in this scene Ellen’s necklace is a visual symbol of attitudinal postmemory by openly opposing Nazi ideology, and readers are invited to acquire the same postmemory. To better explain the relevance of Ellen’s necklace, a parallel with *Waiting for Anya* may be useful, since in Lowry’s work the necklace conveys the idea that friendship prevails, whereas in Morpurgo’s novel a similar narrative device does not have the same metaphorical strength. Like Ellen’s necklace, the chess piece that Jo has been given is a material symbol of his friendship with Michael. However, contrary to Lowry, Morpurgo does not represent any later scenes where Jo plays, looks at, or holds the white queen, or where this has a meaningful role. Therefore, the chess piece loses relevance in the story and it is not a token of friendship, peer-ness, and memory as strong as Ellen’s necklace.

Jackie French’s first novel represents a group of four Australian children who usually play “The Game” (French, *Hitler’s Daughter* 4) – telling a story to the other children while waiting for the school bus. The best storyteller among them, on the basis of the hints provided, might be the granddaughter of the ‘Hitler’s daughter’ the title refers to. None of the Australian children is clearly identified as Jewish, or belonging to any other religion and social group; they all share the fact that they are Australian and school-age children. French prefers writing narratives that have protagonists who are not clearly identified as Jewish, since also her second novel considered here, *Pennies for Hitler*, features Georg, a child who is described and identifies himself as German from the beginning, until Nazi laws enter his family because one of his grandparents was Jewish and, therefore, his parents and himself are considered Jewish too. Similarly, in *Goodbye, Mr Hitler* Johannes is a Polish child who experiences a concentration camp for a very brief period of time because his parents, who are both doctors, have opposed Nazi rules regarding the use of their hospital.

The above novels form the *Hitler Trilogy* and they all have at least one German protagonist or co-protagonist. However, the author always highlights how evil and ‘the enemy’ are identifiable through the individual’s actions and ideology, rather than their nationality. Nationality is something not fixed in French’s novels, since characters often have or acquire dual nationalities: Mark’s friend in *Hitler’s Daughter* is supposed to be the granddaughter of ‘Hitler’s daughter’, Heidi, so she is an Australian girl with a presumed German relative; in *Pennies for Hitler*, Georg plainly states that he is German, but he also has a British passport thanks to his father’s origin, and then he will be adopted by an Australian

family; in *Goodbye, Mr Hitler*, Johannes is Polish and has positive relationships with Frau Marks, that is, Georg's mother, a German married to an Englishman, and he will move to Australia. Nationalities mingle and they do not define a priori Jackie French's characters.

When Johannes is brought to Auschwitz, he is readily helped by a group of children in his barrack. French does not define those children as being Jewish or non-Jewish at the beginning, they are just children like Johannes who decide to help a peer, regardless of Johannes not being Jewish or being Polish. Only after one chapter does French tell the readers that those children were not Jewish, because Jewish children "of all ages were gassed as soon as they arrived" (French, *Goodbye* 46). However, French wisely let a Nazi soldier explain this distinction,³⁷⁶ not Frau Marks, who is working as a nurse at the 'hospital' of the concentration camp in the same period when Johannes is there. The narrator of this chapter adopts her focalization when referring to them as children, rather than Jewish or non-Jewish children:

The children marched. Hundreds of them, barefoot, thin and tattered [...]. The snow had melted, but the road had turned to ice. Frozen feet turned blue then red as that ice cut them like knives. And still they marched, child after child.

Frau Marks and the other nurses marched beside them.

At first the children cried, and then they whimpered. Then even the strength for that was gone. The children marched in silence, staggering, knowing that to stop was certain death.

"Why?" whispered Frau Marks. "Why?"

She did not expect an answer, but one came from a nearby guard. He leered at her, waiting to see if she might smile at him, flirt with him, in exchange for a piece of bread, or sausage. But she did not. He shrugged. "There are too many brats. Too young to be of use. They must be got rid of."

"But they are going to be bathed ..." She meant: They are not going to the gas chambers.

He shrugged again. "They are not jüdisch." Jüdische children of all ages were gassed as soon as they arrived. "One of the higher-ups suggested they be put into a pit and burned, but gasoline is precious. So are bullets."

"But they are just to be bathed!"

He laughed in his boots and overcoat. "Water is cheap." (*ibidem* 45-46)

Frau Marks will be obliged to watch without being allowed to help the children whom she and other nurses have just bathed while they are left barefoot and with damp clothes in the snow, dying one after the other. Of all the children whom Frau Marks saw, only Johannes manages to survive, because he has arrived recently at Auschwitz and has more strength left than his peers. Those children were not Jewish but this did not matter to the Nazis: Jewish and non-Jewish children were murdered, by gas or by leaving them freezing to death. French suggests that there is no difference between them in that they all experienced Nazi evil, they were not

³⁷⁶ Cf. Budick 7; see also ch. 6.

children in the Nazi's eyes, and they all died, except for Johannes who later will have to come to terms with his anger and hatred (see ch. 8.3). Considering all children at the same level, regardless of national, religious, or cultural belonging, does not diminish the magnitude of the suffering that Jewish people, including children, had to live through. It is an example of how French tries to convey the idea that the evil perpetrated during the Holocaust should be known and remembered beyond the Jewish community, because it can take many forms and target other socio-cultural groups.

Following the above considerations, French's novels powerfully convey attitudinal postmemory, even though the author decides not to represent or foreground any Jewish characters. One may claim that French's decision not to have Jewish protagonists and co-protagonists is her own way to show respect for what Jewish people suffered. It may also be due to the fact that she is aware of her external point of view as a non-related postmemorial author, therefore she decides not to try to represent through a Jewish first-person narrator what she cannot figure, because she does not have first-hand memories. Despite her impossibility to know first-hand that perspective, at the same time she does not perceive the Holocaust as 'belonging' only to the Jewish community, because she represents inmates who are not Jewish, like those children or Frau Marks. Therefore, French's works persuade child readers that everyone can be targeted by evil ideology and that this is why they should all collaborate to defeat it, as the children help Johannes by sharing with him their knowledge of the concentration camp to survive there, and he accepts their help, like Hannah does with Rivka in *The Devil's Arithmetic*.

Since everyone can be targeted by evil ideology, French's novels call for a dialogue between the Holocaust and other forms of racism and disrespect in the contemporary era, to which child readers may be more used to, while maintaining historical truth. Child characters decide on their own to do good or evil towards peers and adults within a context where Nazi ideology surrounds them. By avoiding easy representational and literary simplifications, French offers Nazi ideology as the real evil and she invites readers to think about goodness and evil as associated to ideas and behaviour, to a way of conceiving Others (as a peer-human being or not) and relating to them (being respectful or disrespectful), rather than simply to nationality – as Gleitzman does not simply associate evil to uniforms. Therefore, having non-Jewish protagonists does not hinder the ability of French's works to pass attitudinal postmemory to readers; despite the fact that they both introduce German characters, Boyne and French highly differ because of the respective skills in problematizing evil and in showing positive relationships.

The irrelevant role of nationality in most of the novels herein analyzed has its most innovative and persuasive example in Jerry Spinelli's *Milkweed*. Quite interestingly and, I would say, intelligently, the author does not provide a clear identification for the novel's protagonist, who does not even have a name at the beginning of the story. He is a young child (no one knows who he is, where he comes from, or his age) who steals food to survive and he thinks that his name is Stopthief, since this is what shop owners and people shout to him when he is running away. His Polish friend Uri (it is not clear if he is Jewish) gives him a name, Misha, and introduces him to his group of friends – all orphan thieves – who are likely to be Jewish. Since Misha does not understand what they mean when they ask him if he is Jewish, the children offer a disheartening yet interesting definition to Misha:

“What’s a Jew?” I said.

“Answer the runt,” someone said. “Tell him what a Jew is.”

The unlaugher (sic) kicked ground straw at a boy who hadn't spoken. The boy had only one arm. “That’s a Jew.” He pointed to himself. “This is a Jew.” He pointed to the others. “That’s a Jew. That’s a Jew. That’s a Jew.” He pointed to the horse. “That’s a Jew.” He fell to his knees and scabbled in the straw near the horse flop. He found something. He held it out to me. It was a small brown insect. “This is a Jew. Look. *Look!*” He startled me. “A Jew is an animal. A Jew is a bug. A Jew is less than a bug.” He threw the insect into the flop. “A Jew is *that.*”

Others cheered and clapped.

“Yeah! Yeah!”

“I’m a horse turd!”

“I’m a goose turd!”

A boy pointed at me. “He’s a Jew all right. Look at him. He’s a Jew if I ever saw one.”

“Yeah, he’s in for it all right.” (Spinelli 6-7; emphasis in original)

However, when one of the boys notices the yellow stone that Misha is wearing at his neck and asks him about it, he cannot reply, and in a few lines he passes from being Jewish to being a Gypsy only for superficial elements regarding his appearance, just as the description of ‘a Jew’ has been done:

He let go of the stone. He backed off to arm’s length. He wet his finger with spit and rubbed my cheek. “He’s a Gypsy.”

There were gasps of wonder. The others leaned forward, munching, puffing their tobaccos.

“How do you know?”

“Look at his eyes. How black. And his skin. And this.” He flicked the yellow stone.

The smoke blower said, “You’re a Gypsy, ain’t you?”

It sounded familiar. I had heard that word before, around me, in a room, near a wagon. I nodded.

“Get him out of here,” said the sausage muncher. “We don’t need Gypsies. They’re dirt.”

The smoke blower laughed. “Look who’s talking.”

The one-armed boy spoke for the first time. “Next to Jews, they hate Gypsies the most.”

“There’s a difference,” said another. “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.”

“Because we boil babies and eat them for matzoh!” someone growled scarily.

Everyone laughed and threw food.

“We drink people’s blood!”

“We suck their brains out through their noses with a straw!”

“Even *cannibals* hate us!”

“Even *monkeys* hate us!”

“Even *cockroaches* hate us!”

Words and laughter and bread and sausages flew through the tobacco smoke and the horse’s legs. (*ibidem* 8-9; emphasis in original)

Misha accepts the name and the identity that his peers offer him, first as a Jew and then as a Gypsy, and later on he will become – again – a Jewish boy when he is unofficially adopted by the Milgrom’s family. He befriended their daughter Janina when they were still free and then, after the family is forced to move inside the ghetto, Misha feeds them with stolen food, also when he is himself a prisoner inside the ghetto. Misha’s ‘adoption’ in the Jewish family is not devoid of resistance – Uncle Shepsel does not agree because Misha is not a relative and he does not like him³⁷⁷ – but the main point of interest is that, despite having told everyone that he is a Gypsy, he now admits that he did not really think he was:

From the moment Mr. Milgrom said, “He is [family] now,” my identity as a Gypsy vanished. Gone were the seven wagons, seven brothers, five sisters, Greta the speckled mare. Deep down I guess I had always known my Gypsy history was merely Uri’s story, not reality. I didn’t miss it. When you own nothing, it’s easy to let things go. I supposed my last name was Milgrom now, so Pilsudski went too. I kept Misha. I liked it. (*ibidem* 104)

The quoted excerpts make it clear that, if one goes beyond Nazi laws, everyone can be ‘a Jew’. It is no longer a matter of culture, religion, or familiar kinship: ‘being Jewish’, in *Milkweed*, means to be a human being abandoned, rejected by others, who has to hide and steal his or her place in a society that considers him or her at a lower level.

Misha’s question “‘What’s a Jew?’” (*ibidem* 6; my emphasis) proves his innocent naivety and it should not be considered disrespectful. He really does not know the meaning of the term, and one infers that he has never met anyone who was Jewish before getting to know

³⁷⁷ There are also many scenes where the author tells how Uncle Shepsel reads over and over again a book about Lutherans, as he is convinced that if he converts to the Lutheran cult, the Nazis would let him go from the ghetto, and that he would not be ‘resettled’. The informed reader knows that this is only a delusion and understands that the author is using a bittersweet tone when describing Uncle Shepsel’s decision; for readers who may not grasp from the beginning the uselessness of his decision, it may be evident that Uncle Shepsel’s is just an unfounded, desperate hope because of Mr. Milgrom’s comments and the fact that Uncle Shepsel is progressively described as if becoming mad.

the orphans. To him, ‘being Jewish’ acquires the meaning of ‘being disrespected, rejected, persecuted’. This is how he identifies as ‘a Jew’ a man in black who is cleaning the footpath with his long beard while being watched by two ‘Jackboots’: “A pair of Jackboot soldiers stood above him, laughing. Some of the people were laughing too. The man in black was not laughing. [...] In my mind I saw the man in black scrubbing the sidewalk with his beard. [...] My eyes popped open, though in the blackness there was nothing to see. ‘[He’s a] Je[w]!’ I blurted” (*ibidem* 21-24). When the Milgroms adopt him, ‘being Jewish’ for Misha means becoming part of a family, but a family that is nonetheless persecuted, hungry, and in danger. It also means that the Milgroms have recognized him as one of them because he was already ‘a Jew’ – abandoned, rejected, despised. Through Misha’s adoption, child readers become ‘adopted Jews’ too, almost like Hartman’s concept of “witnesses by adoption” (Hartman qtd. in Aarons and Berger 15; see also ch. 1): readers may not be part of the ‘Jewish’ in-group defined by culture and religion, like the Milgroms, but they are likely to be familiar with the feeling of being picked on for some personal characteristic (for example, in the case of bullying), so they can empathize with the Milgroms’, the orphans’, and Misha’s being persecuted for no reason at all other than ‘being Jews’.

Although this chapter has offered a differentiation between Jewish and non-Jewish protagonists, this has been proposed only to highlight how their religion, culture, family links, or nationality are not decisive to activate child readers’ empathy towards them and, therefore, to convey attitudinal postmemory. Empathy is based on the readers’ recognition of the characters as peers, rather than as Jewish children. This means that the most important element considered herein is that the protagonists are *children* like the readers.³⁷⁸ Also, empathy is possible thanks to the characters’ relationships: for example, Gleitzman represents a Jewish protagonist, Felix, who interacts with many non-Jewish co-protagonists (like Zelda, Genia, Wassim, or Gabriek) and who considers them as part of an extended, ‘adoptive’ family of his, so he goes beyond Zelda’s parents being Nazi sympathizers, or Genia’s mix of suspicion and hate towards Jewish people, and privileges the positive, affective relationships that he establishes with them. Dillon’s narrative represents Jewish child protagonists but does not have the same narrative and empathic quality of Gleitzman’s works, while Yolen focuses

³⁷⁸ Of course, the historical as well as literary experience of non-Jewish German characters, like Bruno in *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, and Jewish protagonists like Chaim and Gittel in *Mapping the Bones* is not the same: the first is not persecuted, the latter are imprisoned in a concentration camp. This dissertation does not claim that their perspective on war is the same, but that *as children* they all encounter Nazi evil, albeit in different form, and they must decide what to do.

on loyalty and friendship between peers, rather than communality based on religion, although her novels might have benefited from the inclusion of non-Jewish children as co-protagonists to further enhance the dialogue between readers and characters.

In conclusion, the most critical works are Morpurgo's and Boyne's, considering the representation of protagonists, the problematization of evil, and the positive inputs to child readers to acquire attitudinal postmemory as a consequence of the previous two characteristics. At least in Morpurgo's case, a reason might be his country of origin. The author may be influenced by the fact that the UK is geographically near to mainland Europe where World War II began and where the Nazis perpetrated the Holocaust and, as Mitschke discusses, the UK has always had a positive self-image of heroic nation opposing Nazi Germany (see Mitschke 431; see also ch. 2.3). Yolen and Dillon are in-between cases, since child readers can empathise with their protagonists thanks to the family relationships they have, but at the same time the presence of non-Jewish co-protagonists may have further helped readers to acquire attitudinal postmemory.³⁷⁹

Even though the United States have a positive self-image of heroes against Nazis in World War II like the UK (see Mitschke 431; see also ch. 2.3), it seems that authors of countries far from Europe propose the most positive literary examples herein discussed. Both non-related American (Lowry and Spinelli) and Australian authors (Gleitzman and French) convincingly tell historical narratives that offer many prompts to child readers to acquire attitudinal postmemory. French and Spinelli are the most innovative non-related authors who are able to convey how hatred flooded against both Jewish and non-Jewish child characters and how goodness and evil are determined by personal behaviour rather than national, religious, or cultural belonging through convincing narratives with non-Jewish protagonists. Their novels, as well as Gleitzman's, hint at the fact that Nazi evil during the Holocaust was specifically targeting Jewish people, but hatred, disrespect, and racism are not limited to them and can easily include someone else, or 'infect' people.

On the one hand, Gleitzman, Yolen, and Dillon represent Jewish protagonists; on the other hand, Spinelli, Morpurgo, Boyne, and Lowry represent Jewish co-protagonists. However, having Jewish child protagonists is not linked to a more persuading passage of attitudinal postmemory because this is possible thanks to the focus on the problematization of evil, positive and negative relationships, and the recognition of peers. Consequently, I would

³⁷⁹ Regarding Yolen's novels, it is also necessary to take into consideration the suggestions that Yolen received by her own editor, which may explain why the author decides to represent Jewish protagonists and tell their story with an internal focalization (see note 369).

say that the most skillful authors to convey attitudinal postmemory to child readers are Morris Gleitzman, who proposes a Jewish child protagonist and a convincing problematization of evil; Lois Lowry, who weaves a story with a Jewish co-protagonist; Jackie French, who represents German or Polish protagonists; Jerry Spinelli, whose child protagonist's origins are unknown.

The representation of protagonists of various backgrounds has a great potential and helps conveying (and developing) attitudinal postmemory because child readers do not receive prompts to consider evil as associated just to a specific nationality. This approach would be too simplistic, it would not help contemporary readers to develop a critical and deeper understanding of what evil is, and, eventually, they would not be likely to understand how evil and racism are still present, and in what forms. At the same time, presenting Jewish protagonists who also feel negative emotions like anger and annoyance towards peers, as Gleitzman and Yolen do, makes readers perceive them primarily as other children rather than as Jewish children, that is, children belonging to a separate cultural group. Gleitzman, French, Spinelli, and Yolen (and with some more issues, also Morpurgo and Boyne) try to convey attitudinal postmemory in their own specific way, but they share the fact that it is necessary to recognize other children as peers and that sincere, positive, and nurturing (even 'adoptive') relationships with them, family members, or other adults are the best way to oppose deeply-rooted evil like Nazi ideology. The positive side of these representations is that readers perceive the characters as peers before considering them as Jewish children, or German Jewish children, and so on. This helps convey and acquire attitudinal postmemory, since readers shall behave respectfully towards peers regardless of their origins. It also proves that national groups are porous and that, more than belonging, it is better to rely on and value friendships.

Historical novels like those written from the non-related authors herein considered go beyond the passage of historiographical knowledge in trying to persuade child readers to adopt an ethically-aware position towards the past (and the present) by becoming receivers, carriers, and promoters of an active kind of Holocaust postmemory. If their own behaviour towards others, especially peers, is influenced by reading this kind of historical novels, they perpetuate Holocaust memory, remember what happened and to whom, and become part of a more respectful society. Through their works, the above authors seem to claim that the memory of the Holocaust is not and should not be only of direct witnesses and their descendants; everyone should acquire, preserve, and promote it in the form of postmemory, including attitudinal postmemory. This has multiple implications, starting from the need to

include historical novels like the ones herein discussed in school curricula to provide students with an additional tool to acquire active postmemory besides the necessary historical details.

The fact that authors based in countries far from Europe are most convincing in telling historical novels that convey Holocaust attitudinal postmemory may also reveal that the Holocaust is still too chronologically near to contemporary European authors. This may be why they are unable to represent it in innovative ways that go beyond nationalistic elements or influence (like in Morpurgo), the desire to spare children its harshest truths (like in Dillon), and the difficulty to depict a true dialogue and friendship between German non-Jewish characters and Jewish characters (like in Boyne).³⁸⁰ From the literary point of view, non-related children's authors living in Australia or the United States have proposed new ways to represent the Holocaust and to foster its memory within young generations. Therefore, despite the negative criticisms to Levy and Sznajder's theory of a cosmopolitan memory of the Holocaust (see Levy and Sznajder 87-88; see also ch. 1), the spread of Holocaust memory in Western countries beyond Europe can be considered as positive, since it fuels respectful, innovative, and persuasive narratives.

8.2 Encountering Evil in Person

How do child protagonists encounter evil? How do they react to it? Are their relationships with adults and peers influenced by it? The historical novels herein considered represent two main kinds of 'meeting with evil', which are often both present in the narrative: characters may encounter Nazis in person, or they must handle evil in a metaphorical form. Metaphorical evil corresponds to the multiple consequences of Nazi ideology, persecution, and murdering: for example, being forced into the ghetto and experiencing hunger, illness, death of loved ones (adults or peers), and seeing corpses along the street or hanged (in *Milkweed*); having to hide to survive and the fear of being caught (in *Children of Bach*); physical violence, fear for one's own life and for loved ones (in the *Once* series); being fascinated by the power of evil (in *The Boy at the Top of the Mountain*); seeking revenge (in *Goodbye, Mr Hitler*); being obliged to build arms that will kill relatives and other people under Nazi threat so as not to be killed (in *Mapping the Bones*), and more.

When child protagonists meet evil in person, embodied by Nazi soldiers, these are described with recurring features, which may become a stereotypical representation unless the author further problematizes evil (for example, by avoiding to associate a specific nationality

³⁸⁰ It may be useful to remember the difficulty of this dialogue as explained by the epistolary exchange between Friedländer and Broszat, which has been discussed in chapter 1.

to it or by adding metaphorical representations). In most of the novels herein considered, Nazis are relentlessly represented through synecdoches. Child readers may not be acquainted with this rhetorical device, but they will have no difficulty in identifying them as the vilest characters by means of the references to their cold eyes, rifles, flawless uniforms, metal eagles, and, above all, their shining boots. Nazi boots are black, polished, and they even crush the protagonists physically, like Pierrot in *The Boy at the Top of the Mountain* (I will further discuss this novel later in the chapter). Shining boots become one of the symbols through which readers can identify Nazi evil: when Misha hears the news that Himmler is going to visit the ghetto, he is sure that “[t]he Number Two Jackboot” (Spinelli 111; emphasis in original) will have “the most magnificent boots of all” (*ibidem*):

The Jackboot in the passenger side of the front seat turned his head slightly, enough so that one of his eyes stared at me for a moment. The eye seemed too large, as it was magnified behind the thick, round lens of his eyeglasses. The only thing magnificent about this man was his uniform. I saw half a little black mustache—it seemed to be dripping out of his nostril—a scrawny neck, a head that seemed more dumpling than stone. *Can this be Himmler? The Number Two Jackboot?* He couldn’t be. He looked like Uncle Shepsel!³⁸¹

I knew how to prove it one way or the other. His boots. [...] Maybe they went all the way up his legs. Maybe they had silver eagles.

[...] “Herr Sir! Let me see your boots! Herr Sir!” (*ibidem*; emphasis in original)

Nazi boots are in contrast with other footwear: for example, Felix’s good boots, “almost new” because Barney tells him that “[w]ater hunters need good shoes for running” (Gleitzman, *Once* 111, 112),³⁸² and Janina’s small shoes, which “were black and as shiny as her eyes” when Misha first met her that he could see himself reflected (Spinelli 33). Misha can see his reflection also on Nazi boots; what is different is that Janina’s shoes are unique while there is a parade of the latter. They all look the same, awesome and yet depersonalized:

The tallest, blackest, shiniest boots I had ever seen, endless columns. For an instant I saw my gaping face in one of them.

[...]

They were magnificent. There were men attached to them, but it was as if the boots were wearing the men. They did not walk like ordinary footwear, the boots. When one stood at tall, stiff attention, the other swung straight out till it was so high I could have walked under it; only then did it return to earth and the other take off (sic). A thousand of them swinging up as one, falling like the footstep of a single, thousand-footed giant. Leaves leaped. (*ibidem* 18)

³⁸¹ Uncle Shepsel is the protagonist’s ‘adopted uncle’, who does not like Misha. Regarding Misha’s adoption in the Milgrom’s family, see ch. 8.1.

³⁸² Barney is a Jewish dentist who takes care of Felix and other orphan children.

On the contrary, Janina's shoes are a means to establish a relationship by sharing a laugh with a peer:

[Janina] held her foot in front of [Misha's] face. "Look," she said. "See yourself."

[He] looked. There [he] was, as clearly as in the barbershop mirror. [He] looked... and looked... and then she was laughing. [He] was so intent on seeing [him]self that [he] hadn't noticed she was slowly lowering her foot; now it rested on the step and [he] was on [his] hands and knees, still looking.

[They] both laughed. (*ibidem* 33)

Janina's shoes are recognizable among all others and they change depending on what happens to her, a further symbol of their being 'human'. When she is in the ghetto, they become muddy because of her night runs with Misha to steal food for her family. Once, she almost has one of her shoes stolen when she is asleep on the street because people think she is dead. Eventually, Janina is thrown inside a boxcar by a Nazi soldier, Misha is shot at his ear, and when he wakes up the next day he sees "[a] black shredded scrap. Her shoe. That [he] had seen [his] face in. [He] would have known it anywhere. [He] ran [his] fingertips over it. [He] smiled. [He] picked it up and picked [himself] up and wobbled on" (*ibidem* 187-88). Janina's lost shoe is a proof of the absences that surround Misha now that the Milgroms have been 'resettled', including Janina and his orphan friends, unless they had already been killed in the ghetto. Therefore, Nazi boots metaphorically stand for Nazi ideology, but they are also a visual means to convey the idea that the soldiers' individuality is cancelled by that ideology, whereas child protagonists have second-hand and broken shoes that nonetheless signal their being human. This symbolic use of footwear is important in the attempt to convey attitudinal postmemory because it contributes to highlight how protagonists build and defend their relationships while boots are a threat to them and the characters.

Coupled with the constant presence of boots and of their thundering noise, Nazis are commonly associated to uniforms, almost as shiny and spotless as their boots. In *Children of Bach*, Pali, Suzy, Peter, their friend David, their aunt Eva, and their neighbor Mrs Nagy escape from Hungary to an Italian village in Friuli to be safe from Nazis by hiding inside a van, in a small space behind a Nazi officer's furniture. The driver Béla is twice stopped near the frontier by Nazi soldiers who want to check his documents and his van. These are the moments when the group is more at risk of being discovered and caught in Eilís Dillon's novel.³⁸³ During the first stop, the soldier does not ask the driver to open the back of the van,

³⁸³ There is also another scene, later discussed in this chapter, when the group risks to be caught: while the protagonists are hiding in the priest's house, they have to go to the forest for the night because some soldiers are

but the second time another Nazi insists on checking the furniture and orders the driver to take everything out. This would make him discover the hidden group, so Béla tries to convince him that it is a useless labour, that he would rather play cards in a dry place, since it had started raining. When the soldier agrees, the driver suggests sitting in the back of the van: “‘It’s a bit muddy but we won’t mind that.’ ‘I couldn’t get my uniform dirty. There would be hell to pay. The German soldier is always spick and span [...]’” (Dillon 160).

Dillon very briefly refers to Nazis in *Children of Bach*: in the story, there are only four scenes in which soldiers are hinted at or described, that is, when the protagonists’ parents and aunt Eva are caught in Hungary, when the van is stopped twice near the frontier, and when they have to hide in the forest near the priest’s house because there are “Germans” (*ibidem* 139) near the village. As discussed in the previous chapter, the main problem in Dillon’s novel is that it is excessively simplistic, including in the representation of evil. Considering the four occurrences when Nazi soldiers are present, the overall understanding a reader is highly likely to get is that Nazis were absent-minded, naïve music lovers, and that they did not really want to fight or enjoy being in the army. Of course, an experienced reader with more background knowledge understands that Dillon’s story is a highly simplified, sweetened, and almost untrue representation of historical reality. What is to contest here is not the fact that the soldiers have human characteristics (love for music and playing cards, plans for the future that do not include war and the army),³⁸⁴ but the fact that Dillon’s work lacks any other description of Nazi evil to compare with the scenes offered so as to provide children with a problematization of evil.

In the first meeting with evil, which is told by aunt Eva after she has reunited with the children, readers get to know how she improbably escaped them:

“I think that what really saved me was something I found in my pocket [...] – Voltaire’s *Candide*. [...]

As we walked along, I had an idea. I kept very quiet, like everyone else. None of us spoke at all. Then, at the corner of a street a few blocks away from here, the lights changed and we all halted. It was as if we were a line of trams, not people at all. The soldiers didn’t know what to do. Some of them seemed to think we should move on but the others pointed to the red lights and said that meant we should stop.

[...]

I just sat down on the kerb, and took my little book out of my pocket and began to read. I can tell you I don’t want to read Voltaire again for a long time. I was in a sweat,

expected to search for Jewish people at his place. However, the group is physically nearer to Nazis and their evil when the latter stop the van, so it can be said that the protagonists are more at risk there.

³⁸⁴ On the more human representation of Nazis, see the discussion of Pettitt’s study in chapter 7; on the description of Bogeyman-like Nazis, see Kokkola’s work discussed in chapter 7.

waiting every moment for one of the soldiers to come to the back of the crowd again and yell at me to get up and walk on. I had my answer planned.

[...]

I would have said, ‘Sorry, Captain. I was so interested in my book and I wanted to find out what happened next.’ [...] But no one came. [...] Anyway, there I was, sitting on the footpath, feeling like a fool, still reading my book as if my life depended on it.

[...]

The hardest thing was to continue to sit there, without moving, with my nose in my book. [...]

It felt like five years – it was really more like five minutes, I suppose. I waited until the crowd had turned the corner.

[...]

As soon as I thought it was safe I stood up slowly and walked down the side street, pushing the book into my pocket. [...]” (*ibidem* 44-46)

Apparently, Nazi guards were not attentive enough to avoid her escape. Even if one accepts this improbable scene, which tastes like a literary stratagem to set the character free, the experienced reader cannot really believe that aunt Eva and the other protagonists are not caught due to Nazis’ naivety for a second time. This happens when they are stopped by the second soldier who eventually agrees to play cards with the driver rather than checking the van:

“You’ll have to take out all that stuff and let me see it.”

“Why? I know it’s not my business to ask but aren’t you making a lot of work for yourself?”

“That’s all right. I’m bored to death here anyway. I’ll help you. We’ll have it done in a few minutes. You know, in the army we always have to show enthusiasm. It’s not quite enough to do what we’re told, though they always say it is. A soldier’s first duty is to obey – but if that’s all he does he never gets promoted. [...]”

[...]

“[...] We could just as well be enjoying ourselves. How about a game of cards?”

“It’s forbidden to play cards on duty,” the soldier said, “but it would certainly liven things up.”

“Do you mean to stay in the army when the war is over?”

“Catch me! I’ll look for a job in Milan or Paris and go into business after a while. [...]”

“So why don’t we have a game of cards, then, instead of rooting through all that junk? It will take forever to put it all back.”

“Suits me, as you put it like that. Have you got a pack?” (*ibidem* 158-59)

Playing cards may be a way to metaphorically tell how Jewish people’s lives were depending on fate and luck: the first guard did not check the back of the van and the protagonists would have travelled uninterruptedly to the Italian village unless the second Nazi stopped them. Similarly, had the latter refused to play cards, they would have been discovered. However, this metaphorical level is not explored by Dillon; therefore, the overall impression is that Nazi

soldiers are easy to persuade and that, with people helping them (the driver and the priest), the protagonists have been able to elude them quite easily.

This idea is conveyed also when the group of protagonists escapes in the forest. After the priest and the maid have got to know that there are Nazi soldiers near the village and that they have been informed by a mentally challenged girl that she heard “so good” music “that there must be Jews or angels” (*ibidem* 140), the soldiers are likely to enter the priest’s house at every moment to check who was playing with him. Consequently, the children, aunt Eva and Mrs Nagy go to the forest and stay there for the night. The soldiers come, but they do not suspect anything when the priest plays for them accompanied by an old gramophone because the officer “asked to hear the record. He said he misses real music, he’s sick and tired of hearing only marching songs” (*ibidem* 151). Then, the officer “thanked [the priest] for the concert and apologized for having disturbed [him], and off they went” (*ibidem* 152) without searching further in the house or in the forest.

How are child readers to understand that Nazis pose a much more serious threat to the protagonists’ lives if Dillon does not depict them in this way, or in any more dangerous scene? Readers are more likely to think that Nazis were not smart, were easy to deceive, and, most importantly, that they were not so dangerous and evil after all, since they enjoy music so much to be satisfied of hearing the priest to go away and the soldier at the frontier wishes to change career after the war.

Moreover – why are they evil? Readers know that the soldiers are evil because Dillon indirectly conveys this idea: they are a threat because the protagonists must hide and run away from them. However, apart from the initial scene where they force the children’s parents and aunt to leave their house, the soldiers never do anything that foregrounds them as followers of the specific Nazi ideology: they inspect a house, they listen to music, and they stop a van demanding – only for a while – to check its content. They are recognizable as the enemy because they wear an impeccable uniform, but this is hardly sufficient to make readers absorb an active memory. The representation of the Nazi soldier who thinks about life beyond war and the army may have been a good start to problematize evil: is he the protagonists’ same age? What may they have in common as young people? What behaviour and ideology make him evil? However, Dillon does not explore this opportunity and prefers sticking to an ambiguously superficial description. For example, when talking to the driver, that same soldier seems scarcely menacing in his apologies:

“Have you seen strange people?” the soldier asked sharply. “If you did, you’re supposed to tell me. You could be off to the camps yourself for concealing vital information.”

“I didn’t see anyone on this trip,” Béla said, “and I’m too old a hand to conceal information. [...]”

“All right, all right, I wasn’t criticizing you. I know an honest man when I see one.”
(*ibidem* 159)

The readers know that the protagonists are hidden inside and that the driver is lying. Even though such a scene may cause some smiles at the soldier’s naivety, it is debatable that Dillon does not discuss further Nazi ideology in the novel.³⁸⁵ Therefore, that smile is quite bitter to experienced readers who know that a young readership with less background historical knowledge may not be as quick as them in understanding that Dillon’s representation is parodic and that the spotless uniforms really stand for an ideology stained of inhumane and murderous actions.

Impeccable and perfectly fit uniforms abound in John Boyne’s *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*. Here, they represent evil and power and they are a symbol of Nazi ideology but, unlike Dillon, the author does not spare child readers being (indirectly) told about Nazi violence. Bruno, a nine-year-old German child, has always been told “how important” (Boyne, *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* 4) his father’s job is and that he “was a man to watch and that the Fury had big things in mind for him” (*ibidem* 5),³⁸⁶ even though in his naïve perspective on the world that characterizes the novel, Bruno “wasn’t entirely sure what job Father did” (*ibidem* 4). However, Bruno is sure that his father “had a fantastic uniform” (*ibidem* 5). His father always looks smart and, when the ‘Fury’ promotes him to the rank of Commandant, he and his family have to move from Berlin to ‘Out With’.³⁸⁷ Bruno is used to see soldiers inside his home in Berlin and in their new house at ‘Out With’, but they cannot be compared with his father’s perfect appearance:

Father was at the centre of them and looked very smart in his freshly pressed uniform. His thick dark hair had obviously been recently lacquered and combed, and as Bruno watched from above he felt both scared and in awe of him. He didn’t like the look of the other men quite as much. They certainly weren’t as handsome as Father. Nor were their uniforms as freshly pressed. Nor were their voices so booming or their boots so polished. (*ibidem* 44)

There is only one young soldier Bruno is most afraid of, a nineteen-year-old young man who spends time with his twelve-year-old sister. The day they move to the new house, Bruno is

³⁸⁵ Moreover, Dillon does not even explain what “the camps” (Dillon 159) are in her story (or in a paratext). Since there are not any paratexts, child readers are supposed to know on their own what they are.

³⁸⁶ ‘Fury’ is, of course, ‘Führer’ as pronounced by Bruno.

³⁸⁷ As previously specified in note 374, ‘Out With’ is Bruno’s mispronunciation of Auschwitz.

complaining about the fact that he cannot stay with his “three best friends for life” (*ibidem* 8), Karl, Daniel, and Martin, when he suddenly hears a noise from his parents’ bedroom. He believes that his father has heard him and will reproach him; instead,

a much younger man, and not as tall as Father either, [exits from the door.] [H]e wore the same type of uniform, only without as many decorations on it. He looked very serious and his cap was secured tightly on his head. Around his temples Bruno could see that he had very blond hair, an almost unnatural shade of yellow. [...] He looked the boy up and down as if he had never seen a child before and wasn’t quite sure what he was supposed to do with one: eat it, ignore it or kick it down the stairs. Instead he gave Bruno a quick nod and continued on his way. (*ibidem* 19)

Despite having always seen soldiers, Bruno does not like him because he is “unfriendly” (*ibidem* 44) and he has not “any warmth in his eyes” (*ibidem*). Apart from this young soldier – Lieutenant Kurt Kotler – Bruno never directly approaches other Nazi guards at ‘Out With’, both inside his house or nearby the place full of children and men, all wearing a ‘striped pyjamas’, that Bruno can see from his bedroom window.

Surely, Kotler is a good example of the representation of Nazi evil, not only in his appearance, but also in his behaviour. Even though Boyne never directly describes violence while it is happening, Kotler is the negative character of his novel who performs evil on others. For example, he beats and supposedly kills Pavel, a Jewish doctor prisoner at ‘Out With’ and now waiter at Bruno’s family house. One night, at dinner, Kotler inadvertently refers to his own father moving to Austria and Bruno’s father quickly deduces that he was a political opponent of the Führer, therefore he scorns Kotler through the implied meaning of his words. Shortly after, Pavel is exhausted and accidentally drops the bottle of wine. Kotler exploits this incident to give way to his hatred as well as his anger for his father through beating Pavel. This, at least, is what an experienced reader may understand by reading the chapter, since Boyne does not offer any details regarding his violence, what he did, or what Pavel did while being beaten. Child readers are only told that “none of them could watch[,] [...] Bruno cr[ie]d and Gretel gr[ew] pale” (*ibidem* 153), so they are likely to think that Kotler was extremely violent, given that Bruno’s sister had been trying to impress him and she grows pale.³⁸⁸

After this incident, Bruno would not see Pavel anymore at their house. The relevant passage is an example of Kokkola’s ‘framed gaps’ (see Kokkola, *Representing* 25-27; see also ch. 6), although it is debatable that the child reader has enough surrounding information, at

³⁸⁸ Gretel is Bruno’s older sister.

this point or later in the novel, to infer that Pavel is dead. Unless the reader already knows something of the historical period, Pavel's off-stage death is left unspoken and blurry; Bruno does not even think about him anymore after that night, despite the fact that Pavel tended the scraped kneel he got while playing outside and Bruno thought that it was "terribly selfish" (Boyne, *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* 88) that his mother took credit for it.³⁸⁹

A more visually evident example of Kotler's violence is provided by the encounter between Bruno and Shmuel, the Jewish boy prisoner at 'Out With' whom Bruno had previously met while going on an exploration along the concentration camp fence. Kotler had ordered Shmuel to polish all the family's glasses because he has tiny hands, so he is in Bruno's kitchen doing this work when Bruno enters. Bruno is pleasantly surprised and, even though Shmuel repeats more than once that he is afraid of Kotler and that he must do his work, Bruno talks with him while eating a few slices of stuffed chicken from the fridge. He offers some to Shmuel, who refuses to take them because he fears that Kotler will get back right that moment, but he eventually stuffs his mouth and swallows at once when Bruno puts the food into his hand. When Kotler is back to the kitchen, he accuses Shmuel:

"Did you steal something from that fridge?"

Shmuel opened his mouth and closed it. [...] He looked towards Bruno, his eyes pleading for help.

"Answer me!" shouted Lieutenant Kotler. "Did you steal something from that fridge?"

"No, sir. He gave it to me," said Shmuel, tears welling up in his eyes as he threw a sideways glance at Bruno. "He's my friend," he added.

"Your...?" began Lieutenant Kotler, looking across at Bruno in confusion. He hesitated. "What do you mean he's your friend?" He asked. "Do you know this boy, Bruno?"

Bruno's mouth dropped open and he tried to remember the way you used your mouth if you wanted to say the word 'yes'. He's never seen anyone look so terrified as Shmuel did at that moment and he wanted to say the right thing to make things better, but then he realized that he couldn't; because he was feeling just as terrified himself. [...] Bruno wished he could run away. [...] [Kotler] was advancing on him now and all Bruno could think of was the afternoon when he had seen him shooting a dog and the evening when Pavel had made him so angry that he—

"Tell me, Bruno!" shouted Kotler, his face growing red. "I won't ask you a third time."

"I've never spoken to him," said Bruno immediately. "I've never seen him before in my life. I don't know him." (*ibidem* 176-78)

When Bruno entered the kitchen, he told Shmuel that he is in charge of the house – not Kotler – when his father is away. However, when Kotler is near him, he is afraid that the lieutenant could hurt him as he did with Pavel, so he plainly lies. Thus, despite being equally – or more

³⁸⁹ As one may infer, Bruno's mother did so not to let her husband know that it was Pavel, a Jewish man, who medicated Bruno.

– terrified, Shmuel tells the truth and recognizes Bruno as his friend, while Bruno rejects him, even though he knows that Shmuel fears Kotler. When the two boys meet again at their secret place along the fence, Shmuel has a lot of bruising on his face: Kotler’s violence is again off-scene, but this time the result is more evident. After that, Bruno will apologize to Shmuel more than once for his treachery.

In *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, uniforms are not only a visual symbol of evil, they are also a means to denigrate Nazis. In contrast with Bruno’s quite evident admiration for his father and his uniform, his grandmother is not impressed at all. Bruno is fond of her because he recalls many happy times with her and his sister, especially at Christmas, when the three of them used to prepare and then perform a play in front of the rest of the family. Her grandmother was an appreciated singer when she was younger and she always wore gorgeous dresses; as she says, if “[y]ou wear the right outfit [...] you feel like the person you’re pretending to be” (*ibidem* 212; emphasis in original), so she sews costumes for her grandchildren for their plays. She interprets his son’s smart uniform in a similar way:

“I wonder – is this where I went wrong with you, Ralf?” she said. “I wonder if all the performances I made you give as a boy led you to this. Dressing up like a puppet on a string.”

“Now, Mother,” said Father in a tolerant voice. “You know this isn’t the time.”

“Standing there in your uniform,” she continued, “as if it makes you something special. Not even caring what it means really. What it stands for.”

[...] Mother, trying to calm the situation down a little, [said] “[D]on’t you think Ralf looks very handsome in his new uniform?”

“Handsome? [...] You foolish girl! Is that what you consider to be of importance in the world? Looking handsome?”

“Do I look handsome in my ringmaster’s costume?” asked Bruno for [...] he had been wearing [...] *the red and black outfit of a circus ringmaster* [...]. (*ibidem* 94-95; my emphasis)

Thus, the Commandant’s uniform is paralleled to Bruno’s play costume as if it was just a dressing up, not a symbol of power and importance within the Party and for the country, as Bruno’s father and grandfather think. At the same time, the above scene visually renders how Bruno is soaked in evil, but never acknowledges it because he is too naïve and focused on himself – that is, how he looks with his costume.

Bruno’s naivety along the story never changes. As useless as his grandmother’s words to his father, Shmuel’s hinting at the soldiers’ violence and hatred towards all the people on his side of the fence passes unobserved to Bruno. Not only he never thinks twice about Shmuel’s words, for example by wondering if there might be some truth in what he says, but he is also annoyed that his friend does not distinguish between his father and other, indistinct soldiers. This proves Bruno’s stubbornness and selfishness, since on the day they moved to

‘Out With’, he complains that he is “tired of hearing about Father’s job[.] [...] That’s all we ever hear about” (*ibidem* 18) and he even dares to say to his father that ‘the Fury’ would “hardly send [him] to a place like [‘Out With’] if [he] hadn’t done something that he wanted to punish [him] for” (*ibidem* 52). Despite this, Bruno does not believe Shmuel and remains loyal to the idea he has of his father – the soldier with the “fantastic” (*ibidem* 5) uniform.

Understandably, Bruno loves his father simply because he is his father, not because of his success in his unknown job or because he is a promising soldier. What is most disturbing, though, is that Bruno never grows at the psychological and ethical-emotional level. When he gets back to Berlin for his grandmother’s funeral, he acknowledges that he must be taller since he can now look outside his old bedroom’s window without stretching his neck, but he will never accept Shmuel’s own perspective on soldiers or, at least, he will never reflect upon it before concluding that his own point of view is the truth. Bruno remains convinced that if there was anything wrong in that place, his father would do something for it. Even when he crawls under the fence and sees with his own eyes the conditions Shmuel is forced to live in, acknowledging that there are not any rocking chairs or playing children, that there is not a café or a stall as he thought, he does not concede that Shmuel was right. When he is obliged to take part in a march, he thinks that “he wanted to whisper to [the people there] that everything was all right, that Father was the Commandant, and if this was the kind of thing that he wanted the people to do then it must be all right” (*ibidem* 217).

Even though Bruno may not recognize evil by associating it to uniforms because his father wears one, he should be – or become – able to understand what evil is by establishing relationships with others, but this does not happen. Only a few pages before the previous passage, Bruno admitted that he did not like that place and that he was afraid of seeing around him only “two different types of people: either happy, laughing, shouting soldiers in their uniforms or unhappy, crying people in their striped pyjamas” (*ibidem* 215). He even said that he should go home, despite the fact that he and Shmuel had not even started searching for Shmuel’s father, which is the ‘exploration’ they were supposed to do together before Bruno moved to Berlin. Despite Bruno’s claims, theirs is not a true friendship, because his behaviour and words all indicate that Bruno is always self-centered, while Shmuel proves to be wise and open to his peer more than once, regardless of his weaknesses and his treachery in the kitchen.

For example, while the two children are talking at the fence, Bruno voices his desire to play with Shmuel, rather than sitting and talking every time they meet there but, apparently, he does not really mean it because “Bruno often made comments like this because he wanted to pretend that the incident [in the kitchen] a few months earlier when he had denied his

friendship with Shmuel had never taken place. It still preyed on his mind and made him feel bad about himself, although Shmuel, to his credit, seemed to have forgotten all about it” (*ibidem* 185). Pretending a desire to play with Shmuel only serves the scope to make Bruno feel less guilty for what he did, at least temporarily: his wish is not a genuine offer to play. This situation will be replicated when he and Shmuel go on their ‘exploration’ inside the fence, in the death camp. When Bruno goes to the fence for the last time, he sees that Shmuel is upset and thinks that Shmuel has already been told that he will soon leave for Berlin. He does not take into consideration that there might be something else worrying Shmuel. In fact, Shmuel is downhearted because his father has disappeared, so this proves that Bruno has wrongly inferred the reason of Shmuel’s mood and he has thought only about himself. Repeating again the same egotistical behaviour, Bruno considers the exploration on Shmuel’s side of the fence simply as that – an exploration with another child rather than on his own, while it has a very different meaning to Shmuel: it is one more attempt to find news about his father helped by a peer.

Quite often, Shmuel is described as if he is going to say something, usually contradicting Bruno’s ideas about how life on the other side of the fence is, but then he stops and does not say anything. The author could have granted space to a Jewish perspective through Shmuel’s voice, but the child’s comments are too scarce to give a better understanding of what happens, especially if the reader has not got previous knowledge about concentration camps. It may be that Boyne, as a non-Jewish author, has decided not to represent a Jewish point of view of the concentration camp because he, Bruno, and the readers cannot have the same internal perspective. While this may avoid criticism on the one hand, on the other hand Boyne’s ‘fable’ – as it is defined in the first page of the novel – seems to be more appropriate and useful to an older readership. Metaphors and silences in representing the Holocaust and Nazi evil should not be discarded, even in works for children; however, it is unlikely that child readers will be able to grasp all the metaphorical meanings and even the major parallel between Bruno and Shmuel, because there are too many ‘framed gaps’ (see Kokkola, *Representing* 25-27; see also ch. 6). In fact, the gaps are ‘unframed’ because Boyne’s work presupposes a high level of previous historical knowledge, which is not conveyed during the story or in some kind of paratext. By doing so, the parallels between the two children (being born on the same day and year and having similar appearance) do not serve the aim to convey how absurd the Nazi idea not to consider Jewish people as human beings was.

Indeed, Bruno is very young. He is nine years old, so family relationships are still relevant in his life as a child (see ch. 7). This may explain why he refuses to take into consideration Shmuel's accusations against soldiers and, therefore, against his father. However, even considering his naïve and distant experience of the concentration camp, seen from afar from his bedroom window and from the other side of the fence, the reader is more likely to regard his behaviour as selfish and sometimes as arrogant.

What is worse and, in itself, an example of his selfishness, Bruno does not establish any positive relationships with peers. He defines his sister a 'Hopeless Case', which may be understandable because of the common rivalry between siblings, especially between older and younger ones as it is between Gretel and Bruno. Bruno's Berlin friends are more an absence than a presence in the narrative, since they are only remembered rather than being directly present on the scene. Bruno defines them as his "three best friends for life" (Boyne, *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* 8) and is deeply upset when his mother tells him that they are going to move because he will not be able to visit them anymore. When his mother replies that he will make other friends "waving her hand in the air dismissively, as if the making of a boy's three best friends for life was an easy thing" (*ibidem*), it seems that Bruno has solid relationships with his friends, given that he is aware that making best friends is not so easy. Nonetheless, as the story proceeds, it is evident that Bruno only needs someone to chat and play with rather than friends. When Shmuel becomes his new playmate, Bruno progressively forgets his previous friends, until he cannot remember their names anymore: "[i]t had been almost a year since [they moved to 'Out With'], and his memories of life in Berlin had almost all faded away. When he thought back he could remember that Karl and Martin were two of his three best friends for life, but try as he might he couldn't remember who the other one was" (*ibidem* 182).

Friendships and friends are all temporary for Bruno: he needs them not to feel bored, but he never fully engages with them at the emotional-personal level. Since the three children are scarcely present and mainly evoked or referred to, his friendship to Shmuel is the only positive relationship that Bruno can develop, but he spoils it by being selfish and in some way 'evil' towards him. For example, if Shmuel is really important to him as a friend, why is Bruno so often unable to bring some food to him? Boyne narrates that

[s]ometimes [Bruno] brought more bread and cheese with him to give to Shmuel, and from time to time he even managed to hide a piece of chocolate cake in his pocket, but the walk from the house to the place in the fence where the two boys met was a long one and sometimes Bruno got hungry on the way and found that one bite of the cake would lead to

another, and by the time there was only one mouthful left he knew it would be wrong to give that to Shmuel because it would only tease his appetite and not satisfy it. (*ibidem* 166-67)

A boy aged nine is likely to be always hungry, but so is Shmuel, and not for his age. Even if one does not consider how this representation is disrespectful towards Shmuel, a true friend should have remembered to bring food, or should have avoided eating everything along the way. Focused on himself, Bruno is unable to understand Shmuel's urgent needs as well as his needs as a peer, like having someone who really listens to him, someone who is truly interested in helping him find out where his father has gone, someone who does not renounce after acknowledging that he does not like the place. Shmuel's true friendship, unfortunately, does not balance Bruno's behaviour because Shmuel is granted less space in the narrative. Therefore, in Boyne's novel peer-ness is either inconsistent, like Bruno's Berlin friends, or scarcely present, as for Shmuel.

Bruno's young age and its relevant limits in understanding reality cannot be an excuse to represent a protagonist who may be more dangerous than helpful to child readers. Morris Gleitzman's protagonist, Felix, is ten years old at the beginning of the series and the problematization of evil that Gleitzman's works offer is greater and more profound than in Boyne's novel. By telling a story with a child protagonist who is unable to change, to grow, to establish positive peer relationships, and who eventually dies with Shmuel in the concentration camp,³⁹⁰ Boyne takes a huge risk. Considering the previous reflections, child readers are told a few sure facts: Bruno belongs to a well-established family; he befriends Shmuel, a 'poor', unfed child who is imprisoned because he is Jewish; Bruno agrees to help him search for evidence to understand where his father has gone, and at the end both of them disappear.³⁹¹ Given all the informational gaps of the novel, what may child readers infer from these facts? Readers are preponderantly exposed to Bruno's thoughts, words, actions, and narratorial perspective, while Shmuel's standpoint is left unvoiced or has to be inferred most of the time. On this basis, it is most likely that the story be interpreted in a negative way, since one may say that if Bruno had not helped Shmuel to find evidence, he would not have disappeared. Or, since his parents warned him not to go near the fence, the child reader may infer that Bruno should have followed his parents' order; if he had, he would have survived.

Despite the fact that 'following what parents say' is usually correct, the problematization of evil should have encouraged Bruno to oppose his father more often, or

³⁹⁰ This is what an informed reader infers; what child readers can understand is, at least, that Bruno 'vanishes' like Pavel before him.

³⁹¹ Shmuel's father had disappeared some days before. For an informed reader, it is likely that he had been killed.

readers may deduce that they should obey and follow their parents even if what they do is evil.³⁹² Additionally, rather than condemning the protagonist's selfishness, the story seems to 'defend' him, as his life was going well (despite moving house) before knowing a peer, an 'Other', someone to grow with by sharing and discussing points of view. For these reasons, assuming children as the main readership, *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* is not a convincing narrative from the literary point of view nor as a historical novel conveying attitudinal postmemory.

Michael Morpurgo's *Waiting for Anya* is another debatable novel and it can be paralleled with Boyne's narrative. Although they are not as developed as they could have been, Morpurgo's story offers some prompts towards potential relationships with peers, as discussed in the previous chapter; on the contrary, Boyne's narrative lacks real relationships. It is easy to understand the literary advantages of this decision: given the difficult subject and context, a friendship between a German and a Jewish boy is risky. However, both Bruno and Shmuel are exposed to evil on a daily basis, although in very different forms, and it is difficult to understand why Bruno never acknowledges evil and Shmuel's attempts to make him aware remain unanswered.

Surely, Shmuel is aware of the evil surrounding him as he is able to identify the soldiers and Bruno's father as perpetrators, but he is also aware of the fact that it is personal behaviour that proves a person to be evil, rather than his family or nationality: he never accuses Bruno of being wicked, despite the fact that his father is the Commandant and that he is a German boy.³⁹³ Conversely, Bruno never goes beyond reading his surroundings as a bored child who pretends to be an explorer. Since child readers are more exposed to his perspective, if they empathize with him Nazi evil may remain in the background, unacknowledged, unless they have deeper previous knowledge. Therefore, if they are not provided with the chance to better approach evil, it is unlikely that they can develop attitudinal postmemory.

Selfishness and refused friendship, greed and power are present also in Boyne's *The Boy at the Top of the Mountain*, which can be considered a companion piece to *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*. While the latter novel has a debatable title referring to Shmuel, who is a co-protagonist only in a few scenes, the first work reveals Pierrot as the child protagonist. Pierrot's father was German but he was born in France and when both his parents die, he

³⁹² A very different problematization of evil and of the relationship between parents and children is offered by Jackie French's *Hitler's Daughter*, discussed later in this chapter.

³⁹³ Shmuel is Polish.

spends some time in an orphanage until his aunt Beatrix decides to take care of him by inviting him at the house where she works, the Berghof. As if Boyne is resuming the themes of the previous novel, Pierrot is very fond of his father, who fought in World War I, despite the fact that he has to throw empty bottles of alcohol away at night and that he knows that he hits his mother, a behaviour deriving from his war-related trauma. In particular, Pierrot admires his father's uniform and, like Bruno, he has a Jewish friend, Anshel, at least at the beginning of the story. Since they were born, they used to share a lot of time together and Pierrot regards him like a brother; moreover, they have developed a secret sign language that only they know to communicate with each other because Anshel is deaf. When Pierrot moves to the Berghof, his aunt tells him that he must be called Pieter from that moment onwards and that he cannot write again to Anshel because it would be safer for them all. After spending some time there, Pierrot becomes each day more convinced of the injustices and wrongs that were done during World War I to Germany, which he now regards as his own country, he rejects Anshel's friendship, and he believes that the Führer will reestablish German power. After many private talks with Hitler, he even tells his aunt that his father was "[t]he worst [coward] of all. For he allowed weakness to vanquish his spirit. But [he is] not like him" (Boyne, *The Boy at the Top of the Mountain* 154) and he will restore the family's name.

Uniforms and synecdoches have a central role in this novel. The Führer is usually described by referring to his seriousness, his moustache, and his yelling. Pierrot-Pieter gets in contact more often with him rather than other Nazis. However, before continuing his journey to the Berghof, he bumps into a Nazi soldier waiting at the platform:

Looking up, his eyes took in the man's earth-gray uniform and the heavy black belt he wore across his waist, the calf-high black jackboots and the patch on his left sleeve that showed an eagle with its wings outstretched over a hooked cross.

"I'm sorry," he said breathlessly, looking up with a mixture of fear and awe.

The man looked down, and rather than helping him up, curled his lip in contempt as he raised the top of one boot slightly, pressing it down on top of Pierrot's fingers.

[...] He had never seen someone take so much pleasure from inflicting pain before. (*ibidem* 60)

A few pages later, Pierrot meets a group of Hitler Youth boys in his carriage and he is afraid both because they are older than him and because of their threatening appearance. Nonetheless, Pierrot's fear is mixed with admiration, even envy, because they are wearing a uniform and he thinks that, if he had one, people would respect him:

All the boys were dressed alike in uniforms of brown shirts, black shorts, black ties, white knee socks, and diamond-shaped armbands, colored red at the upper and lower sections and white at the left and right. In the center was the same hooked cross as the one on the sleeve of the man who had stood on his fingers [...]. Pierrot couldn't help but be impressed, and he wished he had a uniform like theirs instead of the secondhand clothes the Durand sisters had given him back at the orphanage. If he were dressed like these boys, then strange girls in train stations wouldn't be able to make remarks about how old his clothes were. (*ibidem* 65)

These boys bully Pierrot by stealing and eating his sandwiches. Bullying is not a new experience to Pierrot: in his school in Paris there was a schoolmate who used to call him 'Le Petit' because he was smaller than his peers; later, in the orphanage, there was a boy picking on him. Since he believes that uniforms make people safe from bullies, his dream of having one becomes steadier, although those who wear it are precisely bullies who behave wickedly towards others.

Indeed, when he starts going to his new school in Germany, it is already evident that he prefers being an oppressor rather than an oppressed, without taking into consideration that being the first means privileging being evil towards others over establishing positive relationships with them. When other students make fun of him because of his French accent, just one girl, Katarina, never does that:

"Don't let them bully you, Pieter[.] [...] There's nothing I hate more than bullies. They're just cowards, that's all. You have to stand up to them whenever you can."

"But they're everywhere," replied Pierrot, telling her about the Parisian boy who had called him *Le Petit* and about the way Hugo had treated him [in the] orphanage.

"So you just laugh at them," insisted Katarina. "You let their words fall off you like water."

Pierrot waited a few moments before saying what was really on his mind. "Don't you ever think," he asked cautiously, "that it would be *better* to be a bully than to be bullied? At least that way no one could ever hurt you."

Katarina turned to him in amazement. "No," she said definitively, shaking her head. "No, Pieter, I never think that. Not for a moment." (*ibidem* 126; emphasis in original)

When Pierrot turns eight, the Führer makes him the present that he has always wished: a uniform. This symbolically marks what was already evident: that he has drawn close to the Führer not only by having private conversations with him, but also in changing his ideology and behaviour towards others, be they peers or adults.

First at the train station with the Nazi soldier, then with the Hitler Youth boys and on many occasions at the Berghof, Pierrot's encounters with evil corrupt him and ruin his potential to have positive peer relationships. Narrative empathy enables readers to 'feel with' him (see J. Smith 720), for example when he wishes not to be bullied, to be more 'powerful', and to be respected. Yet, precisely because readers empathize with Pierrot, they are also

invited to recognize that he decides to gain power and respect at the expense of others and, as a consequence, he becomes lonelier than at the beginning of the novel. Undoubtedly, it is Pierrot himself who is guilty of his own ethical degradation, even if one may think that this is inevitable because he lives at the Berghof, surrounded by negative influences. Nonetheless, as already discussed in the previous chapter, characters are evil because they decide to do evil, not because they have not got any other options left. Pierrot talks quite often with the Führer, but his aunt loves and cares about him; she is a positive adult model. She ‘converts’ him into Pieter to make him *sound* “a little more German” (Boyne, *The Boy at the Top of the Mountain* 100) and asks him not to write to Anshel, but her actions are nothing more than her desire to make him safer while he is at the Berghof. Therefore, Pierrot is no longer Pierrot because he willingly decides to *be* Pieter, a German boy infused with Nazi evil.

This turn is conveyed by his own behaviour, for example when he talks down to the maids and his aunt. After being rude to a maid, he is reproached by his aunt Beatrix, but “Pierrot shook his head, dismissing the idea. ‘She’s just a maid,’ he said, ‘and I am a member of the *Deutsches Jungvolk*. Look at my uniform, Aunt Beatrix! She must show me the same respect that she would (sic) any soldier or officer’” (*ibidem* 152).³⁹⁴ Pierrot wants others to recognize his superior power: even when he asks the Führer whether he can have a bigger bedroom in the house and he is offered his aunt’s, he admits that “[h]e wanted the bigger room, of course, but he also wanted her to recognize that it was his right to have it” (*ibidem* 168). Emma, the cook, sadly acknowledges his change for the worse while talking to him: “‘What happened to you, Pierrot? [...] You were such a sweet boy when you first came here. Is it really that easy for the innocent to be corrupted?’” (*ibidem* 231-32). Even his only true friend is not important anymore to him, because he eventually turns down Anshel’s letters and refers to him no longer as his brother, but as “an old friend of mine [...]. [J]ust a neighbour really [...]. No one important” (*ibidem* 170).

Conversely, Pierrot becomes growingly interested in personal power and in how to demand respect from others because of his uniform. When he is in the Führer’s room during a conversation with Himmler and the Nazi who pressed his fingers with his boot, the Führer orders Pierrot to transcribe their dialogue with the details of a concentration camp (even though it is not named so) with showers where water does not run. When he is at the Führer’s personal desk, Pierrot “sat down and pressed his hands flat against the wood, feeling an

³⁹⁴ Among the parallels with *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, Bruno usually talks to the maid in a nice way and considers her as part of the family; nonetheless, only in the new house he acknowledges that she has her own thoughts and feelings.

enormous sense of power as he glanced around the room, the flags of the German state and the Nazi party standing on either side of him. It was hard not to imagine what it would be like to sit here as the one in charge” (*ibidem* 205). Pierrot is so blinded by his greed for power and personal prestige that he is unconcerned by what he listens to, apparently nonsense, and he only acknowledges his superiority even over the Führer and the officials because “at least *he* knew that there was no point in building a shower room without water” (*ibidem* 212; my emphasis).

His thirst for personal power over others grows parallel to his ethical descent in interpersonal relationships. Before rejecting his friendship, for a while Pierrot still writes to Anshel. They have agreed not to write their names in their messages to be safer and to use instead their own personal symbols to sign them: Pierrot will draw a dog, Anshel will add a fox. As the narrator tells before Pierrot left for the orphanage, it was Pierrot who insisted on writing to each other:

We can write to each other, Anshel, signed Pierrot. We must never lose touch.

Every week[,] [answered Anshel].

Pierrot made the sign of the fox, Anshel made the sign of the dog, and they held the two symbols in the air to represent their eternal friendship. (*ibidem* 28; emphasis in original)

Despite their old closeness, Pierrot starts ignoring his letters even though Anshel had been telling him that life for Jewish people was rapidly worsening in Paris, just like Shmuel tries to tell Bruno about the soldiers’ hatred towards him and the other Jewish prisoners. When Emma tries to hand one more letter to Pierrot, his corrupted ethics bursts out:

“I said burn it [...]. I have no friends in Paris. And certainly not this Jew who insists on writing to tell me how terrible his life is now. He should be glad that Paris has fallen to the Germans. He’s lucky to be permitted to live there still. [...] I don’t want to receive any more of these letters, do you understand me? If any come, throw them away. If you bring another one to me I will make you regret it.” (*ibidem* 203-04)

Pierrot not only refuses to defend and maintain his friendship with Anshel, but he also ruins other relationships. Apart from being rude and bossy, he accuses his aunt and the driver Ernst of having added something to the cake the Führer is about to eat during a party at the Berghof. Since this is found out to be true, both of them will be shot while Pierrot is watching from his window. When the Führer looks at him, he makes the Nazi salute, therefore showing to whom he is loyal.

Similarly, he reports on a schoolmate, who then ‘disappears’ from his class. Boyne does not tell directly this incident, as he did not describe Kotler’s violence against Pavel in *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*. However, the reason why his classmate is not at school anymore is a ‘framed gap’ (see Kokkola, *Representing* 25-27; see also ch. 6) that is likely to be inferred by child readers, unlike those in *The Boy with the Striped Pyjamas*, thanks to the comments of a positive character, Katarina, the girl who told Pierrot to stand up to bullies. When they are at school, Pierrot approaches Katarina to ask her why she does not sit next to him anymore and why she does not like him and talk to him as she used to:

“Well, Gretchen had no one to sit next to,” said Katarina, “After Heinrich Furst left the school. I didn’t want her to be alone.”

Pierrot looked away and swallowed hard, already regretting beginning this conversation.

“You remember Heinrich, don’t you, Pieter?” she continued. “Such a nice boy. So friendly. You remember how we were all shocked when he told us the things his father had said about the Führer? And how we all promised to tell no one?”

Pierrot stood up and brushed down the seat of his trousers. “It’s getting cold out here,” he said. “I should go back inside.”

“You remember how we heard that his father had been taken from his bed in the middle of the night and dragged out of Berchtesgaden and no one ever heard from him again? And how Heinrich and his mother and his younger sister had to move to Leipzig to stay to stay with her sister because they had no money anymore?”

A bell rang from the doorway of the school [...]. “Your tie,” he said, [...] “It’s time. You should put it on.”

“Don’t worry, I will,” she said as he walked away. “After all, we wouldn’t want poor Gretchen to be left sitting on her own again tomorrow, would we? Would we, *Pierrot*?” she shouted after him, but he was shaking his head, pretending that she wasn’t speaking to him; and somehow, by the time he got back inside, he had removed their conversation from his memory and placed it in a different part of his mind—the part that housed the memories of Maman and Anshel, a place he rarely visited anymore. (Boyne, *The Boy at the Top of the Mountain* 176-77; emphasis in original)

Pierrot’s reaction only confirms his guilt. In contrast with his behaviour, Katarina is a German girl who does not agree with the Nazi Party and who is not afraid of her ideas, since she refuses to wear her armband during the school break. Most importantly, she remains loyal to her positive relationships with peers, as the above excerpt proves, and she is not fascinated at all by uniforms and the superficial power that they confer; least of all, she is not impressed by Pierrot’s uniform nor by his life at the Berghof. When Pierrot goes to her family shop to buy pens and ink, Katarina’s pity is only equaled by Pierrot’s selfish naivety:

“Of course,” she said, with as little enthusiasm as she could muster. “You live with the Führer at the Berghof. You should mention it more often so people don’t forget.”

Pieter frowned. He was surprised to hear her say this as he thought he mentioned it often enough as it was. In fact, he sometimes thought that he shouldn't talk about it quite as much.³⁹⁵ (*ibidem* 215)

After willingly abandoning Anshel, Pierrot continues spoiling his few relationships with peers. The last one he still has – or believes he has – at the end of the novel is with Katarina. Pierrot always uses his uniform and showcases the fact that he lives at the Berghof to demand respect as well as to please Katarina because he desires her, but respect is not possible if he refuses to have a dialogue and recognize his peers as his equals. Pierrot's power and 'respect' obtained at the expense of the wellbeing of others will give him nothing more than a set of uniforms – costumes – that make him just a “squadron leader without a squad” (*ibidem* 197), plus a greater set of negative consequences: loneliness, guilt, corruption. Thus, Anshel and Katarina are positive characters in that they remain loyal to their relationships with peers and they may act as good counterpart to Pierrot; however, their presence is quite scarce during the story.³⁹⁶

Pierrot's evil turn reaches its worst point when he attempts to rape Katarina during another party at the Berghof. First he reproaches her: “[...] stop talking down to me. I invited you here, to a place a girl like you would never usually get to visit. It's time you showed me a little respect” (*ibidem* 228). Then, in his bedroom, she turns him down but he does not let her go because a “small voice in his head told him to stop. Another, a louder one, told him to take what he wanted” (*ibidem* 231).

After the maid abandons the Berghof because the Americans are approaching, Pierrot is the only one who is still there: he has nowhere to go, and no one beside him. His loneliness continues after the war, when he wanders around Europe as if to leave behind evil – his own evil – as well as his absence of feelings, relationships, ethics, but he cannot escape. When he

³⁹⁵ Another example of Pierrot's attempt to impress Katarina, of his evil, and of her ethical superiority, is provided later in the novel: “‘More pens?’ he asked when they were alone again struggling to make conversation. [...] ‘Isn't there anyone else who can help you?’ he asked as she carried the boxes over to a corner and stacked them neatly. ‘There used to be,’ she replied calmly, looking him directly in the eye. ‘A very nice lady named Ruth once worked here. For almost twenty years, in fact. She was like a second mother to me. But she's not here anymore.’ ‘Oh no?’ asked Pieter, feeling as if he was being led into a trap. ‘Why, what happened to her?’ ‘Who knows? [...] She was taken away. As was her husband. And her three children. And her son's wife. And their two children. We've never heard from any of them since. She preferred a fountain pen with a soft fine nib. But then, she was a person of taste and sophistication. Unlike some people.’ Pieter looked out the window, his annoyance at being so disrespected mingling with the aching desire that he felt for her. [...] ‘Jews, I suppose,’ he said, turning back to Katarina and spitting out the word in frustration. ‘This Ruth creature and her family. Jews, yes?’” (Boyne, *The Boy at the Top of the Mountain* 216-18).

³⁹⁶ Anshel is physically present only at the beginning and at the end of the narrative, when Pierrot returns to France after the war. When Katarina is with Pierrot, her behaviour highlights his own ethical degradation; however, Boyne does not offer many descriptions of interactions and conversations between the two far from Pierrot's house (for example, at school), as he prefers depicting him at the Berghof, where she will go only once towards the end of the story.

works in a dockyard, he befriends a colleague who always wears long sleeves. When his friend tells him that all his family was killed in the war, Pierrot understands why he does not want others to see his arm and quits the job the following day. Afterwards, Pierrot meets Katarina while watching a street artist: she fixes her unblinking eyes on him but he cannot bear her look and lowers his eyes. The last step of Pierrot's guilt-shame journey occurs in France, where Anshel has become what he dreamt to be as a child, a writer. Pierrot visits him because he is looking for their initial true closeness: only true friendship can listen to and tolerate the story of his life, of his evil, and of his guilt. Indeed, Anshel allows him to enter his house and listens to him. This symbolically conveys the idea that loyalty to true friendship is more powerful than any power a uniform can ever give. The respect and the approval that Pierrot longed for at the Berghof were based on nothing or, at most, on his will to stand out by stepping on others.

The Boy at the Top of the Mountain is a novel that better problematizes evil if compared to *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*. However, there are some major flaws that resemble those in Boyne's previous work: it would have been useful if Anshel was more present to provide positive examples of how he is loyal to Pierrot, who becomes almost as self-centered as Bruno. Another issue is represented by the ambiguous scene almost at the end of the novel, when Herta, the maid, warns Pierrot never to say that he was unaware of what was going on around him:

“Don't ever pretend that you didn't know what was going on here. You have eyes and you have ears. And you sat in that room on many occasions, taking notes. You heard it all. You saw it all. You knew it all. And you also know the things you are responsible for. [...] The deaths you have on your conscience. [...] Just don't ever tell yourself that you didn't know. [...] That would be the worst crime of all.” (*ibidem* 238)

What was Pierrot able to listen to while at the Berghof? What do the readers know of what he listened to? Lamentably, the answer is not much. Like the previous novel, *The Boy at the Top of the Mountain* leaves the reader with too many inferences; something that inevitably implies that the child reader has some solid previous knowledge. Despite the fact that historical fiction does not aim to provide readers with the same amount of historical information that textbooks and nonfiction offer (see ch. 6), Boyne's narrative could have improved by including an informative paratext or by representing more scenes like the one where Pierrot is present during a conversation about concentration camps. The lack of similar scenes coupled with the absence of a real father figure may bring readers to 'justify' Pierrot by claiming that

he did not have a positive role model, so he became evil because he had no other possibility and because this was what he was invited to do – which is a potentially dangerous inference.

However, unlike the previous novel, here child readers have more occasions hinting at how the story could have developed otherwise if Pierrot had opposed evil. At the beginning of the narrative, Pierrot seems not to have control over what happens to him: he must move to Germany, call himself Pieter, and he is forbidden to write to Anshel. Later on, he is the one in charge of his own life, decisions, and their consequences. Moreover, as far as the adult figure as ‘role model’ is concerned, it is Pierrot who prefers the Führer to his aunt, because he offers an ideology that makes Pierrot feel powerful over others, which he longs for, whereas his aunt admonishes him when he rudely gives orders to the maid.³⁹⁷ Therefore, even though Pierrot’s aunt may have made a mistake in bringing him to the Berghof, it is Pierrot’s own decision to prefer power, a uniform, and acquaintanceships among Nazis over respect for his family (his aunt), others (the driver Ernst), and peers (Anshel and Katarina). It is Pierrot who prefers evil to genuine, positive, and nurturing relationships. He decides to be part of the social group he believes to be ‘stronger’ – bullies – that crushes others rather than privileging recognition of peers. Therefore, evil is a personal decision: it may be insistent and it may surround the individual, but it is possible not to surrender, as Katarina does not.

In stark contrast with Boyne’s approach, Jackie French offers a much successful, profound, and inspiring representation and problematization of evil. *Hitler’s Daughter* discusses the connection between evil and parents or, more broadly, relatives, as well as the issue of ‘hereditary evil’. This novel has a literary frame in the present where a group of children (Anna, Mark, Tracey, and Ben) usually wait together at the bus stop to go to school. One day, they decide to play ‘The Game’ – they tell each other stories, taking turns – that is the starting point for the historical novel chapters where the protagonist is Heidi, Hitler’s daughter – or at least this is whom she believes to be.³⁹⁸ Despite what one might think, Heidi does not meet the ‘Aryan requirements’: she has dark hair, limps, and has a big red birthmark on her face. She is not nearly as perfect and beautiful as the dolls that the Führer gives to her

³⁹⁷ Ernst, the driver, can be considered another positive adult figure.

³⁹⁸ Jackie French might have made a mistake in that she does not specify in a paratext that Hitler never had any children. In the third novel, *Goodbye, Mr Hitler*, while explaining the inspirations she had for that book, she admits: “I already knew I must write a sequel to *Hitler’s Daughter*. After thousands of letters and emails asking me if Heidi in the book really was Hitler’s daughter, I needed to explicitly explain that Heidi would have been one of the foster children adopted for propaganda purposes, even if she hoped desperately that she really was the daughter of Germany’s leader” (French, *Goodbye, Mr Hitler* 198). However, this is a historical detail that, either known or unknown to child readers, does not hinder the provocative questions and reflections made by her contemporary characters and, by empathizing with them, by contemporary readers too, who have to decide between good and evil while they grow.

and, in her opinion, this is why Hitler does not visit her often. Nonetheless, she always hopes that he loves her and cares about her.

Like Pierrot, Heidi meets Hitler in person, but he is not ‘the Führer’ to her, as she always calls him with an affectionate diminutive, Duffi. While Pierrot adopts the Führer as his foster father, or at least as a model, Heidi regards him only as a father; consequently, she conceives him only in terms of a – supposed – familiar relationship and, as a child, she longs for his approval and recognition (see ch. 7), even though she secretly suffers a great deal when he gives her with the perfect dolls. Voicing the child readers’ thoughts,³⁹⁹ Mark, who is the most interested within the group in the story Anna is telling, asks her: “‘How could she want someone like that to love her? Someone who did such horrible things?’” (French, *Hitler’s Daughter* 33), to which Anna simply replies “‘He was her father’” (*ibidem*).

French is not so naïve to represent Hitler as a kind, supportive, loving parent. The novel is not a revisionist claim to historical truth. The focus is on Heidi who, like Bruno, is in the troublesome position of a child whose father is doing evil beyond her imagination. However, unlike Bruno or Pierrot, who both live near two examples of extreme evil (‘Out With’ and the Berghof), Heidi does not meet often Hitler, as she is in “Berchtesgaden — [in] a house in the country[,] the only world she knew” (*ibidem* 11). She does not live there alone: there is a teacher, Fräulein Gelber, who takes care of her, and a cook. However, she does not have any chance to overhear conversations about concentration camps and the persecution of Jewish people ordered by the Führer. This may sound unconvincing,⁴⁰⁰ but Heidi’s position acquires a deeper meaning when Anna transposes it to contemporary terms:

Mark shook his head. “But ... but she must just have KNOWN. If she’d just started to think about it all ...”

“Would you know if your parents were doing something wrong?” asked Anna softly.

“Of course I would. But they wouldn’t do anything really wrong anyway.”

“Are you sure?” persisted Anna. Her eyes were bright. “All the things your mum and dad believe in — have you ever really wondered if they are right or wrong? Or do you just think they’re right because that’s what your mum and dad think, so it *has* to be right?”

“Well, I ...” Mark stopped. [...]

[T]hat was different. Mum and Dad weren’t evil.

“It’s not the same,” he said at last. (*ibidem* 34-35; emphasis in original)

³⁹⁹ Both readers who already know about the war and Hitler and those who do not, since French provides basic historical information regarding World War II through Ben’s ‘child-style’ words: “[Hitler] was this bloke in World War Two[.] [...] He was the leader of Germany – they were the enemy in the war. Well, Japan was too. But Hitler had all these Brownshirts and the Gestapo and they tortured people and had concentration camps and things like that and everyone had to go ‘Sieg heil!’ or ‘Heil Hitler!’ . You know, like in those movies on TV” (French, *Hitler’s Daughter* 7).

⁴⁰⁰ Heidi senses that there is something wrong on a couple of occasions, but hers are only suppositions. However, she decides to do good, regardless of what Hitler has done and is doing.

Heidi's encounter with evil disguised as a father and her being unaware of all the cruel and shameful deeds that he was perpetrating pose a serious ethical issue to child protagonists as well as to child readers: it is easy to discern evil afterwards, but how do you spot it when you are in front of it, especially embodied in someone you love? How do you recognize it? And, most importantly, what do you do after acknowledging it?

Skillfully, French depicts Mark quite certain in his initial reply to Anna, but after a few pages he does not seem so sure that his was a convincing reply. Indeed, it was not: Anna's storytelling foregrounds questions that are not easy to answer, so, as a child, Mark decides to ask for help to adults, hoping that they would be able to find a more persuasive perspective. Firstly, he approaches his mother with questions regarding that historical time, to which she distractedly replies while driving; then, he resorts to his father:

[...] "Dad?"

"Yes?" asked Dad, a bit warily.

"If you were Hitler ..."

"If I was *who*?" Dad began to laugh.

"No, Dad, I'm serious. If you did things like Hitler did — really bad things — what do you think I should do?"

Dad looked at him more sharply. "You mean, should you go along with me because I'm your father, no matter what? [...] I don't know," said Dad slowly. He put his paper down, as though for once he was seriously trying to answer Mark's question. "I'd suppose I'd want you to do what you thought was right. [...] Does that answer your question?"

"I don't know," said Mark truthfully. "Hey, what would you do if I was a mass murderer? [...]"

"Stop your pocket money," said Dad, grinning. (*ibidem* 43-44; emphasis in original)

Eventually, Mark also tries to talk with his teacher at school, with a bit more success, but he too becomes silent at the end: "'But how can we *know* we're doing the right thing?' cried Mark. Mr McDonald shrugged. 'I can't answer that either,' he said a bit helplessly. 'I'd have to think about it. How about you ask your parents [...]' He supposed Mr McDonald had at least tried to give him answers" (*ibidem* 75-76; emphasis in original).

In the novel, it is up to child protagonists and, consequently, to child readers to pose questions about the past and to problematize evil because adults are often unable to give answers, disinterested, or they feel uncomfortable to reply to such difficult enquiries. Mark's attempts show all these cases: his mother is always in a rush and gives sparse historical information to him while not paying much attention either to his questions and his interest in

the past nor to her own answers;⁴⁰¹ not by chance Mark wonders “what it would be like to have a mum who loved answering questions. A mum who really like (sic) thinking about things ...” (*ibidem* 89). His teacher tries to answer, but when he poses a more ethical query, he becomes impatient, as if he fears to continue tackling ethically demanding contents. Mark’s father kindly mocks his interest in the Führer and, although conceding some serious thinking on them, he does not really link Mark’s questions about evil in the past to more contemporary examples. It is Mark who is more ethically aware and does so, which deserves a longer quote:

Dad had listened to the weather report earlier and left the radio on ...

“... *the genocide still continues. Eyewitnesses now say that the death toll may number several thousands, with the numbers still rising as government troops ...*”

Mark blinked. For a moment he had thought he was back in the 1930’s, the radio talking about all the people that Hitler was killing.

But this was NOW. People were being killed NOW. He’s heard these reports before of course, but it had never seemed real ... he’d never actually *thought* about it before.

[...]

“Dad ...” asked Mark suddenly. [...] “Are people being exterminated today?”

Dad swallowed his food the wrong way. “Are they *what!*” he choked.

“Being exterminated. You know — like Hitler and the Jews.”

Dad took a gulp of coffee. “Of course not,” he said.

“But on the news it just said about people being killed in that place with the funny name ...”

Dad shrugged. “Oh. That stuff. Can’t say I’ve been following it.”

Mark chewed for a minute. “Dad ... [...] How did great-great-Grandpa get our farm?”

“What? He bought it.” Dad reached for the mustard and squirted some on his sausage.

“He didn’t steal it from the Aborigenes?”

“No, of course not.” Dad gave him a sharp look. “It wasn’t like that in those days, anyway. No one thought of it as stealing.”

[...]

“But what if he *did* take it from the Aboriginal people ... just suppose. It wouldn’t be our fault, would it?”

“Who’s been feeding you all that stuff?” demanded Dad, his face closed off in a way that Mark had never seen before. [...] “The things they teach kids nowadays[.] It’d make more sense if they taught everyone to mind their own business. Do-gooders poking their nose in where it doesn’t concern them.” (*ibidem* 82-85; emphasis in original)

This excerpt clarifies why Heidi’s difficult position is relevant to child protagonists and readers today: evil is not only in the past, it is also in the present. How should they react to it?

Heidi decides to do good instead of evil. Not only she cares about her teacher and the cook, but also about Jewish people, even though nobody at the house seems able to explain to her who they are and why they are different. Like her contemporary co-protagonists, her

⁴⁰¹ Nonetheless, she is not depicted as an uncaring mother: ““Look, ask me questions when I’m not so rushed. Okay?”” (French, *Hitler’s Daughter* 91).

questions remain unanswered, so she develops a personal understanding of who Jews are, just like Misha and the other orphans do in *Milkweed*: “Jews were people just like her, with red marks on their faces and one leg just a little short. Different people, who had to be hidden away” (*ibidem* 98; my emphasis). Thus, she prepares a shelter in case any Jews seeking help would come to her garden. Heidi is open to interpersonal relationships with others, including peers: later in the novel, when her Nazi guard is killed, she willingly tries to find her own way through the ruins of the city, physically distancing herself from Nazis, Hitler, and his bunker – where he cried, in front of her, that he had never seen that girl – until she comes across a boy and his mother who help her, ‘adopt’ her, and with whom she will move to Australia.

Child protagonists rely on relationships with their peers as well as with adults, or at least they try to, to emotionally process Heidi’s story, to discuss evil in the past, and to problematize evil in the present. Unlike what adults may think, contemporary evil is both emotionally near to the children, as in the case of Mark’s family house stolen to the Aborigenes, and geographically distant, like the news report broadcasted. Is Heidi a carrier of evil (in Australia, or another country) because she is Hitler’s daughter? This view denies Heidi a distinct personality and her personal decision to do good. As French writes in *Goodbye, Mr Hitler*, “hate is like bacteria infecting others” (190), and it is up to individuals to stop it, by deciding what to do. This is what Heidi does and what the contemporary child protagonists also do: by discussing evil between themselves and with adults, they realize that they can have a more active role opposing it, if compared to what they previously imagined; they have the opportunity to decide whether to do good or continue evil. This opportunity is what defeats evil, at least in potential terms, since readers do not know what Anna and Mark did afterwards. What is sure is that Anna started to problematize evil and Mark began to pay more attention to its presence in the world and in his own family. In this way, the evil perpetrated during the Holocaust is linked to other examples of similar hatred and racism and it becomes “resonant” (Hirsch, *Generation* 33; see also ch. 1), in Hirsch’s terms, in child protagonists’ and child readers’ life. French achieves this in *Hitler’s Daughter* through a double process of narrative empathy, firstly with Anna and Mark ‘feeling with’ Heidi (see J. Smith 720; see also ch. 7) and, secondly, when child readers empathise with their contemporary narrative peers.⁴⁰²

⁴⁰² Not all child protagonists grasp the relevance of the story that Anna has been telling them: Tracey is too little and Ben is only interested in what he regards as the “[...] good bits[.] [...] You know — battles and stuff like that” (French, *Hitler’s Daughter* 110-11). Nonetheless, one cannot assume that all children can be encouraged to discuss evil with the same story.

Another example of a successful problematization of evil is Morris Gleitzman's *Once* series, where Felix, the protagonist, encounters and experiences multiple aspects of Nazi evil. Two of the most striking examples are narrated in *Then* and *After*. In *Then*, the second novel of the series, Felix and his friend Zelda, who is like a sister to him, have been found by a Polish female farmer, Genia. Even though she does not like Jewish people, she takes care of them because "most of all [...] [she] hate[s] anyone who hurts children" (Gleitzman, *Then* 46): they are children targeted by Nazis, who murdered all the Jewish orphans in the local orphanage.⁴⁰³ One day, when they are in a shop in the village to buy some things for Felix and Zelda, Felix finds a novel written by Richmal Crompton, his favourite author, and he is holding it when a Nazi soldier orders them to go outside to watch the Hitler Youth parade. As Felix comments, "[t]hey're boys about my age, maybe a couple of years older. All wearing Nazi uniforms and gleaming Nazi boots. They don't have guns, which is a good thing. Most of them have really sneering expressions" (*ibidem* 75-76). Since Felix has in fact stolen the book, when it falls from inside his shirt he thinks that the Nazis are going to arrest him, but

as the column marches off, one of the other Hitler Youth, not one of the thugs, stares at the book on the ground in front of [him].

And does an amazing thing.

He grins at [Felix]. And with a small movement of his hand, so the other Hitler Youth can't see him, he gives [Felix] a thumbs up.

[...]

Is [the Hitler Youth boy] telling [him] that he's a Richmal Crompton fan too? (*ibidem* 78)

This is the first instance of the problematization of evil that will be developed throughout the novel. Nazi evil is a constant presence in Felix's life: he and Zelda worry every time a Nazi convoy reaches Genia's farm to inspect it or to take her hens, and both Zelda and Genia will be eventually killed at the end of the story. However, Gleitzman carefully associates evil to Nazi soldiers as well as to other characters, and at the same time he represents a Hitler Youth boy who seems to be more of a child like Felix than a young merciless soldier loyal to Nazi ideology.

Felix's first impression about the Hitler Youth boy will find many validations as the story goes on. For example, when Felix is obliged by Nazis to watch Jewish people marching along the streets and he remembers his dead parents, among the Hitler Youth surveilling the

⁴⁰³ Felix is Jewish, while Zelda is the daughter of a Polish couple that decided to stand with the Nazis and that was killed by the Polish Resistance. Genia lives near a former orphanage, now the headquarters of the local Hitler Youth, after all the children living there have been killed and thrown into a pit.

villagers there is also that same boy. Felix notices that he is “staring off into the distance like [he] was trying to do. He doesn’t look stern and enthusiastic like the other Nazis, he looks sad” (*ibidem* 134). Although the boy does not do anything to stop the march, or to alleviate the Jewish suffering, Felix and the Hitler Youth boy, Amon, share the unwillingness to be there as they have been ordered to do, albeit for different reasons.

Despite his uniform, Amon is not evil like other Nazis, or like Cyril, a Polish child who is much more arrogant and violent than him. Gleitzman intelligently constructs a literary parallel between Cyril and Amon showing that often it is not as easy to recognize evil as it is to see a uniform. During the march, Zelda reaches a Jewish couple and asks them if they want to be her foster parents. A Nazi soldier notices her and grabs her, but before he hits her with his rifle, Felix flings forward to stop him, who in turn hits him in the head. When Felix wakes up, Genia informs him that Zelda was spared thanks to Amon’s intervention, since he persuaded the soldier to let her go. As little Zelda comments, ““He was nice[.] [...] He wasn’t a murderous Nazi scum”” (*ibidem* 137). On the other hand, Cyril and his mother will be responsible for Zelda and Genia’s arrest and hanging, even though they do not wear the uniform of a ‘murderous Nazi scum’.

Gleitzman foregrounds the problematization of evil through Cyril’s and Amon’s behaviour towards peers at least on other two occasions. Since Amon has saved Zelda once, Felix hopes that he will do it again, if necessary, so he decides to ask him to protect her because he is going to leave her and Genia for Zelda’s sake, as he believes that she is in constant danger by knowing a Jewish boy like him. To talk with Amon, Felix volunteers to pick up potatoes where the Hitler Youth supervise and he spots him but, before he is able to call his attention, Cyril yells that he is a Jew. A Nazi soldier approaches Felix to undo his pants to find out if it is true but he shows the guard Zelda’s locket, which holds a family photo where her father is wearing a Nazi uniform. Felix hopes that the Nazi will think that they are his family too and will let him go, but at the same time he also makes Amon notice him by taking his Richmal Crompton’s book out of his pocket. After that, Amon translates what the Nazi soldier has asked Felix and saves him. Since his attempt to have Felix arrested has failed, Cyril goes on accusing him of having stolen the book from their family shop. For the second time, Amon prefers siding with Felix, as he hits Cyril in the stomach, making all Hitler Youth and Nazi soldiers laugh.

As he planned to do, Felix eventually asks Amon to protect his adopted sister Zelda, and he agrees: ““Tell [Zelda] [...] if she gets into trouble, to ask for me. Amon Kurtz”” (*ibidem* 149). To thank him, Felix hands his Richmal Crompton book to him and the two

children are really at the same level in the following scene – they are just peers surrounded by war and evil:

He looks surprised. And pleased.

“Thank you,” he says.

Amon takes the book and looks at it for a moment. His face goes serious. He glances around the potato field to make sure nobody else is listening.

“I wish Richmal Crompton was in charge of Germany instead of Adolf Hitler,” he says quietly. “If she was, I wouldn’t have to be in the Hitler Youth. You and me, we’d be both be at home with our parents. I wouldn’t be sleeping in a dead kid’s bed.”

He puts the book inside his jacket.

[Felix] want[s] to talk with him more, but [they]’re at [his] furrow now and [Felix] must get back to work.

There is one last thing [he] ha[s] to ask.

“Amon,” [Felix] say[s]. “What did you tell the others about me back there?”

Amon grins.

“I told them you were just like us Hitler Youth,” he says. “A boy doing his duty.”

[They] look at each other for a few moments.

“Thank you,” [Felix] say[s].

Amon clicks his heels together and gives the Nazi salute.

“Heil Richmal,” he says quietly. (*ibidem* 150)

Gleitzman suggests that Amon is not defined by his uniform but by his love for Richmal Crompton’s books, and that he is a child just like Felix. Similarly, Felix is just “[a] boy” who is “doing his duty” (*ibidem*), although the ‘duty’ as conceived by the two children is far different from what Nazi ideology intends for it: Felix is saving Zelda and Amon is helping a friend, interested only in his love for Crompton’s stories rather than his being Jewish or not.

Amon’s loyalty to the protagonist will be once more highlighted after Zelda and Genia have been hanged: Amon tells Felix that he was unable to save them and hands him the locket that he took from Zelda’s pocket, which was Zelda and Genia’s birthday present for him. This occurs while Felix is inside the Hitler Youth headquarters with another Jewish boy, Dov, who survived the Nazi massacre at the local orphanage. They are both determined to become human bombs to kill the highest number of Nazis, regardless of their age. Felix seeks revenge for Zelda and Genia’s death and he is overcome by anger towards Amon because he promised to protect her and yet she is dead: “All I’m thinking about is how many of them I can kill. And how many of their families I can hurt” (*ibidem* 176). Amon may be a child before being a Hitler Youth boy, but Nazi evil still surrounds Felix and hurts him and the people he loves. After deciding to be a human bomb, Felix puts on a Hitler Youth uniform. He was about to let evil take over him, but staring at his birthday present reminds him of who he really was, still is, and of his positive relationships. Thus, Felix takes his hand off the grenade, grabs Amon,

and runs outside the headquarters before hearing an explosion; then, he throws away his Hitler Youth uniform.

Similarly, the second example of Gleitzman's problematization of evil involves Felix and other Hitler Youth boys in *After*. In 1945, Felix is staying with Genia's husband, Gabriek, who was forced to go to Germany to work for the Nazis. When Gabriek is badly hurt during a fire, Felix goes to Gabriek's partisan friends to ask for help, but he is not allowed to stay with them unless he passes a test: he must go alone in the near village and bring a Nazi gun back. Although he does not want to be violent, Felix is determined to do the task because all he cares about is to stay with Gabriek; therefore, he goes to the village, sharpens a stick, and waits in a drain for a Nazi to come:

I still can't see the Nazi soldier, but I can hear his boots crunching on the path near one of the houses.
[...]
I pause for a moment and think of Mum and Dad, ill and in pain and stumbling towards a death camp.
This is for both of you.
And you, Zelda.
And you, Barney.
And you, Genia.
I grip the stick tight and run full-pelt between the trees towards the crunching boots.
And stop.
And stare.
It's a boy.
He isn't much older than me. He's wearing shiny boots and a whole Nazi uniform, but he doesn't even have a gun.
Just a bike.
Confused, I duck behind a tree.
I realise what he must be. A Hitler Youth boy.
He hasn't seen me. He's leaning his bike against the wall of a house.
The door of the house opens and a man and a woman come out. The woman hugs the boy. The man gives him a Nazi salute and the boy gives him one back.
They look like proud parents.
The boy takes his boots off and the three of them go inside and shut the door.
I'm hot with sweat. Partly because of what I was going to do, and partly because of what I can see on the bike. [...] They look like explosive shells on the end of long sticks.
(Gleitzman, *After* 56-57)

Then, Felix steals the Hitler Youth boy's bike, boots, and bazookas and goes back to the partisans, without using violence. He was about to kill a 'Nazi', but he recognizes the boy as a peer and refuses to kill him.

Later on, the protagonist will meet again that same boy when he is searching for food in the bombed village. Felix finds three Jewish girls hiding and, in the house next door, he meets a young girl and a couple of Hitler Youth boys. One of them is the bicycle boy, while

the other one is aiming his rifle at Felix, trembling, and for a moment he seems about to cry. Felix infers that the dead man at the entrance of the bombed house is their father and manages to mediate with them by offering them a way to open their tins in exchange for half of the food.

After the partisans with whom Felix was living are all killed by Nazis and he is alone, Felix goes back to the village to save the Jewish girls and get the other tins the boys owed him, but he finds the second house even more damaged than the previous time.⁴⁰⁴ The girl and the two Hitler Youth boys are stuck in the debris

huddled and sobbing.

One is hugging his knees.

Another is hugging a rifle and his little sister.

I recognize the uniforms even under all the dust.

“Rescue us,” says the little girl.

The two Hitler Youth boys don’t say anything or do anything, just stare at me. They don’t look like they care who I am or what I am here for. But I can see they want me to rescue them too.

For a few moments I don’t want to rescue them. I think of Mum and Dad and Yuli and the othe[r] [partisans] and I want to hurt them.

Then I remember I’m doing without parents now.

People who aren’t bothering about parents shouldn’t bother about revenge either.

(*ibidem* 149)

Like in *Then*, Gleitzman informs his readers that Felix would like to take revenge, but he decides not to act against the Hitler Youth boys.

Before reaching the village, Felix buried the partisans and he was sure that his latest adoptive mother figure had been killed too. He thought that he would not search for other foster parents, because “[w]ars aren’t a good time for parents. You see it everywhere. Kids upset and angry and bitter because of what’s happened to parents. It’s not the parents’ fault, it’s just the way it is. [I]n wartime you’re better off doing without parents[,] [so] [f]rom now on I’m not going to bother with parents either” (*ibidem* 143). Genia had been hanged, he is persuaded that Gabriek abandoned him, and the female partisan he considered as a mother was murdered by the Nazis. One may say that Felix does not kill the boys because he is still influenced by his real or adoptive parents, or by their absence, but the following pages tell a different story. Felix has grown emotionally and ethically, as he feels to be the only parent to the children he has on his cart – the Jewish girls and the Hitler Youth boys with the little girl. He would prefer not to have this role; nonetheless, he cares about them and more than once tries to convince them not to fight over things like using the single toothbrush they have or

⁴⁰⁴ In the following excerpt, the narrator is Felix.

who can stay under the blanket. They do not want to share anything with each other, therefore there are constant quarrels between the Jewish girls on one side, and the Nazi boys and little girl on the other side. While taking care of them, Felix does not accuse the Nazi children; instead, he is relieved when, at last, there were “[n]o more [quarrels of] Nazis against Jews. Just girls against boys” (*ibidem* 157).

Gleitzman further highlights the fact that they are all children, regardless of their ‘in-groups’ or political affiliations, when he depicts the two Hitler Youth boys talking about their loyalty to the party:⁴⁰⁵

“We’re sick of hiding away like this,” says Hannah. “We want to fight the Nazis.”
I look nervously at Axel and Helmut.
Helmut is sitting on his own, scowling. But Axel is nodding too. Did he hear what Hannah just said?
Now I’m confused.
Axel sees me looking puzzled.
“We didn’t want to be Nazis,” he says. “They made us because our parents were German.”
He looks like he means it.
“And you’d fight them?” I say. “You’d fight against the Nazis?”
“They ruined everything,” says Axel. “That vermin Adolf Hitler has ruined my life.”
“Axel,” hisses Helmut.
The two German boys glare at each other.
“Hitler’s ruined your life too,” Axel says angrily to Helmut.
Helmut looks like he’s going to argue.
But instead he droops.
“Yeah,” he mumbles.
His little sister goes over and puts her arms around him.
“Our mum and dad were proud of Helmut in the Hitler Youth,” says Bug. “He was keeping our family safe.”
“Didn’t work, though, did it?” says Helmut sadly. “Adolf Hitler should have stayed in Munich and been a travel agent, that’s what our mum said before she died.”
We all think about this, and how different all our lives would be if he had. (*ibidem* 157-58)

The two boys seem to have been forced to join the Hitler Youth. However, their joining does not prevent them from thinking on their own about what their life or reality is like, and how evil changed them. Therefore, contrary to Bruno and Pierrot, they are willing to acknowledge and oppose evil.

Felix has many opportunities when he could take his revenge on Nazis for murdering his parents, Zelda, Genia, the partisans, and all the people he loved, and for all the suffering they have caused him. He could have killed Axel before stealing his bicycle; he could have

⁴⁰⁵ In the following excerpt, Hannah is one of the Jewish girls, Axel is the Hitler Youth boy whose bicycle Felix stole, Helmut is the other Hitler Youth boy, and Bug is Helmut’s little sister.

left him, Helmut, and Bug stuck in the debris; he could have let the Russian soldiers hit or kill them, after the end of the war, when their army reaches the village. He could have done all this, even though these Hitler Youth boys were not the ones directly responsible for his loved ones' death. However, as he does in *Then*, Felix does not surrender to revenge and evil; instead, he recognizes the Hitler Youth boys as peers. This is symbolically rendered by the score of the football match that Felix starts when he notices that Axel and Helmut are afraid of the Russian soldiers, who usually kill Nazis and may have noticed their uniforms. The two teams are Felix and Hannah against Axel and Helmut – Jewish children against Hitler Youth children – and the score is even. Thus, child readers are offered the chance to empathise with a peer who acknowledges that, despite anger, sadness, desperation, one can still do the right thing and recognize others for their peer-ness.

In addition to the problematization of evil, Gleitzman's series is valuable because it depicts a protagonist who never withdraws from confronting it. On the contrary, Felix often approaches Nazis when this means defending or saving a person he loves, as he does for Zelda in *Then*, an example already mentioned. However, he does the same also towards people he has not known for long who need help, as it happens in *Once*, when he is Barney's assistant during his dental surgical procedures. One night, they go to a Nazi soldier's house and, of course, Felix is afraid, but he does not go back to their shelter. Instead, he starts telling a story – his role as an assistant – so as to entertain the Nazi and divert his attention from pain. If he is a good enough storyteller, he thinks that maybe the Nazi would give them more food for the children waiting for their return.

Similarly, when Felix finds out that Zelda's parents were Nazi sympathizers, he does not abandon her because she is not guilty of what her parents did. He tries to save her from 'resettlement' by showing her locket to a Nazi soldier, even though Zelda does not want to leave him and bites the soldier's hand.⁴⁰⁶ Again, Felix does not withdraw from confronting Nazis when he goes into the nearby woods because he thinks that Gabriel has been captured by them, or by the Polish police collaborating with them. He wants to save Gabriel by telling a lie, even though he is quite aware that they are likely to shoot him even before he can say anything.⁴⁰⁷

Once more, in *Soon*, Felix does not abandon his friend Anya, who wants to go back to Dr Lipzyck's orphanage to ask forgiveness because she needs a doctor to make sure her baby will be born safely, even though at that point they both know that Dr Lipzyck may not be who

⁴⁰⁶ This happens in *Once*.

⁴⁰⁷ This occurs in *After*.

he claims to be and it is likely that he is a Nazi with a forged identity. As it turns out, he is a sadistic Nazi ‘doctor’ who performed amputations and other tortures on living human beings. He also tries to kill Felix and Anya; yet, Felix does not surrender to evil and revenge and he does not feel “glad” (Gleitzman, *Soon* 172) as he thought he would be when Dimmi is choking him, “[b]ecause if Mum and Dad and Zelda and Barney and Genia were still alive, I don’t think they’d want the world to be like it is now. Full of people still trying to solve every problem by killing each other. I think they’d want something better” (*ibidem*). Thus, he makes Dimmi stop before he kills the Nazi and they wait for the authorities to come.⁴⁰⁸

Felix does not run away from evil and, at the same time, he never surrenders to it. Therefore, child readers can empathize with a protagonist who is brave, kind, and a common human being who feels fear and desire for revenge, who loves books and sometimes thinks of himself as the Crompton’s books hero. Children can ‘feel with’ (see J. Smith 720; see also ch. 7) Felix who is uncompromised by Nazi evil and who never betrays his peers while remaining a child – for example, he considers Zelda as his sister and deeply loves her, but this does not mean that he never feels annoyed by her stubbornness.⁴⁰⁹

Felix is not an implausible protagonist with a ‘perfect ethics’: as discussed, he does think about killing Nazis. Child protagonists as well as child readers have the right to feel upset, angry, and revengeful. Young readers meet a protagonist who is not ethically superior to them, but at their own level, and Gleitzman’s first-person narrative voice, which is meant to engage the readership, helps establishing a dialogue between Felix and the readers. This narrative technique is both used to raise the readers’ initial interest in a character who is funny, a bit naïve, with a passion for stories, and also to facilitate their narrative empathy with him when they acknowledge that Felix is as human as themselves in his feelings and his need to have parents’ approval, find parental substitutes, and have friends. Felix decides to do good because he resists being like the characters that have harmed him and his family thanks to the positive relationships he has had with adults and peers. It is through recalling them, for example thanks to Zelda and Genia’s locket, that Felix remembers what good things he had and still has in his life, and that he refuses evil. Child readers are invited to do the same by empathizing with his emotions. Therefore, in terms of Holocaust postmemory, Gleitzman’s works enable readers not only to ‘feel’ the historical period, but they also invite them to adopt

⁴⁰⁸ Dimmi is a Jew, whom Felix and Gabriek know. The story told in *Soon* takes places after the end of the war.

⁴⁰⁹ The same occurs in *Milkweed*: Misha loves and cares about Janina and tries as best as he can to reach the concentration camp where the Nazis have taken her and Mr Milgrom, but when she apparently started suffering from madness (due to desperation and hunger) and Misha was unable to quieten or to reason with her, he sometimes hid where she could not find him to be on his own.

a trustful and loyal attitude towards peers that opposes the evil ideology represented: they encourage children to acquire attitudinal postmemory.

Unlike Gleitzman's works, Michael Morpurgo's *Waiting for Anya* is an ambiguous novel. Published in 1990, at the beginning of the representation of the Holocaust in non-canonical forms (see ch. 1) and after Yolen's innovative *The Devil's Arithmetic* (see ch. 5), the story can be well inserted in relation to other works about World War II themes by the same author,⁴¹⁰ but it poses many obstacles in conveying Holocaust postmemory. Devoid of paratexts, apart from initial acknowledgements to people whose relation to the story is not specified,⁴¹¹ the novel tells the story of a French boy, Jo, who lives in a village near the frontier with Spain and who meets by chance a Jewish man, Benjamin, in the woods. As Benjamin tells him, he is hiding at his mother-in-law's house waiting for his daughter Anya to come, since they were separated when fleeing from the Nazis. Meanwhile, Benjamin cooperates with a group of people who make Jewish children arrive safely at Lescun to run to safety across the border, which is what also Léah, a small girl whom Jo gets to know, will try to do.

Given the strategic position along the border, Lescun soon becomes patrolled by German soldiers. Jo's father is a prisoner of war in a German camp, but

to many of the children, to Jo too, the war was still an unreal thing. In over two years of war they had not seen a single German soldier, no planes, no tanks, nothing. The war was in the talk and they heard plenty of that [...]. And all the while they waited for the prisoners-of-war to come home and they didn't. They waited for the Germans to come and they didn't. (Morpurgo, *Waiting for Anya* 30)

Jo's encounter with evil occurs in the village, when "[a]n armoured truck stood in the centre of the Square with four soldiers in black uniforms and shining helmets sitting erect in the back of it" (*ibidem* 45) and "a tall German officer [...] leaned his rifle against the wall[,] [...]. He clicked his heels, saluted the Mayor and got back into the truck" (*ibidem*). With him, there are

four soldiers in the truck [who] had sat impassive, their rifles between their knees. Jo stared at them and despite himself he could not but admire them. They were undeniably splendid in their immaculate uniforms. These were the black knights who had conquered wherever they went. He was staring at one of them in particular when the helmet turned, glinting in the sun, and Jo found his gaze suddenly returned. The eyes that held his were blue and cold and they chilled Jo to the heart. He looked away quickly. (*ibidem* 46)

⁴¹⁰ For example, *Friend or Foe* (1977) and *An Eagle in the Snow* (2015).

⁴¹¹ Morpurgo thanks a group of people from Lescun, although it is not further explained who these people are and how they are involved – if indeed they are – with the story.

The German officer had announced that a troop would soon reach the village to take control over it. Only when Jo sees these soldiers he realizes “that the war had come at last to Lescun, to his valley. [...] Suddenly it was all real, this was the enemy his father had fought against” (*ibidem* 48). Indeed, another troop soon arrives, but these soldiers do not look like the first ones: there were

two ranks of them in grey uniforms. They wore side caps not helmets. In front of them, on a bay horse, was an officer, both hands on his reins, a revolver in his belt. [...]

The soldiers were not like the ones who’d come before. These were older men, some portly even, and with grey hair. Their boots were dusty and they looked somehow awkward in their uniforms. These were men dressed up as soldiers, not the real thing. (*ibidem* 64-65)

As soon as they reach Lescun, there are round the clock patrols, a curfew, and soldiers along the frontier not to let anyone escape into Spain. Whoever will help somebody or try himself or herself to cross the border will be shot.

Although Jo had identified the soldiers in black uniforms as the “enemy” (*ibidem* 48), later on he is very much doubtful about the way to behave towards the middle-aged, grey-uniformed men, in particular towards the Corporal. He has been kind to him and to the other children and he can speak French, so that “[h]e had already become a firm favourite [among the children], mostly because he seemed to have an endless supply of sweets” (*ibidem* 74). Jo is uncertain about whom he should regard as his enemy despite his father’s imprisonment and his grandfather’s verbal attacks towards the Germans, so he initially accepts a sweet from the Corporal, “but then his conscience had got the better of him and he spat it out around the corner, something he immediately regretted as he watched [his dog] enjoying it instead” (*ibidem*).

Jo’s conscience seems to fight between what he can see, a man – although being German – who is kind and approachable, who seems the opposite of the soldier with blue and cold eyes, and what his grandfather has always told him about the First World War. As the author writes, “[w]hat Jo thought about the war and about the Occupation seemed to depend on whether he had just talked to Maman or to Grandpère: he could never make up his mind” (*ibidem* 31). Jo worries when he meets the Corporal because he is helping Benjamin and his mother-in-law by buying supplies and carrying them to their house, where each day there are more Jewish children hidden in the barn, waiting to cross the border. He talks quite often with the Corporal, but at the same time he does not want to let him know that Benjamin and the children are living there. Jo’s resistance in considering the Corporal as his enemy may be regarded as a positive aspect of the novel, because he thinks on his own and child readers may

empathize with Jo and his difficulties in deciding who his enemy is and what evil is; at the same time, Jo is not so naïve to regard the Corporal as a man he can safely trust, because he belongs to the opposite army.

Jo's approach to the officer causes him trouble because, when his father is liberated and returns to Lescun, he accuses Jo of being a collaborator and slaps him. Despite his internal conflict, Jo is a sufficiently positive protagonist because he helps Benjamin and the children and worries for them, especially when they are hiding in the hut near the frontier. Jo actively stands against injustice. However, Morpurgo's novel is problematic not for the protagonist's personal stance, but for other reasons that make the narration highly ambiguous. Even though the presence of two troops of soldiers is an attempt at problematizing evil, Morpurgo does not develop this hint further. The novel seems to hinge upon the question 'are the Germans good or evil?', which is troublesome for at least two reasons: it proposes nationalities (rather than behaviours and individuals) as if they were a unified, indistinct group, and it does not take into consideration ideology.

Jo's grandfather firmly highlights his perspective: "[...] I don't like the English, never have done, but at least they're fighting the Germans and anyone who is fighting them is a friend of France, that's how I see it. And I should know, Jo, I fought them before, remember? [...]" (*ibidem* 30-31). Indeed, Jo acknowledges that the Corporal seems a better German than the ones his grandfather complains about; he takes into consideration his attitude: he distributes sweets to children, he gives his binoculars as a gift to Hubert, a mentally challenged teenage boy, and when one of his daughters dies during an attack on Berlin, he claims that wars should be fought only between soldiers and not civilians. Despite this, what the novel lacks is the comparison with the ideology that obliges Benjamin and Léah to hide and cross the border to be safe. Readers may wonder: why should the kind Corporal arrest them, even if he has been ordered to? Apparently, he tells Jo that there is not a reason why 'the Germans' are behaving in this way towards Jewish people, or at least Morpurgo does not inform child readers:

"[...] Every day since I hear about my daughter, every day I ask myself many questions and I try to answer them. It is not so easy. What are we doing here, Wilhelm, I ask myself? Answer: I'm guarding the Frontier. Question: why? Answer: to stop people escaping. Question: why do they want to escape? Answer: because they are in fear of their lives. Question: who are these people? Answer: Frenchmen who do not want to be taken to work in Germany, maybe a few prisoners-of-war escaping, and Jews. Question: who is it that threatens the lives of Jews? Answer: we do. Question: why? Answer: There is no answer. Question: and when they are captured, what happens? Answer: concentration camp. Question: and then? Answer: no

answer, not because there is no answer, Jo, but because we are frightened to know the answer.” (*ibidem* 109-10)

Even though the Nazi ideology invented the reasons why Jewish people should be persecuted and killed, it is rather problematic that the author simply dismisses its ideas by having the Corporal say that ““There is no answer”” (*ibidem* 110).

When Jo asks for help to his mother and grandfather to better understand who their enemy is, and who Jewish people are (as Misha did in *Milkweed* and Heidi in *Hitler’s Daughter*), neither of them provides him with a satisfying answer:

“What’s a Jew?” [...]

Grandpère and Maman looked at each other. For several moments neither seemed to know what to say.

“Well,” said Grandpère at last. “It’s difficult to say exactly what he is, your Jew. He’s not a Christian that’s for sure, and he’s not a Catholic. He’s not like you and me. Doesn’t go to church.”

[...]

“But why do the Germans want them?” said Jo. “What did they do?”

Grandpère thought for a moment. “Well,” he said. “Hard to say. Hard to say. The Germans, they don’t need much excuse do they? What they don’t like they kill, and what they want they take. They don’t need reasons, and even if they do they invent them as they go along!” (*ibidem* 49-50)

Morpurgo’s narrative poses the German as a unified group that does not need reasons to appropriate what is not theirs and to persecute Jewish people, ‘forgetting’ that German Jews were persecuted as well. Therefore, the author’s use of the adjective German is often debatable in the story, because it conveys the idea that all Germans – instead of Nazi ideology – are the enemy and child readers may consider this a valid perspective also in their own time.⁴¹²

Jo is able to acknowledge the Corporal’s human side, but Morpurgo decides to eventually make Jo “see [the Corporal] as a man in the uniform of the enemy, a good and kindly man [...], but nonetheless an enemy too” (*ibidem* 166). Therefore, the apparent problematization of evil is cancelled by this passage and so is the readers’ chance to develop a more critical problematization of evil through narrative empathy. Moreover, the narrator poses what happens to Benjamin and Léah in the background – as if a few lines telling what happened to them are ‘enough’ like the fact that for the Corporal it is ‘enough’ that some of the children managed to cross the frontier:

⁴¹² Regarding this specific aspect, the novel is less successful in problematizing evil associated to nationality adjectives: *Friend or Foe* (1977), one of Morpurgo’s previous novels, better discusses the protagonist’s divided thoughts towards German pilots.

“They were taken to one of those camps, weren’t they?” said Jo. The Corporal said nothing.
 “But why?” said Jo. “What for? What did they do?”
 The Corporal took a deep breath and let it out slowly. “I have no answers, Jo,” he said.
 “I know no answers, no reasons. I have thought much of that man and the little girl, and still I do not understand.”
 [...]
 “That day up at the hut,” Jo went on. “You knew, didn’t you?”
 The Corporal nodded. “I thought there was someone inside,” he said, “someone or maybe something you did not want me to see.”
 “There was,” said Jo. “There were twelve Jewish children, and they escaped. All except Léah, they escaped.” And he did not try to disguise the triumph in his voice.
 “Well, well,” said the Corporal. “I suppose that’s something. *Auf Wiedersehen* Jo.”
 (*ibidem* 166-67)⁴¹³

Jo is contemptuous when talking to the Corporal, after Benjamin and Léah have been arrested and brought to the train station to be deported; however, he does not condemn him openly, only through his tone. This narrative decision not only deprives children of more historical information, but it also seems to dismiss Benjamin and Léah’s relevance by not using other narrative devices to make readers empathize with them.⁴¹⁴

The above passage also highlights a dubious twist of roles between Jo and the Corporal. Since the latter understood that someone was hidden in the hut, the fact that the children are able to escape into Spain poses him like a ‘heroic’ character, because he helps them rather than arresting them all. Possibly, Morpurgo depicts the above scene to prove once more that the Corporal is inherently good, but my concern is that the writer does not sufficiently elaborate the comparison between the first troop of cold-eyed soldiers and the Corporal’s good-mannered troop. As an experienced reader may infer, the first follows Nazi ideology – the real enemy – while the latter shares only the nationality with the first. However, considering the novel, child readers do not have the chance to compare the two mindsets and troops; therefore, it may be difficult for them to deduce that the real enemy cannot be spotted by adjectives of nationality. In terms of respectful representation of German

⁴¹³ In the last chapter, the narrator informs child readers of what happened to Benjamin and Léah in two paragraphs: “Everyone waited for some word of Benjamin and Léah, but there was no word; instead came the first dreadful rumours, rumours that there were some camps – concentration camps – where Jews and others had been systematically murdered. Even when there were pictures in the newspapers and reports on the wireless Widow Horcada refused to believe it. Jo clung to Benjamin’s own maxim: ‘Wait and pray,’ he had said ‘Wait and pray’; but often alone in the cold church he would cry into his hands, for he somehow knew that his prayers were too late. Meanwhile Monsieur Audap had been making enquiries. It seemed that Benjamin and Léah had been taken first to Gurs concentration camp about thirty kilometres away. From there they had been sent on to Auschwitz. Auschwitz was a death camp, he said. There were only a few survivors, and Benjamin and Léah were not amongst them. Like millions of Jews they would not be coming home” (Morpurgo, *Waiting for Anya* 170-71).

⁴¹⁴ There are not any paratexts giving additional historical information to child readers, so the novel presupposes that they are already knowledgeable about concentration camps and mass murdering.

and Jewish people, while the first may count on the Corporal's kind behaviour, the latter suffer from the author's ambiguous representation of their arrest and their relationship with the bear cub. Benjamin and Léah do not cross the frontier with the other children and, while they are going back to the house where they had been hiding, they come across a bear. The animal is the grown-up bear cub that Benjamin had saved at the beginning of the story. After his unsuccessful attempts to make it go away, Léah screams and the patrols hear her. Morpurgo's novel might convey the idea that Benjamin and Léah should have paid more attention in the forest and that it is Benjamin's and Léah's fault if they are deported, rather than the Nazi ideology that obliged them to leave their home and to hide.

The bear is one of the missed potentially powerful metaphors in the story. Instead of becoming a narrative symbol that accompanies child readers and helps them empathize with Jo, Benjamin, and Léah, it is used in a too ambiguous way to clearly meet this expectation; eventually, it becomes misleading. At the beginning of the novel, Jo runs to the villagers to tell them that he has seen a bear in the mountains, which is a threat to the village farmers as well as to his own family. As a consequence, the villagers go hunting the bear and they kill it. Jo feels upset when he sees the bear skin hanged as a trophy because he has been the cause of its death; therefore, when he goes back to the forest and his dog finds a bear cub, Jo decides not to tell anyone about it because he wants it to live, as if to expiate his guilt for the killing of its mother. Slightly after, Jo meets Benjamin for the first time, who is about to feed the cub with milk not to let it die.

Given this initial scene, it seems that Benjamin and the bear cub are somehow associated to one another. It may also be possible to establish an association between the bear and Hubert, since he is a mentally challenged boy who likes imitating the bear roar to play with little children. However, while the Corporal is talking to Jo later in the novel, he clearly establishes a link between himself and the animal when he admits that he likes honey: "I'm like a bear" (*ibidem* 78). Is the bear a symbol of all these characters meaning that they are all similar – all human beings? Although possible, it is unlikely. The grown-up cub is the same bear that frightens Léah in the forest and that is responsible for her own and Benjamin's arrest. Thus, the bear seems to be a symbol of 'the Germans' as enemies because it threatens the village farmers and then meets Benjamin and Léah, just like the soldiers occupy Lescun and then arrest them.

Hubert is eventually shot by the retreating Germans, so his performance as a bear might be understood as a symbol of how 'German evil' infected him, condemning him to death. If it were so, the narrative is highly problematic because Benjamin takes care of the

bear cub until it can feed on its own; therefore, once again it is suggested the idea that what a Jewish protagonist does turns against him or her, as it happens when Léah screams in the forest and the patrols arrest her and Benjamin. In addition to this, Jo's hurt feelings after the bear's death mean that he regrets having alerted the villagers because it is as if he was the one who killed the bear. One may say that he did not think enough about the consequences of his warning, but if the bear is a symbol of 'German evil', then it means that Jo cannot escape violence and death: either he 'kills' the cub-the Germans at the beginning, or he lets the cub-the Germans live and they will later kill Benjamin and Léah. Empathizing with Jo means to be inside an ambiguous and deceitful narrative that seems to encourage pre-emptive evil rather than the recognition of evil ideology and behaviour. Even though Jo decides to do good by helping Benjamin, Léah, and the other children, readers will be confused by the symbolically and ethically fuzzy story, which does not offer the useful problematization of evil of Gleitzman's and French's works, nor their convincing narrative structure.

Jo's missed condemnation against Nazi ideology rather than the Corporal's uniform and the problematic narrative are likely to convey ideas such as that evil is recognisable by superficial elements (like uniforms or countries of origin), that evil 'sometimes happens', that (past and present) Germans are vicious, and that Jewish people were persecuted 'for some (unspecified) reason'. Despite this, there are some positive characteristics, such as Morpurgo's basic attempts to establish Jo's friendship with Michael (see ch. 8.1) and Jo's caring about Benjamin, Léah, and the hidden children. These are the few positive prompts that *Waiting for Anya* provides child readers with to acquire attitudinal postmemory.

Lois Lowry's *Number the Stars* depicts Annemarie's direct encounters with Nazis and her brave stance towards evil despite feeling fear for her own life, for her own family members, and for her Jewish friend Ellen and her parents. Among the novels here considered, Lowry's story is one of the narratives that most evidently describes a parallel between the protagonist's experiences and fairy tales; in this case, Little Red Riding Hood, since Annemarie walks through a dark forest to bring an important packet to his uncle, a fisherman who is hiding Ellen and her family on his boat. Like Lowry, Jane Yolen adds open references to fairy tales in all her three novels about the Holocaust: *The Devil's Arithmetic* is a time-slip historical novel where the protagonist, Hannah, tells the story of Hansel and Gretel to a group of girls in 1942; the fictional novel *Briar Rose* is based on the personal version of Briar Rose-Sleeping Beauty as told by the protagonist's grandmother and that is then found out to be her own life story of how she survived death in Chelmno; *Mapping the Bones* is a historical novel

linked to the previous works in that it adopts a double narrator like *Briar Rose* and it follows the structure of Hansel and Gretel.⁴¹⁵

Number the Stars does not offer a profound problematization of evil; on the contrary, it is based on an evident differentiation between good and evil, positive and negative characters. The Danish population is caring and selflessly risks their lives to save their Jewish peers, like Annemarie and her parents do. Some participate in organized partisan resistance, like Annemarie's older sister and her fiancé, who will be both killed; however, their violence is not condemned since it is meant to save lives and to oppose Nazi evil.

Despite what may seem a plain description of good and evil characters, as Keen discusses,

the critical preference for psychological depth expressed by ["round"] characters [...] does not preclude empathetic response to flat characters, minor characters, or stereotyped villains and antagonists. Drawing on the literature of cognitive social psychology, Richard J. Gerrig[']s theory suggests [...] that flat characters—easily comprehended and recalled—may play a greater role in readers' engagement in novels than is usually understood. ("Theory" 218)

This is true in Lowry's novel, since Nazis are described following the usual synecdoches – boots and rifles – and they are the equivalent of the wolf in Little Red Riding Hood. Nonetheless, their apparently flat, underdeveloped description as stereotypical villains who stand out against positive characters⁴¹⁶ highlights Annemarie's bravery and ethical integrity when she does not betray or abandon her friend Ellen, even though she is afraid and worried for her own family.

Annemarie's encounters with Nazis establish a progression starting from a lower level of threat and reaching the highest risk when she is 'Little Red Riding Hood' in the forest. The first scene when Annemarie meets evil is at the beginning of the story. Annemarie, Ellen, and the protagonist's sister are racing through the streets because Annemarie wants to practice for the school athletic meet and she is winning when they are forced to stop by two soldiers around the street corner:

There were two of them. That meant two helmets, two sets of cold eyes glaring at [Annemarie], and four tall shiny boots planted firmly on the sidewalk, blocking her path to home.

⁴¹⁵ As the same author explains in her website, "like the Hansel & Gretel story, there is starvation in the ghetto and [the protagonists'] parents leave them in the woods in the care of (they hope) the partisans. And in the end, there is the House of Candy, and a witch and an oven" ("Mapping the Bones", accessed 25.01.2022).

⁴¹⁶ This may recall Kokkola's discussion of the Nazi as Bogeyman (see Kokkola, *Representing* 132-65; see also ch. 7).

And it meant two rifles, gripped in the hands of the soldiers. She stared at the rifles first. Then, finally, she looked into the face of the soldier who had ordered her to halt. (Lowry 2)

Like Katarina in *The Boy at the Top of the Mountain*, Annemarie dares to look evil in the eye. She is the one who speaks with the soldiers when they are interrogated about why they were running, and while doing this she derides them in her mind: they have been occupying Denmark for three years but they are still unable to speak their language and the taller soldier is “the one she and Ellen always called ‘the Giraffe’ because of his height and the long neck that extended from his stiff collar” (*ibidem* 3). Despite the fact that she “tremble[s]” (*ibidem*) when one of the soldiers prods her backpack, she acts fearlessly and answers the soldiers’ questions, sparing her sister and her friend replying to them. Even though she admits that she was scared, after they are gone, she did not hesitate to defend her loved ones and to stand up against the threat that the soldiers represent.

Annemarie’s second meeting with evil occurs at night, when her family is hiding Ellen, disguised as their daughter, while her parents were brought to a safe place. The Nazis are searching in all houses and apartments to find Jewish families and they think that Annemarie’s family may have helped their Jewish neighbours, so they inspect their house too. Ellen and Annemarie are asleep but the officers do not care about Annemarie’s mother pleading them not to wake up the girls. When they are approaching their room, Annemarie tells Ellen to take off her necklace, a Star of David. As discussed in chapter 8.1, the protagonist manages to tear it off Ellen’s neck just before they enter the room, “crumpl[ing] it into her hand and clos[ing] her fingers tightly. Terrified, both girls looked up at the three Nazi officers” (*ibidem* 45). Along the suggested progression, this direct encounter with evil embodied by Nazi officers represents a riskier meeting because “[t]hese three uniformed men were different from the ones on the street corners. The street soldiers were often young, sometimes ill at ease, and Annemarie remembered how the Giraffe had, for a moment, let his harsh pose slip and had smiled at [her sister]” (*ibidem* 46). Nonetheless, Annemarie is ready to tell her name and Ellen’s, who is using the name of Annemarie’s dead sister. Once more, the protagonist is loyal to and cares about her friend, which is narratively rendered through a powerful image previously discussed: “Annemarie relaxed the clenched fingers of her right hand, which still clutched Ellen’s necklace. She looked down, and saw that she had imprinted the Star of David into her palm” (*ibidem* 49). Despite not being part of Ellen’s ‘in-group’ of Jewish people, Annemarie metaphorically becomes a member thanks to her behaviour.

The third and most frightening encounter with Nazi evil occurs when Annemarie is alone in the forest near her uncle's house where she, her mother, and Ellen are staying, waiting for the best night to hide her friend and her parents on her uncle's fishing boat heading towards Sweden, where they would all be safe. After Ellen and her parents have left the house to reach the boat, Annemarie finds a packet that her uncle said to be extremely important. She does not know what there is inside it, but she understands that it must be fundamental since her mother deeply worries and says that "It may all have been for nothing" (*ibidem* 104) after seeing it. Annemarie offers to go on her own to her uncle's boat since her mother has a twisted ankle and cannot walk. Aware that this is the only way to bring the packet to the boat, Annemarie's mother tells her to prepare a lunch basket for her uncle and to place the packet at the bottom of it. Soon Annemarie is walking through the forest, like Little Red Riding Hood, and she starts telling the same fairy tale as she is used to narrate to her sister because this may soothe her while she is in the darkness. The moment when she says that Little Red Riding Hood hears a growl,

Annemarie stopped, suddenly, and stood still on the path. There was a turn immediately ahead. Beyond it, she knew, as soon as she rounded the turn, she would see the landscape open to the sea. [...] Very soon it would be noisy there, with engines starting, fishermen calling to one another, and gulls crying.

But she had heard something else. [...] She heard footsteps. And—she was certain it was not her imagination—she heard a low growl.

Cautiously, she took a step forward. And another. She approached the turn in the path, and the noises continued.

Then they were there, in front of her. Four armed soldiers. With them, straining at taut leashes, were two large dogs, their eyes glittering, their lips curled. (*ibidem* 112)

Annemarie is as brave as on the previous occasions. She decides to perform a silly girl when approaching the soldiers, as her mother suggested her, and she is the first to speak. The soldiers inspect her basket and interrogate her, further highlighting the connection between Nazis, dogs, and the wolf in Little Red Riding Hood when one of them "barked the question at her" (*ibidem* 115). Inevitably, they find out the hidden packet because the dogs insistently sniff her basket. Out of frustration, she starts crying because she really does not know what is inside it, despite their questions, but when they find a handkerchief, they toss her uncle's bread to the dogs and let her go. Then, Annemarie runs to the boat just in time to hand the basket to her uncle. Only at the end of the story both the reader and Annemarie will get to know that the packet contained a handkerchief imbued with a substance that made Nazi dogs unable to detect human smell. If Annemarie had not carried it to her uncle, Ellen and her parents could have been caught.

The well-known fairy tale helps Annemarie to be brave, but Lowry also uses it to describe the protagonist's journey into the forest as well as to accompany child readers inside it. Evil is unquestionably associated to Nazis, but their stereotypical and fairy tale-inspired representation does not ruin Lowry's ability to convey Annemarie's feelings and to invite child readers to empathize with her. As previously claimed, their flatness underlines even more Annemarie as the heroine of the story and as an average, kind, loyal schoolgirl who values her relationships with her family and her friend despite the evil she meets on her way.

Lowry's story is 'safer' than other narratives herein analyzed because Annemarie can always count on the presence of adults and Ellen's parents are in a safe place waiting to reunite with their daughter, while in most of the other works child protagonists have to separate from their parents. However, Lowry's work is not at all like Dillon's historical novel (see ch. 8.1): the protagonist meets evil in progressively riskier contexts with peers (in the first encounter), adults (at her house), and alone (in the forest), whereas Dillon never represents a direct encounter with evil where her protagonists are alone. Moreover, in Lowry's novel *Annemarie* shows that she is able to decide on her own more than once: she takes "a step forward" (*ibidem* 112) against evil and she defends people about whom she cares. Therefore, *Number the Stars* is valuable novel to convey attitudinal postmemory because it invites readers to 'feel with' (see J. Smith 720) a positive protagonist who actively opposes evil.

As this chapter discussed, the protagonists' encounter in person with evil can have a significant role in helping child readers empathize with them and, as a consequence, to acquire attitudinal postmemory. However, this highly depends on the authors' ability to use literary meetings with Nazis in a successful and balanced way, so as to offer young readers a representation of their evil ideology and, at the same time, a problematization of evil that avoids simplistic associations (for example, the one simply based on nationalities).

The use of synecdoches (mainly boots and uniforms) to represent Nazis provides characters and readers with symbols that help them identify evil, but stories cannot rely only on this narrative device to convey attitudinal postmemory, unless the author adopts a storytelling technique that draws on the fairy-tale style, like Lowry. In the latter case, the author represents Nazis as stereotypical villains and their bidimensional description has the scope to highlight the protagonist as a positive character.

All the novels herein discussed do not simply convey a plain, superficial differentiation between good and evil characters. What makes the difference, including in

Lowry's fairy-tale-inspired story, is the relevance that authors give to the protagonists' behaviour and relationships with peers and adults, both of which pose them in high contrast with the negative figures adopting Nazi ideology. Behaviour and relationships are threatened, infected, or unchallenged by the protagonists' direct encounter with evil. When they remain loyal to their friends and recognize them as peers despite their origins or political affiliations, there is a successful problematization of evil that liaises with narrative empathy to convey attitudinal postmemory to readers. In this sense, the most successful authors are undoubtedly Morris Gleitzman and Jackie French (see also ch. 8.3), who both deeply problematize evil and the protagonists' actions at the emotional and relational levels. Jerry Spinelli wisely uses the opposition between Nazi boots and Janina's shoes to further characterize evil and friendship. Lois Lowry's protagonist actively stands against evil; on the contrary, Eilís Dillon's narrative is simplistic and adopts an excessively safe approach to the protagonists' direct encounter with Nazis. Similarly to Dillon, Michael Morpurgo's novel fails to discuss evil in relation to nationalities and it offers scarce prompts to child readers to acquire attitudinal postmemory. Rather than conveying it, *Waiting for Anya* blurs attitudinal postmemory due to Morpurgo's missed comparison between Nazi ideology and the Corporal's troop behaviour, the author's use of national adjectives, his protagonist's inability to befriend the Jewish children, and his incoherent symbolic use of the bear. John Boyne's works seem to mirror one another in their representation of a German protagonist who has a Jewish friend and who is unable to defend his positive relationships. However, *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* is more problematic a narrative than *The Boy at the Top of the Mountain*, which at least presents two positive characters. Their behaviour opposes the protagonist's ethics tainted by Nazi evil, therefore helping readers to acknowledge his errors. By doing so, the novel offers a few prompts to acquire attitudinal postmemory.

The suggested readers' age range for the historical novels considered corresponds to the period when children start learning how to take decisions on their own, even in contrast with their parents; moreover, they continue developing emotional and relational skills (see ch. 7). When Felix decides not to harm the Hitler Youth boys in *After*, he grows at the ethical, emotional, and interpersonal level. Child readers empathize with him and his conflicting thoughts because they are in an age when they "[w]ant to behave well" (Morin, accessed 15.06.2021): they know what it means to feel fear, to worry about loved ones, to protect them, to be loyal. Young readers also wish to behave more like grown-ups (see ch. 7); therefore, they know that sometimes one lies to protect a peer from being admonished by an adult or not to make adults angry or worried.

Annemarie, Felix, and most of the other protagonists do not run away from evil; they confront it directly and they do what Felix states at the end of *Then*: he will live and his life will be an example to everyone of how Zelda was, of how all individuals could be – loving, caring, loyal. Child protagonists eventually understand who their enemy is, and what evil is. In this way, by means of narrative empathy, child readers are invited to do the same and to actively stand against evil. They are encouraged to reject the ideology and the denigrating and persecutory behaviour that protagonists encounter in the stories, which means that they refuse Nazi evil. Therefore, they acquire attitudinal postmemory, an active memory of the Holocaust.

8.3 Encountering Metaphorical Evil

At the beginning of the previous chapter, I claimed that the novels discussed in this dissertation depict two kinds of encounter with evil, often comprised within the same narrative: the protagonists may meet evil in person or in a more metaphorical form that, nonetheless, is ascribable to Nazi ideology. For example, authors represent metaphorical evil when the characters suffer from being separated by their loved ones, from being caught and deported in a concentration camp, or from the multiple dimensions of Nazi persecution, like hunger, death, and constant hiding. Focusing on this kind of encounter with evil, it is useful to reflect upon two strategies that authors use to metaphorically convey evil and the protagonists' opposition to it. The first narrative means is the representation of dogs, which is useful to highlight Nazi evil or the characters' positive relationships; the second literary strategy comprises the specific use and the role of words in historical narratives, be they spoken, written, or even only thought. Both these literary devices help child readers acquire attitudinal postmemory by highlighting the relevance of positive relationships.

In addition to synecdochical references to uniforms and boots, Nazis are also commonly described as yelling, crying, shouting, making noise. They never talk with a human voice; they usually bark orders and, because of that, they are often associated to and matched with threatening dogs. In chapter 8.2, the discussion about *Number the Stars* referred to Annemarie's three meetings with Nazis. In particular, in the third encounter that takes place in the forest evoking Little Red Riding Hood story, the four soldiers have "two large dogs, their eyes glittering, their lips curled" (Lowry 112) that sniff Annemarie's basket and are as intimidating as the wolfish soldier who also "bark[s]" (*ibidem* 115) a question at her. Both dogs and Nazis stand for the wolf in the most traditional fairy tale: they stop Annemarie, she tries to explain that she is carrying a lunch basket to her uncle, but they insist on inspecting it

thoroughly, delaying her. This means that Annemarie risks reaching her uncle's boat too late and that she will not be able to hand a package hidden in the basket to him before he leaves; that package is of the utmost importance because it contains a substance that can misdirect Nazi dogs when they search for any people hidden on boats, as Annemarie's friend Ellen and her parents are. Therefore, dogs and soldiers are both a direct threat to Annemarie and an indirect one to the people she cares about.

Similarly, in Jerry Spinelli's *Milkweed* there are Nazi dogs during the 'resettlement' of the Jewish people in the ghetto: "Jackboots with dogs guarded both sides of the gate [of the ghetto]. The people slumped along with their suitcases, heads hung low, as if they did not know the teeth of the dogs were snapping into their faces" (Spinelli 183-84). When Janina and Misha return to the ghetto,⁴¹⁷ the 'resettlement' has already started. They go to their apartment to look for Mr Milgrom, but they find it empty. Janina's mother had died earlier in the novel, so she looks everywhere for her father because she does not want to lose him too. As Misha tells child readers, she eventually goes among the crowd of people who are being forced onto boxcars, surrounded by Nazis and dogs:

Janina knocked me aside as she ran from the room and down the steps. I ran after her [...]. [...] I lost her as she plunged into the people. I did likewise. The dogs gasped on their leashes, but no one tried to stop us. On the other side of the wall, I made my way from side to side of the parade, bouncing off suitcases, searching for her. Whistles shrieked. Boxcar doors screamed. Dogs yapped and snarled. Jackboots and dogs and bayonets threw gigantic, jerking shadows on the ground.

[...]

Then I saw her. Or did I? Was it really her? How could I be sure? It was four or five boxcars down the line. [...] She was a shadow cut loose, held above the other shadows by a pair of Jackboot arms. She was thrashing and screaming above the silent masses. I could not make out her words, but the sound of the voice was hers, and I was running, breaking from the parade and running toward her. And then the arms came forward and she was flying, Janina was flying over the shadow heads and the dogs and soldiers, her arms and legs turning slowly. [...] I was running and wishing I could fly with her, and then she was gone, swallowed by the black maw of the boxcar, and even as I felt the hot breath of the dog, I could hear the rumble and the boxcar door clanking shut.

I tried to run to her, but the dog wouldn't let me go, and then the dog was gone and a boot came swinging and I was kicked so hard I popped off the ground. (Spinelli 185-86)

In the excerpt above, Nazi evil is visually represented by boots and dogs and it separates Janina from her father; then, it impedes Misha from reaching her. Child readers will not know if Janina and her father would be able to reunite before dying in a concentration camp. However, what is highly relevant is that they know that Nazi evil is responsible for dividing

⁴¹⁷ They usually leave at night through a hole in the wall to search for food in the town and they get back in the morning.

Janina and Misha because she will be ‘resettled’ like Mr Milgrom, while Misha will not be forced onto a boxcar because his orphan friend Uri, working for the Nazis, grabs him and shoots him at the ear purposefully, so that Misha faints before other guards can get their hands on him. Janina and Misha are children who are both trying to defend their positive relationships to be with their loved ones, but Nazi evil does not allow them to do so, be it through soldiers or dogs.⁴¹⁸

The parallel between Nazis and wolfish dogs is evident also in Boyne’s novel *The Boy at the Top of the Mountain*, where Pierrot is afraid of the wolfish appearance of the Hitler Youth boys on the train:

Five boys, all aged around fourteen or fifteen, well-built, blond, and clear-skinned, turned to look at him silently, as if they were a pack of hungry wolves unexpectedly alerted to fresh prey.

“Come in, little man[.] [...] We won’t bite.” He held his hand out and beckoned him forward slowly. There was something about the movement that made Pierrot feel very uncomfortable. (Boyne, *The Boy at the Top of the Mountain* 64)

However, in the novels herein discussed dogs may also be good and loyal towards the protagonists. Even though authors tend not to represent Nazi dogs and the protagonists’ pets together,⁴¹⁹ which means that there is not an open parallel between them, this absence is in itself a representational pattern.

When authors include dogs in their narratives, they tend to foreground them as being either trained by Nazis or faithful to child protagonists. In the first case, Nazi dogs are always threatening, teeth-showing, and they are interchangeable with the soldiers, while in the latter case dogs have a special emotional relationship with the children. Faithful dogs draw attention to the relevance of positive relationships in child protagonists’ life to oppose evil and suffering and they also highlight the fact that they may lose such relationships due to Nazi ideology. For example, in *Waiting for Anya* Jo always goes shepherding with his faithful dog Rouf, which “lay (sic) beside him, his head on his paws, watching the sheep. Only his eyes mov[e]” (Morpurgo, *Waiting for Anya* 7). Notably, Rouf is responsible for finding the bear cub, which can be a symbol of the German soldiers that will occupy and patrol Lescun, as discussed in chapter 8.2. This interpretation seems to be confirmed by the fact that Rouf has been attacked by the cub and when Benjamin finds both of them in the forest, Rouf was “[c]overed in blood” (*ibidem* 17). Unless Jo heard Rouf’s whining, he may have not seen the

⁴¹⁸ As Gleitzman’s protagonist Felix thinks, there is only one kind of Nazi dogs – killer dogs.

⁴¹⁹ An exception is John Boyne, who represents both Pierrot’s pet D’Artagnan and Hitler’s dog Blondie, with which Pierrot will play at the Berghof.

bear cub and he may have not met Benjamin: despite Morpurgo's ambiguous use of symbols in the story (see ch. 8.2), it is as if Rouf brings Jo in front of evil (the bear cub) and a friend (Benjamin) and Jo should decide what to do.

In *The Boy at the Top of the Mountain*, Pierrot has a pet, a small dog called D'Artagnan that "always knew when Pierrot was upset" (Boyne, *The Boy at the Top of the Mountain* 15). However, Pierrot has to leave it at Anshel's house when he goes to the orphanage, which may foreshadow how he will abandon his friend too, although he willingly decides to stop his friendship with Anshel, while he does not plan to leave his dog.⁴²⁰ D'Artagnan and Anshel belong to Pierrot's life in Paris; therefore, when he decides to adopt Germany as his own country and to follow Nazi ideology, there is no longer space for them in his life, so much so that he does not think about it anymore whereas he read about it in Anshel's letters while he was at the French orphanage.

As claimed in chapter 8.2, Gleitzman is one of the most successful authors in problematizing evil. As for the representation of dogs, Jumble is Felix's pet when he is an adult living in Australia, but it represents the crowning of Felix's dream as a child: owning a dog called like the one in Richmal Crompton's books. When he was a child, Felix could not have a dog for obvious reasons and surely it is not by chance that Jumble will be killed by neo-Nazis in *Always*, while Felix and Wassim are in the cemetery at Zelda's memorial grave. Jumble was old, "hopeful" (Gleitzman, *Always* 45), but the members of Cyril's gang simply killed it to intimidate Felix and Wassim while it was waiting for them in the car:⁴²¹

I burst out of the trees, my legs all over the place, and see him on the ground, not moving, his throat red and wet, and I know.

Oh.

Oh, Jumble.

Wassim is on his knees next to Jumble, sobbing.

The car door is open.

Nobody inside. Nobody near. Nobody anywhere in the carpark. No other cars.

Just my car.

With something smeared on the dear door.

A symbol.

Wet and red.

I recognize it. an ancient noble symbol. Stolen by people who aren't noble at all.

Trying to use history to flatter their rancid ideas.

I turn my back on it.

Hurry over to Jumble and Wassim.

[...]

⁴²⁰ Notwithstanding the symbolic value of Pierrot leaving his dog, it is useful to highlight the fact that Pierrot *willingly* decides to stop his friendship with Anshel.

⁴²¹ In the following passage, Felix is the narrator.

“Felix,” sobs Wassim. “It’s the Weasels’ symbol. How did they get here? Why did they do this? [...] Uncle Otto said the Weasels might want to hurt me[.] He didn’t say anything about an innocent dog.” (*ibidem* 74-75)

Dogs that are loyal to child protagonists are a literary means to highlight how positive relationships are broken by Nazi evil because Nazi ideology threatens them in the past as well as in the present, the historical time does not matter. When Felix is a child and he and Zelda are staying at Genia’s house (in *Then*), they befriend Leopold, Genia’s dog, to which also Dov is attached, as he brings him a “lump of raw meat” (Gleitzman, *Then* 56) even though “[m]eat is even more precious than eggs [because] people are lucky if they have it once a month” (*ibidem*). When a group of Nazis inspects Genia’s farm, they steal Genia’s chickens, Zelda’s favourite subject for her drawings, and they shoot Leopold:⁴²²

Leopold is lying on the ground. Not barking. Not growling. Not even moving.

[...]

“Leopold,” screams Zelda, rushing past [Felix].

She flings herself down next to Genia and tries to lift Leopold, but his head just flops against her chest.

“Leopold,” sobs Zelda. “Don’t be dead.”

[...]

Zelda is shaking with sobs, pressing her face against Leopold’s limp body.

I crouch down and gently close his eyelids and stroke his soft untidy fur.⁴²³ (*ibidem* 99)

When Dov is informed of what happened, he eventually lets his anger out. Leopold was the only positive relationship which Dov could still rely on, since Nazis had murdered his parents, his brother, and all the orphans who were living in the near orphanage run by his family. Eventually, Dov will become a human bomb to kill Hitler Youth boys, while Felix is reminded of his positive relationships before doing the same thanks to Genia and Zelda’s present for his birthday, as discussed in the previous chapter. The parallel between past and present is openly offered by Felix, who remembers Leopold and the similar situation he lived as a child when he and Wassim find old Jumble dead and bury it:

Watching [Wassim digging Jumble’s grave], I remember another grave being dug a long time ago.

A grave for another innocent dog.

⁴²² Also in the following excerpt, the narrator is Felix.

⁴²³ As I will discuss later in this chapter, words are a means to defeat Nazi evil and to remember those who die: in this case, Zelda makes a drawing for Genia depicting Leopold and the animals stolen by the Nazis so that she can remember them.

We buried Leopold under a big tree on Genia's farm. Me and Zelda, weeping and digging.

Zelda muttering angrily about the Nazis who'd killed him, and the young thug who'd distracted us with bullying so we couldn't warn our loyal friend. (Gleitzman, *Always* 78-79)

In contrast with Nazi barks, yells, and their inability to speak words as human beings, child protagonists' voices are not silenced. They continue using words to write or tell stories and to communicate with their loved ones, regardless of the threatening situation around them. They speak (or whisper, if it is safer), read, and write to oppose evil. Literature and words have a fundamental role in many of the novels considered as a means to maintain the protagonists' relationships with peers and family members, be they alive or dead. Words (and drawings) are the means to remember, to show love and care, or to give way to one's negative feelings, like anger and desperation. They are a metaphorical weapon against metaphorical evil, which morphs into multiple forms of dehumanization in ghettos and in concentration camps. Therefore, poems and stories are a symbol of humanity against beastly yells, even when they cannot be spoken out loud, even when Felix hands his precious notebook pages to people in the boxcar to be used as toilet paper.

In Gleitzman's *Once*, Felix loves books because they remind him of his parents, who used to have a bookshop. He is an excellent storyteller and writer, and he always carries a notebook with him where he notes down his stories. Zelda draws her loved chickens adding the letters F and Z under them for Felix's birthday and through another drawing she is able to reconcile with her Nazi parents after Dov, an orphan Jewish child, angrily draws his orphan friends massacred by the soldiers. On the contrary, in *The Boy at the Top of the Mountain*, Pierrot rejects his friend Anshel by refusing to read and reply to his letters but, after the war, Anshel will be the only one who can listen to and note down Pierrot's story, since Pierrot is unable to voice his guilt and shame with anyone apart from his old friend.

Words in the form of poems are a recurring presence in Jane Yolen's *Mapping the Bones*. Of the two protagonists, Chaim is an evident example of how poetry saves his life and, in this way, of how it helps him to protect his twin sister Gittel as well as Sophie when they are in the Sobanek labour camp.⁴²⁴ Chaim has always preferred writing to talking because he stutters and, as the reader is informed, he does not usually say more than five words a day. He has developed a sign language to communicate with Gittel, but very often they do not even need it as they seem to already know what the other one is thinking, feeling, or worrying

⁴²⁴ As Yolen explains in her "Author's Note", there are mainly children in this labour camp, where they work to build ammunitions. However, Sobanek is not a real labour camp: the author joined the names of the real labour-death camps Sobibór and Majdanek (see Yolen, *Mapping the Bones* 416).

about. Chaim read his notes and poems aloud in the evening to Gittel, when they still were in their house; he never hesitates while reading from his notebook. Similarly to Anshel and Pierrot, Chaim and Gittel's sign language and their specific shared listening-reading habit in the evening, which continues also in the ghetto, highlight the profound link between the two as well as the power of words that are not silenced by the surrounding evil. Chaim's subjects change, but his words are as 'alive' as they were before – they are a means through which Chaim is constantly aware of the situation around him and, at the same time, they prove that his power to communicate with others has not been annulled:

*Later, in the ghetto, when there was little to write about but death and terror, [...] Chaim still kept on writing, though he had to scribble in the margins of his journal for such books were in short supply and far too expensive for us to buy. After dinner, he'd read me a poem, an observation from the window of our apartment, a wicked word portrait of a Nazi soldier standing alert on a side street. (Yolen, *Mapping the Bones* 21; emphasis in original)*

Chaim is alert to the world outside and skillfully converts his own thoughts and feelings into written words, despite the terrible and worsening conditions they are forced to live in. Chaim's words are a means to oppose evil, to 'manage' it by writing it on the page, but literature is also a narrative device. As previously said, *Mapping the Bones* is divided into three parts following the Hansel and Gretel fairy tale and, like the original tale, they feature key moments in the protagonists' lives. Part I tells their life in the ghetto and their escape through the forest where they have to go on without their parents, Part II narrates their life in the forest with the partisans, and Part III is the most frightening one because it is about their imprisonment in Sobanek, where children who report gossip and information useful to the guards are rewarded with bits of candy, while those who are too weak, ill, or outspoken are condemned to 'the chimneys'.

Intertextual references to the original fairy tale are strewn along the Yolen's story. When Chaim and Gittel are being brought to the partisans with Bruno and Sophie, two *Mischlings* from Lublin who have shared their apartment in the ghetto,⁴²⁵ "Bruno was busy

⁴²⁵ At the beginning of the novel, Bruno and Sophie's family is assigned to Chaim and Gittel's apartment. The relationships between the two families are tense, as the first do not want to stay with the latter, and the latter do not like their unpleasant behaviour. For example, Bruno once steals some precious balls of candy to Chaim and Gittel's father, the only medicine he has for his bad cough. Bruno always behaves in a disrespectful, selfish, and naïve way; he does not care about the consequences of his actions but only about what he wants. Sophie soon enough sides with Chaim and Gittel's family, especially when her father does not come home, most likely because he has been killed, and her mother consequently loses her mind. She understands that they have a chance to survive only if Chaim and Gittel's family helps them, while Bruno thinks that they will be able to do it on their own. As Sophie reproaches him, "'You mean *I* would have to make do,' Sophie told him. 'You would read your comics, and Mutti would go silently mad at the window. [...]" (Yolen, *Mapping the Bones* 111;

being Bruno, tossing stones he'd collected, white and gray pebbles, off the back of the cart. 'So we can find our way home,' he confided in Chaim" (*ibidem* 184), mirroring Hansel and Gretel's bread crumbs. Once they are in the forest with the partisans, after leaving the path, Chaim senses that he must be careful because they are "[p]robably ten miles in [...]. The dark, dense woods are like a fairy tale forest. And not the good kind" (*ibidem* 192; emphasis in original). In the fairy tale, the forest is the place where the protagonists meet evil embodied in the witch; similarly, in Yolen's novel the forest is where the uncanny unfolds. While they spend time with the partisans, Chaim and Gittel's closeness temporarily deteriorates as they become increasingly distant at the communicative and emotional level. Gittel becomes more silent and impossible to 'read' for Chaim, something he is not used to, because she is working on her grief for having left their parents behind, on the uncertainty that they will ever be able to reunite with them, and on the fear for what hidden threats are in the forest as well as in Chaim's and her own future.

Consistently, in the forest, Chaim, Gittel, Bruno, and Sophie all experience evil. For example, they find themselves in the middle of a firefight between the partisans and the Nazis and they are forced to watch the first being killed by mercenaries. However, among them, Gittel seems to be the most 'infected' by the power of evil – the power that weapons give over other human beings. The partisans spend some time to teach the children how to use a rifle because they must be able to shoot and defend themselves from Nazis and, as Chaim reckons, it was

[n]ot as easy [...] as shooting the BB gun he'd gotten one year for his birthday, back when they lived in their old house, where Papa had set up a target at the far end of the garden. Gittel had turned out to be the more accurate of the two of them at shooting, but said she hated it and did it only twice.

Now, here in the forest, surrounded by the shadows of unseen enemies, far from Mama and Papa, suddenly the only thing that seemed to drag Gittel from her strange lethargy was that gun. She asked short, quick, whispered questions [...], questions that hadn't occurred to Chaim or Sophie or Bruno. [...]

This was a new Gittel. A hard Gittel. A fierce Gittel. Chaim just wasn't sure it was *his* Gittel anymore. And he wasn't sure how he felt about that.

Just touching the gun seemed to have changed Gittel. [...] (*ibidem* 203-04; emphasis in original)

The novel alternates chapters of historical fiction where Chaim is the narrating voice and thoughts made by Gittel in the present time. Therefore, the reader gets to know also Gittel's

emphasis in original). Thanks to Chaim and Gittel's parents, all the four children reach the partisans by hiding into barrels.

point of view, which confirms Chaim's impression about the influence that the gun had on his sister, especially during the firefight with Nazis: "*I felt a power surging through me, almost a kind of joy when I shot that time in the forest. I had no idea if I killed anyone or not. But the joy remained. Which is why I threw the rifle away, into the weeds, when the firefight was finished*" (*ibidem* 224; emphasis in original). Conversely, despite fearing for their own lives and for their parents', Chaim is not tempted to surrender to the power represented by guns, even though he would be safer in case of a fight. Instead, he prefers "*stick[ing] to the knife Papa gave [him]*" (*ibidem* 204; emphasis in original): this is not simply a preference for a certain weapon, as it symbolically conveys his resistance to evil and his nurturing the relationship with his family.

Chaim sometimes thinks that he will leave poetry, sensing that it is useless in their situation, but he quite soon changes his idea. After being captured by the soldiers who killed the partisans, all the children are sold to the Nazi guards of a labour camp, where the relevance of words and of relationships with family members and peers becomes even more evident. Chaim tries to speak more, when it is necessary, but written words are his true means to oppose the horror of the labour camp. Poems are a weapon to protect his extended family (which includes Bruno and Sophie), regardless of the fact that he has not got any paper nor a pencil to note them down:

Chaim suddenly understood something. After being silent in the forest with the knife at his throat, he was like a horse already broken to the plow. But both the girls, and Bruno, too, were his family. And now Manny. Chaim knew he might not make an outward protest, but he could make silent ones. Finger signs. Poems written in his head, though no longer spoken aloud. Not even to be written in any journal, lest they be found and he punished for it. And his friends punished with him. He nodded silently at Manny and hoped that silence would be enough.⁴²⁶ (*ibidem* 265)

From that moment onwards, Chaim turns to words to bear the shocking conditions in which they live as well as to carry on working at a steady pace to meet the production requirements and, consequently, to have his meal. Children are perversely forced to be part of other people's death to save their own lives because they are exploited to build ammunitions that, as Gittel says, were to shred their friends, families, and other people like them, and "Chaim found that if he recited lines from his poetry journal, they were like the old sea chanties. The cadences kept him moving" (*ibidem* 278).

⁴²⁶ Manny is a Jewish adult prisoner who is ordered to shave the children's heads and who befriends them.

Silent words, only repeated in his mind, help Chaim to work and, thus, to survive, while unvoiced words are a tool of resistance against Madame Szawlowski, their guard in the ammunitions room. While other children's voice trembles in repeating "Yes, Madame Szawlowski" (*ibidem* 270) as she instructs them, "Chaim only mouthed the words. It was his one small rebellion" (*ibidem*). Chaim is able to convert imposed silence into saving poems and to deny his voice to reply to orders; by doing so, he is able to convert two forms of evil (imposed silence and forced replies) into mental and unvoiced words of resistance, of life.

Chaim is aware that poems and words will not save others' life apart from his own: when one of the boys in his barrack dies during the night, no one knows why, what happens is simply that Manya will report his death and, as she says, "[...] that will be the end of it. [...] He'll be gone by the time we return from work. It will be as if he'd never been [...]" (*ibidem* 288). Manya is the same girl who helps Chaim and Gittel in many ways, for example by telling them the 'rules' of the labour camp when they arrived, like Rivka does with the protagonist and the other girls in *The Devil's Arithmetic* (see later in this chapter). She seems cold-hearted and selfish, but when her voice slightly shakes in commenting on their peer's death, Chaim understands that "her attempt at [...] coolness [...] was obviously false" (Yolen, *Mapping the Bones* 288). Could words have avoided his death? They could not, but they can mourn his death and help remember him to defeat the evil that will make him vanished in a few hours' time:

This was the first Sobanek death [Chaim] had witnessed, and somehow he knew it would not be the last.

At that same moment, he understood what he had to do to stay alive. And to keep Gittel alive. He had to write—not just a line here, a line there—but something everyday about what was happening, if only in his head.

He had to act as a living memory to the events here. He had to witness and then write about them. But because they were allowed no paper, no pencils, he had to remember each piece of writing whole. Not just a line there, a word there, but whole. As he still remembered the poem he had written about the little girl dead on the ghetto street. [...] Maybe staying alive and writing was what he had to do for [his parents] as well as for himself.

It will be like lighting a yearzeit candle, he thought. A light for the year anniversary. However long this nightmare lasts. When you light the candle for someone dead, you remember the dead, the good they did, the work they drew sustenance from, and perhaps how they died. You witness. You remember. (ibidem 289-90)

When Chaim decides to write a poem that will be like "*lighting a yearzeit candle*" (*ibidem*), he needs to know for how long they have been imprisoned and Manya helps him once more by revealing him how many days and months have passed, since she is the only one who can do it because she has a secret knife that she uses to cut lines in the wood of her bunk. Even

though Chaim's use of words to remember what he sees and to honour those who die do not save people physically, it can nevertheless save their memory. Therefore, those words metaphorically save people through remembrance, making them part of those who are still alive, affecting their emotions and their lives. Child readers are invited to empathize with Chaim and, thus, to do what he does thanks to attitudinal postmemory: remembering the Holocaust through their attitude.

In contrast with Chaim's words to survive and let others' memory remain alive too, Bruno uses his words for egotistical reasons. Rather than caring about others, he decides to use them to his personal benefit, which consists of getting more food from the guards. By becoming their translator, he openly 'befriends' them in a unidirectional relationship that not only makes him suspect and potentially dangerous in the eyes of the other children, but also does not provide him with any real additional safety or advantage:

[Bruno] was too busy currying favor with the guards, speaking German to them, laughing with them, the only child prisoner to do any such thing. As time passed, he found himself a kind of go-between, especially when the guards wanted something specific done and couldn't explain it in their still-fractured Polish.

Chaim knew there were other German-speaking prisoners. [...] But none of them sought out the guards. Only Bruno did that.

Of course it made him a pariah among the other children, Chaim being the first to treat him with disdain, even when he saw the pain of it in Sophie's eyes. But Chaim soon realized that though Bruno's isolation hurt Sophie, Bruno himself didn't seem to care.

The guards not only talked and joked with him, they also handed out treats to him—mostly bits of candy when they had it, or the occasional carrot or potato.

A bit like sharing the remains of a meal under the table with a dog [...]. (ibidem 299-300; emphasis in original)

Bruno's refusal to establish positive relationships with his peers makes him like 'a dog' loyal to Nazi guards and infected by selfish, evil ideology rather than being able to recognize the relevance of his sister and his friends in his life.

Bruno's behaviour is at the opposite end of Gittel's. She is an open person, always trusting others even if she does not know them, and this does not change in the labour camp. Upon their arrival, the four children are sent into a barrack for the night and they are able to acknowledge the presence of other children only because they can hear their whispered voices in the darkness. Of their small group, it is Gittel who tells the other children who they are and where they come from, but Bruno's approach to them is suspicious:

Bruno hissed at [Gittel], "Why tell them anything? Are you crazy? They may be spies. They could report us."

“Look at them,” Gittel said [...]. “They’re children. *Like us*. Who would they report to? Who would believe them?” [...]

A third shudder ran through the cloud, and one unidentified soul whispered, “The boy is right. There are people in this place who would report you for a handful or dried-up grapes or a dram of chicken soup, even without the chicken. [...].” (*ibidem* 250; my emphasis)

Nazi evil ruins peer-ness among children and potential positive relationships by making them one the enemy of the other. It is hard to say whether the child’s words were an inspiration to Bruno. Given his constant selfish behaviour, it is likely that he would have eventually taken advantage of the chance to get more food even if he had not heard them. However, what interests the most here is that Gittel is represented as kind and loyal to her peers, while Bruno only thinks about his own good, as he will do when he confides to the murderous doctor of the labour camp a detail about Chaim and Gittel. He could not know what the doctor had in mind for them, but by revealing him that they are twins, Bruno becomes part of the evil surrounding him: that fanatic ‘doctor’ will run tests and interrogate Chaim and Gittel over days to continue, and possibly surpass, the work of his mentor – Mengele. Chaim and Gittel will survive his inhumane tests, but they will not be spared watching the horrible death of Chaim’s friend Gregor, and child readers will not be spared either.

Despite Bruno’s inability to defend and nurture his positive relationships with his sister and friends, Sophie takes care of him even before dying of a severe fever, as she pleads Chaim and Gittel to “‘Take care . . . of . . . Bruno [...]. He means . . . well’” (*ibidem* 324). Gittel had been ill too, but then she felt better and never left Sophie’s side. After her death, Chaim will write a poem for Sophie to remember her: “It was the only way he could do something for her—too late, of course, but it was all he had. [...] He started to commit [the poem] carefully to memory. Tomorrow he might try to tell it to Bruno, the beginning act of his promise to his departed friend” (*ibidem* 342).

Although Bruno is depicted as egoist and unable to grow emotionally, he is not a character as negative as the Nazi guards or the ‘doctor’, as he seems mostly unaware of his own selfishness, while Nazi ideology is purposefully evil. Bruno, Chaim, and Gittel will still be alive when the labour camp is liberated. Chaim and Gittel have been able to survive because they could count on each other, on their kinship as siblings, and on the relationship they had with the other children. Each one developed them in a way that better fitted their own character: Gittel in person, by talking earnestly to others and by staying near Sophie struggling with fever; Chaim silently, with his unwritten poems. Relationships and words were the only things the two protagonists had in the labour camp and they were able to use them against the evil they were surrounded by.

Words and relationships with peers have a relevant role also in *The Devil's Arithmetic*. The protagonist of Jane Yolen's novel, Hannah, is a contemporary girl who travels back in time to 1942 Poland, where she lives and experiences the life of Chaya, the girl who saved Hannah's aunt in the concentration camp where they were sent and whose name Hannah shares. Although it is a daunting task, Yolen depicts the inside of a concentration camp and, in doing so, she successfully balances direct description with 'framed gaps' (see Kokkola, *Representing* 25-27; see also ch. 6) so as to enable child readers to grasp the horror and the "chaos" (Yolen, *The Devil's Arithmetic* 135) that ruled it. Yolen's protagonist experiences or sees many forms of metaphorical evil: for example, when she is in a boxcar, an infant dies; when she is imprisoned in the concentration camp, she is surrounded by forms of evil such as hunger, the shocking conditions of the prisoners, the chimneys, the death of two little children, the run to safety of other children into the midden, the shaved heads, the tattooed arms, to recall but a few.

Even though she comes from the future and she is aware of what Nazi persecution and concentration camps meant, Hannah's warnings and the historical details she tells to let people know in advance are useless. Child readers share her powerless position: since it is likely that they already know something about the Holocaust before reading the novel, through narrative empathy with the protagonist they can sense that they cannot do anything to avoid the arrest of Hannah's friends, to avoid them to travel in a boxcar and their imprisonment in the concentration camp.

Despite her words conveying historical knowledge cannot change history, Hannah's approach to stories and their function changes and indeed improves in the narrative. At the beginning of her shocking journey to the past, the protagonist tries to tell Chaya's family that she is not Chaya, in fact, but Hannah, from the USA. Of course, her attempt is useless and she continues living in the past, although she would very much like to wake up from that dream. When she is getting ready to go with Chaya's family to the near village for a wedding, she meets four girls, Shifre, Rachel, Esther, and Yente, and starts telling them some details of her life in the future, like going to school and shopping. Glad that the girls are so focused on her words, when she cannot think of anything else Hannah narrates the plots of all the books and movies that she can remember, still mesmerizing her peers:⁴²⁷

⁴²⁷ In the following excerpt, Aaron is Hannah's little brother and Rosemary is her best friend in the present time.

Stories seemed to tumble out of Hannah's mouth [...]. [...] After the first [telling], which they had interrupted every third sentence with questions, they were an attentive audience, and silent except for their frequent loud sighs and Esther's nervous laughter at all the wrong moments.

Rachel cried at the end of *Yentl*, when Hannah described Barbra Streisand bravely sailing off to America alone. And all four had tears running down their cheeks when Beth died in *Little Women*. Hannah wondered at this strange power she held in her mouth. It was true Aaron had always liked her stories. So did Rosemary, but as her best friend she had to. [...] But she'd never had such a large, appreciative audience before.

[...] She *was* Hannah. But these girls, who were hanging on every word, believed she was Chaya. And it was great to be so popular. She wasn't going to spoil it by trying to convince them she really was someone else.

[...]

Hannah was in the middle of a muddled version of Hansel and Gretel, having temporarily run out of movies and books and fallen back on the nursery tales [...], when her attention was arrested by a high, thin, musical wail. She stopped in mid-sentence.

[...]

For a moment, Hannah was almost annoyed at having her audience distracted, "Don't you want to hear any more?" she asked. (*ibidem* 50-53; emphasis in original)

Hannah's approach to stories is selfish as she likes to be 'popular' thanks to her storytelling 'power'. She does not think about the girls in any other way apart from being her audience.

Nonetheless, her relationship with her peers changes while she is in the concentration camp. As soon as they arrive there, a girl called Rivka – whom Hannah will later find out to be her own aunt – tries to warn all of them about what to expect and tells them the 'rules' they should follow to have one more chance to live. Rivka lost all her family there with the only exception of her brother Wolfe, and yet she is opposing the surrounding evil by telling the newcomers what to do and not to do to survive; she also manages to get Hannah a workplace in the kitchen because she is not a country girl and she would not have been able to bear other works there for long. Survival is based on luck and 'organizing', which means finding things: Rivka reassures them that if they need anything, she will try to "organize" (*ibidem* 115) it for them, as mutual help is the only weapon they have to oppose Nazi evil.

Most importantly, Rivka teaches Hannah how to convert Nazi evil into a story of positive relationships by explaining her tattoo to her, Shifre, and Esther:⁴²⁸

"J because I am—like you—a Jew. The I is for me because I am alone. The 8 is for my family because there were eight of us when we lived in our village. And the 2 because that is all that are left now, me and Wolfe, who believes himself to be a 0. But I love him no matter what he is forced to do. And when we are free and this is over, we will be 2 again. [...]" (*ibidem* 113)

Stories, like Chaim's poems, are a powerful defense against evil, even though they cannot avoid physical death. While Hannah is telling the other girls that in the future there will be

⁴²⁸ Rachel had previously died in the boxcar, while Yente died in the concentration camp.

Jews, regardless of what they are suffering in that moment, a guard accuses them of talking rather than working and plays with their terror by pretending not to know whom he will condemn to death. He needs three of them “to make up a full load” (*ibidem* 157); eventually, Shifre, Esther, and Rivka are to follow him, whereas Hannah is spared. However, she quickly takes Rivka’s kerchief and places it on top of her head, telling her to run and live, as the new guard will not be able to tell them apart. Then,

she walked purposefully, head high, after Shifre and Esther.

When she caught up with them, she put her arms around their waists as if they were three schoolgirls just walking in the yard.

“Let me tell you a story,” she said quietly, ignoring the fact that they were both weeping, Shifre loudly and Esther with short little gasps. “A story I know you both will love.”

The strength in her voice quieted them and they began to listen even as they walked. (*ibidem* 159)

She will tell them about herself, Hannah, until they reach “the door into endless night” (*ibidem* 160). While her retelling of book and film plots was a selfish activity, now her story is meant to soothe the evil around them, her peers’ suffering, and their death. Hannah is more caring towards others than at the beginning of the novel and when she returns to the present, she will remember the girls. She has acquired not only memories of what happened, but also the skill to weave stories connected to others and the positive relationships with them thanks to what Rivka – her own aunt – taught her while she was Chaya. Like Chaim with his poems, Rivka succeeded in converting dehumanization and her tattoo, a symbol of evil, into a personal story that fiercely reclaims her human nature: this is not a common ability.

Despite the success of Yolen’s novel, one may say that the way Hannah acquires memories poses a problematic issue, because the story seems to suggest that contemporary young people should live through the horror of the Holocaust in person to ‘really remember’ it at the personal level – as if they should feel the suffering that was felt and experienced at the time because there are not any other ways to make them approach the past. When Hannah returns to the present time, she repeats “I remember. [...] I remember” (*ibidem* 164): she has memories because she has been in the past and she has lived it. Following this reasoning, she would not be able to remember anything emotionally, personally, and psychologically unless she had that chance, which is impossible for child readers. Consequently, readers would be supposed not to be able to remember the past and the Holocaust. However, since the novel is about the need to remember, Hannah’s journey to the past can be understood as a literary representation of how young generations have difficulty understanding the past as something

alive, experienced by their older relatives, which mirrors the difficulty to pass down memory from the first-hand generation to young people.

Child readers cannot travel back in time like Hannah, but they can experience narrative empathy towards her, an average peer who quarrels daily with her little brother and who disagrees with her parents and relatives because her young age implies a different view on the world and other priorities. As discussed in chapter 7, during pre-adolescence young people increasingly prefer staying with their peers rather than their family; therefore, readers are likely to emotionally share Hannah's bewilderment, longing to get back home, and need for her own friends (and even relatives) when she is alone in an unknown place, living with strangers, and with certain expectations on her. Child readers also share her knowledge *a posteriori* of what happened in the past, which goes beyond 'in-group' divisions: despite their common will to change the past while they read it through the protagonist's focalization, they are as unable as Hannah to do anything. By 'feeling with' (see J. Smith 720; see also ch. 7) Hannah, they experience the past while she is living it; then, once they return to the present time with her, they can 'remember' the historical facts also thanks to the emotional sharing they had with her, especially for the loss of her friends.

Relationships with friends, relatives, and adopted family members are at the centre of the many letters included in Jackie French's *Pennies for Hitler*, where the protagonist is a German boy, Georg, who finds out that Nazi Germany considers him Jewish because his paternal grandfather was Jewish. Of course, also his English father and his German mother are threatened by the regime. After Georg's father, an admired German literature professor, is murdered by a group of university students during a graduation ceremony, his mother quickly manages to send him to the UK, hidden in a suitcase, where his aunt hosts him. Georg spends some months in London, never leaving his aunt's flat until she thinks he has become fluent enough in English to sound like a native. Then, he is allowed to go outside but, like Pierrot in *The Boy at the Top of the Mountain*, Georg becomes George, for safety reasons.

When the UK starts being bombed by Germany, Georg is forced to leave and, thanks to his British passport, his aunt sends him to Australia on a ship bringing to safety many other children. Most of French's novel takes place in a small Australian village and war seems far away, in another continent, on the other side of the world. Is it? Even though Georg repeats himself that "He [is] safe [t]here. They [are] all safe. A small safe town with hatred (mostly) far away" (French, *Pennies for Hitler* 227), he usually wakes up at night, terrified, because he often dreams that the kind and loving couple who is hosting him, the Peaslakes, and his friend

Mud find out that he is not the person his papers say – that he is Georg, a German boy, not the English George.

Apart from his country of origin, Georg also constantly worries about his mother, who could not escape from Germany with him: is she safe? Is she dead? Has she been imprisoned and starved as the news reports inform them regarding what Germany is doing to deported Jewish people? And, in addition to all this: who is his enemy? He is a German boy, or so he had been thinking, who has been accused to be an enemy of his own country because he is considered to be Jewish. He has watched his father being attacked by his own university students, he has seen his motionless body on the ground,⁴²⁹ he has been forced to separate from his mother, and yet he feels that Germany is his country. He is in a strange, unknown place, with odd trees, where the school has just one class gathering all the children of the village, regardless of their age. He is surrounded by caring and affectionate people, but they consider Germany as their enemy, so he is his hosts' enemy. He cannot tell anyone that the sad news coming from Germany worry him for his mother's life and, at the same time, its victories make him feel unsafe, as if he was a spy among people who trust him. Despite these worries and fears, Georg continues spending his days with his friend Mud and the Peaslakes, revealing his origins to no one.

Georg is always surrounded by evil, regardless of his geographical location. In Germany, he sees his father's being murdered and he has to leave his mother. When he is in London, he fears to be recognized as a German boy because of his accent. When his aunt allows him to go to school, he likes spending his afternoons at the library. Georg would like to befriend a girl in his class, Elizabeth, but a German bombing suddenly destroys everything he has come to know until that moment: the library is gone and when he runs to Elizabeth's shelter in her garden, he cannot do anything but watching her bleeding to death. Even though it is not embodied in a Nazi soldier, Georg can feel Nazi evil both in Germany and in the UK. Nonetheless, he continues to prefer positive relationships to revenge: in the UK he looks for a friend; later, when he is on the ship towards Australia, he and Jamie are the older children in their cabin and they are in charge of the smaller ones, but Georg goes beyond official orders to assure that they are ready at mealtimes and establishes a more human relationship with them by telling them stories at night. Thanks to him, one of the little children does not wet the mattress anymore, after a while.

⁴²⁹ At first, Georg did not understand that his father was dead, as he was being carried away by his mother who did not let him reach his father's corpse. Only in Australia Georg acknowledges that he will never see his father again.

Pennies for Hitler is interposed by letters written by Georg and other characters, such as his aunt, Mud, the Peaslakes' son Alan, who volunteered to become a soldier to defend his own country, and Mud's brother, who is a soldier, too. Letters are the means to maintain positive relationships with loved ones and even to establish them: Alan and Georg will never meet in person, but the Peaslakes' son considers Georg almost as a little brother and asks him to care about his parents and his old wooden train. Letters are also a reminder of the fact that the war and the fights may be far, but evil is not so far from them, as it surrounds the lives of those at home in metaphorical forms. This is particularly evident when the village is informed that both Mud's brother and Alan have been killed:

[Georg's] country had killed the Peaslake's son.

Alan Peaslake had been in Egypt, facing a German army. And the Italians too, perhaps. But it was Germany who had started the war. If Hitler had never yelled the order, if his countrymen had never followed, Alan Peaslake would be alive. Alan could even be in the bed next door to now, down on holiday with his parents.

Instead they had a German boy: a boy who lied. A boy who was the enemy who had killed their son.

The enemy was him. (*ibidem* 288)

As the author will further develop in the following book of the series, *Goodbye, Mr Hitler*, evil is not only represented by Nazi soldiers and the deaths they cause: it is the 'bacterium' (see French, *Goodbye, Mr Hitler* 190) sown into Georg's life and soul and that risks to make him 'a boy of hate' rather than 'of love' (see later in this chapter). Since he is both a victim of his own country of origin and a German citizen, thus an enemy of Australia, Georg feels both frightened and glad when the war eventually finds him even at the other side of the world because this means that he is no longer Australia's main enemy, as he has been thinking until that moment:

Part of him felt frightened, in a way that even Mud could never know. He knew what war was like. War wasn't real until you saw the flames after the bombs, the blood and glass scattered across pavements.

Yet part of him was glad too, despite the change. Australia's hatred had turned from the Germans to the Japanese now. The cowardly Japanese, who had struck without warning; the treacherous Japanese, who had bombed before declaring war. Hatred had run through the town like the row of pennies the soldier had shown him, all falling down almost together.

Georg could share the hatred of this enemy.

This enemy wasn't him. (French, *Pennies for Hitler* 240)

Mud does not know what war is like. However, she knows negative feelings associated to war because her brother had been fighting it and she knows what it means to worry for her own

family and country;⁴³⁰ therefore, child readers can understand both Mud's emotions about her brother and Georg's worries about his mother, despite not having lived through a war, because the characters value their family relationships.

Georg is persuaded of the fact that he can change his 'guilt' of being German by feeding his hate towards the Japanese, Australia's nearest enemy, because hatred grants him a place in the community that shares it: "Now he felt hatred like a warm tide running through his body; felt it link him to Mud, to the whole town and country. He belonged now, because of hate. 'Yes,' said Georg. 'I'd fight the Japs too. And we'd win'" (*ibidem* 266). Since young readers know that Georg is more than just 'a *German* boy', they may think that the hatred towards the Japanese is 'right' because it is against a 'real' enemy, which they know Georg is not; nonetheless, French does not allow them to simplify things in this way.

Hate does not work the way Georg thinks. It does not make an individual part of a group in the sense he wishes, especially when the person cares about the others he or she wishes to become closer to. Only positive, nurturing relationships with peers and adoptive family members can give Georg another home far from Germany. When Australia is attacked by the Japanese and there is more news from Germany, Mr Peaslake is angrier than he has ever been and wishes he could get his hands on a German. His words break Georg's protective shell: "clinging onto hate to stop the pain" (*ibidem* 295) does not work anymore and he eventually reveals to the Peaslakes that he is German. The couple does not believe Georg, so he runs away at night. While running, he spots a plane on fire and then a parachute, most likely of a Japanese pilot. This is Georg's chance to decide on his own what to do, whether to feed evil and hatred or to stop them:

All Georg could see of him was his leather flying helmet, his face, the Oriental eyes.

Then he saw the blood. It welled from what looked like a crease on the man's neck. Georg had a sudden vision of bombed-out London, of flying debris that ripped through flesh. Of Elizabeth, the life seeping from her as they dragged her from the dirt.

The enemy didn't move, but he was alive. [...]

He could kill an enemy. Feed the hate inside him. Give a gift of hate to the Peaslakes, to Mud.

He looked around for a weapon. A branch. A rock.

The rock stared up at him, jagged, dusty, as though it had been put there for him to use. He lifted it, felt his hands grow big with power. [...] He held the rock high above his head, ready to smash it down.

⁴³⁰ Mud wishes to help the 'war effort' even if she is only a child: she schedules a specific training for the children of the village including collecting metal, going to first-aid classes, and making their own bayonets using brooms and mops, following what her brother's "1932 *Boy's Own Annual*" said (French, *Pennies for Hitler* 264).

The enemy groaned. It was a small sound, a whisper almost too soft to hear. *It was a human sound*, the first he had heard all the long night except his own panting and the thud of his feet.

Georg dropped the rock. For long seconds he stared at the crumpled body, like Papa's body on the ground, blood on the stones.

He kneeled, and pressed one hand to the man's neck, just as he'd seen the air-raid warden do, nearly two years before, with Elizabeth. [...] He pressed his other hand down too, hard, then harder.

It hadn't worked for Elizabeth, but it worked now. [...] Had the wound stopped bleeding because the man was dead, or from the pressure of his hands? He didn't care. Didn't care what would happen when they found him there: a German boy trying to save the life of a Japanese man. (*ibidem* 299-300; my emphasis)

Despite the power he feels over that pilot, his whisper helps Georg recognize him as a human being, like himself. Georg was driven by negative emotions when he first saw him and when he grabbed the rock: sadness, frustration, fear, worry, anger. He loves the Peaslakes, Mud, Australia, but he also loves his parents. He has been unable to find a balance between past and present, between his country of origin and his life there, until he leaves all hatred as well as expectations apart to allow himself to be guided by his positive relationships with his father and with his peer Elizabeth, both dead and both as loved by Georg as Mr Peaslake and Mud. Evil had brought his father and Elizabeth away from him, so he cannot become part of the same evil: whoever that pilot is, Georg's (successful) attempt to save him is a short circuit in the seemingly endless hatred circle that kills people because they are not recognized as peers and as human beings. To Georg, there is not any difference now between Japanese and Australians: he tries to save the man just as he did with his peers while he was at school, when they saw a Japanese plane and he cried to them to stay outside the building, because it was safer. Georg decides what to do in front of a supposed enemy regardless of his being a German, an English in part, and an adopted Australian, and even despite what he thinks Mud and the Peaslakes would have appreciated. Only then Georg is finally himself – a child: "I'm no one's enemy, he thought. I'm me" (*ibidem* 301).

Mud and the Peaslakes' hate towards the Japanese is caused by their suffering because they have lost a loved one during the conflict. Like Gleitzman's protagonist Felix, Georg has lost many people too and feels anger, hate, sadness. However, it is important what he does after acknowledging that these negative emotions have taken control of him. Similarly, the Peaslakes will be able to understand his story, of how he escaped from Germany and then from England, only when they listen to him without being overwhelmed by the pain, anger, and hatred for Alan's death, when they fear to lose Georg too, after he runs away. Therefore, they privilege their love for him rather than their hatred towards Australia's enemy.

After his story and against Georg's expectations, they look at him lovingly and ask him to accept them as his family:

"I... I already have a mother ..."

"Auntie then," Mrs Peaslake offered, undaunted.

Auntie Thel and Uncle Ron, the same as Mud? That felt wrong too.

"How about Grandma and Grandpa?" Mr Peaslake's boom was as quiet as it ever got.

"You got either of those?"

"No."

"There you are then. You've got them now. That fit right with you?"

It did. It felt warm and solid [...].⁴³¹ (*ibidem* 306)

As Mr Peaslake tells him, Mud will not care about his past because she is fond of him, proving that nationality does not define an individual and that hate is not a way to belong, nor a basis for relationships. It only withers one's soul and makes one unable to recognize peers – even more so because, in fact, the pilot Georg saved is Australian. Hate brings people to reduce a person to a single characteristic, be it having "Oriental eyes" (*ibidem* 299) or a Jewish grandfather. Like in *Hitler's Daughter* (see ch. 8.2), French offers a successful problematization of evil and depicts evil as a choice.

Another example of French's problematization of evil is in the following novel, *Goodbye, Mr Hitler*. This work tells the lives of many characters because it is the linking story between the previous two novels of the series. Its structure alternates chapters dedicated to Johannes, a Polish non-Jewish boy, and Frau Marks – now known with a forged name – a German nurse who is Georg's mother. Johannes' parents used to own a hospital in Poland but when they refuse to follow Nazi orders they are arrested with their son, who still believes that soon Hitler will save them because there must be a mistake and it makes no sense that they are in a boxcar. They all will be sent to Auschwitz, including Frau Marks, who has been working and hiding in a Catholic hospital and has befriended Sister Columba, a kind nun who helps her with her grief and worry for Georg. When the Auschwitz gates are closed behind them, Johannes understands that the Führer will not come to help them because he "finally [...] realized. Th[at] was the belly of the ogre, and there was no escape. For the ogre was called Adolf Hitler" (French, *Goodbye, Mr Hitler* 37).

Johannes interprets the concentration camp he is forced into by means of a story with an ogre that his grandfather used to tell him and that always scared him. Nonetheless, he is quite aware of the real surroundings; he is not lost in a parallel, literary world. What he relies

⁴³¹ Georg's mother will reach him in Australia, after having been imprisoned in a concentration camp. In *Pennies for Hitler*, Georg only imagines this, but *Goodbye, Mr Hitler* proves that his would not only be a dream.

on to survive are his relationships, first with his mother, and then with the other children whom he finds near him when he wakes up in his barrack. Words, be they spoken or silent, are at the centre of both relationships: Johannes and his mother silently tell each other their mutual love before being forced to different parts of Auschwitz, as “Mutti spoke, but not with words. Words in the heart, thought Johannes, cannot be burned away. Even an ogre cannot swallow those. [...] He pushed the words deeper into his heart as she looked at him, making sure they were safe and could not leak away” (*ibidem* 34). On the contrary, outspoken words are those said by his peers in the barrack, when they explain the ‘rules’ of the concentration camp to him, like Rivka does in Yolen’s *The Devil’s Arithmetic*:

The boy looked at him intently. “Pay attention. You need to know things. If you do not you will die.” The boy shrugged. “Probably we will all die. But if you know things you have a chance of life.”

Johannes forced himself to focus. This made sense. In every land there were new rules. New rules for the land called “war”. New rules now in the ogre’s belly. (*ibidem* 39)

French describes what happens inside the concentration camp over some chapters; therefore, child readers are informed about the shocking conditions in which Johannes and Frau Marks are. However, French does not describe the children’s death after they have washed with ice-cold water and left as they were in the snow for hours adopting Johannes’ internal focalization. It is Frau Marks’s perspective that conveys the scene, to which she is obliged to take part as a nurse. First she washes the defenseless children, then she watches them fall down one by one, and eventually she and the other nurses are allowed to grab the few barely alive to take them to the ‘hospital’, even though most of them dies while in the nurses’ arms. This literary device makes child readers approach the massacre from Frau Marks’ more distant viewpoint rather than through the direct experience of the children. At the same time, they are emotionally drawn into it because the only child who apparently survives is Johannes.⁴³²

Only physical and emotional human warmth – the only thing they could give him in the concentration camp – will save Johannes in the ‘hospital’ thanks to Frau Marks and Johannes’ mother, who works there as a doctor. Frau Marks’ friend, Sister Columba, shares Johannes’ bed and constantly hugs him to warm his body despite the fact that her skin is red and covered with pustules due to radiation experiments. As important as warmth, Sister

⁴³² Johannes survives because he has arrived a few days earlier in the concentration camp, unlike his peers, who have been unfed for a longer time and, therefore, they are weaker.

Columba manages to soothe Johannes' hunger and the evil around him by telling him stories with the things the child dreams of – gingerbread and roast potatoes:

When you had stories about roast pork and apple sauce and how the dog had wriggled its nose up onto the table and dragged the roast away, and Sister Columba's mother and father and sisters and brothers all ran after it, and how there had been sausages instead for supper ... when you had stories like that, lying almost warm inside her arms, you could wait longer for real food. (*ibidem* 54)

When Johannes recovers, the war is almost at the end since the Russians are approaching. Before being officially liberated, Johannes escapes thanks to his mother and Frau Marks, who will later both run to safety during a death march outside the concentration camp. Johannes will be found and helped by Helga, whom the readers know as Heidi from *Hitler's Daughter*, her adoptive brother Hannes, and his mother, Frau Schmidt.⁴³³ From now on, the narrative provides child readers with a parallel between Helga and Johannes, who truly and lovingly befriends her, even though he does not know who she supposedly is. They develop a solid friendship, caring for one another not only in terms of food and shelter, but also at the emotional level, since they share thoughts and have a similar character.

Johannes is not anymore in the concentration camp but this does not mean that he is not still in the 'belly of the ogre'. Evil and hatred continue to be present at a metaphorical level in his life. For example, after having being forced to separate from his mother for a second time, evil has deprived him also of his words:

At night he tried to pray for Sister Columba, for Mutti, for Vati, for Oma and Opa, for the Schmidts and himself and the whole world, except for Adolf Hitler and all who followed him. And the Russians.

But he couldn't pray at all. The words wouldn't come. Maybe he was infected with hate too, like the soldiers, and the guards at the camps. (*ibidem* 74)

When Johannes, Helga, Hannes, and Frau Schmidt meet a troop of American soldiers who indicate the nearest Displaced Persons camp to them, Johannes' comment shows that what he fears is true, that is, evil has infected him and hate is growing inside him: "‘Maybe they'll kill Adolf Hitler.’ Johannes almost didn't recognize his own voice, so thick with hatred. ‘I hope they crush him. Rip him into pieces. I hope they kill them all!’ He meant the Germans. Though of course Helga, Hannes and Frau Schmidt were Germans too" (*ibidem* 83).

⁴³³ Heidi met Frau Schmidt and her son in *Hitler's Daughter*; she joined them adopting the name Helga, who is the name of Mrs Schmidt's dead daughter. They do not know if Mr Schmidt is alive until he reaches them in the American Displaced Persons camp where there are staying, in *Goodbye, Mr Hitler*.

Hannes will be killed right before entering the Displaced Persons camp. Once there, Helga wishes to help all the people she can, as she has always cared for Frau Schmidt and his adoptive brother. Johannes reunites with his parents and Frau Marks, while Helga meets Mr Schmidt. However, they all soon have to separate once again to be safe: Frau Marks is granted a passage to reach Georg in Australia by the English army because her husband was English, Mr Schmidt goes alone to the same country because the paperwork is quicker than requesting to go to the USA and he plans to reunite with his wife and Helga as soon as he gains enough money to buy a house. Johannes and his parents too go to Australia, so he has to leave Helga behind, in “the belly of the ogre where anything could happen, and only Helga was the rock that never changed, kind Helga with the gentle hands, Helga with a mind that hunted like his own, Helga, the always friend” (*ibidem* 130). Being in an unknown country makes Johannes feel the same as Georg felt at the beginning – he does not feel at home. He is unable to settle also for another reason: moving to Australia does not mean that he has left evil and hate behind him, in the ogre’s belly.

The same is true for Frau Marks. She believes that she is able to let go of the hate that has infected her when she reaches the harbour because she will soon be again with Georg, who is waiting for her with a loving expression on his face:

And she was dirty. Not with the filth of one camp, finally washed off, and the grime of another, where washing was restricted to once a week, but with a soul that was black with hatred, raw with pain. She could not step forwards, hug this handsome boy, the boy who looked at her with love.

She shut her eyes, saw herself grab shears, the kind for pruning hedges. She hacked at the hatred in her soul, fast and frantic, let it fly back across the ocean to the land where it belonged.

She opened her eyes, put down her suitcase, opened her arms, her heart.

She held her son, her loving son. She held her son with love. (*ibidem* 126)

It is not so easy to sever all ties to hate, especially after so much suffering. Frau Marks is happy and satisfied with her life in Australia with Georg, the Peaslakes, Johannes and his parents, and her other friends. However, when she receives a letter from Sister Columba’s niece informing her that, right after getting to know that she was safe in a new country, her friend died, she understands that she must do what Georg had done when he found the pilot. She must handle the hate inside her directly, helped by her love for her son and for her friends, to forgive her sister. Unless she does that, she would never be free of the evil that has been forced into and has grown inside her.

In fact, her sister Gudrun writes to her every month attaching a cheque for the rent of Frau Marks' house in Germany, where she moved into when her own was destroyed. In the previous novel, Gudrun refused to help Frau Marks and Georg after Georg's father was killed other than allowing them into her house for some hours to make a call that would bring Georg to England. Frau Marks has never forgiven her sister for her loyalty to the Nazi party rather than her own family, but Sister Columba makes her realize that "[s]he had thought she had become a woman of love when she found her George[,] [but] [s]he had been wrong" (*ibidem* 168).⁴³⁴ Frau Marks was still 'a woman of hate' against her sister; therefore, she writes to Gudrun for the first time in years, forgiving her.

Is Johannes equally able to defeat the ogre's belly? As it happened with Frau Marks and Georg before her, only when Johannes acknowledges that evil is not confined in Europe but has come all the way to Australia with him, he is able to decide what he wants to do. Being free and safe does not mean being liberated from infectious hate. As previously said, when Johannes reaches Australia he does not integrate well because he feels a stranger there. He cannot play sports because of his bad lungs for his time in the concentration camp and he does not like going to the cinema with Georg and Mud, despite their kindness. There is only one person who knows the belly of the ogre as much as him and with whom he can really talk – Helga, so he does not feel at home because she is not with him, or at least he thinks so. Evil and hate are still conditioning him by hindering him to fully embrace his new life because he knows that they are still threatening his friend. This is an example of how trauma lingers because its effects do not end when direct persecution ends.

When Helga and Frau Schmidt eventually reach Australia, Johannes feels better and is happy because he can share again everything with her; yet, their friendship and Helga's presence and words can just momentarily soothe him and control his hate, still lingering and waiting to explode inside him. Positive relationships with peers and adults are essential for Johannes to handle evil and hate, but he must take an active stance against them to be free like Frau Marks and Georg. Johannes has the chance to do so after letting his anger out for Mr Mittelfeld's death. Mr Mittelfeld had been imprisoned in a concentration camp like Johannes and he has been his violin teacher – more than that, he teaches Johannes to listen "[...] for the beauty [because] [i]t is always ... there" (*ibidem* 176) around him, even in concentration

⁴³⁴ As French explains in her acknowledgements: "[...] each [of the volunteers at the Sydney Jewish Museum] said that after the war they hated; and that each, slowly, had learned to love again. In the words of one man: 'The day they put my son into my arms I saw that my heart was so filled with hate there was little room to love my son. I knew I must become a man of love, not a man of hate, for my son'" (*Goodbye, Mr Hitler* 200). Thus, her use of the concept of 'woman of love' in the novel derives from the volunteer's words.

camps, however small, like “[...] a lark sing[ing]” (*ibidem* 177). When he dies due to pneumonia, Johannes “needed Helga. Always, when life was hard” (*ibidem* 178) and he allows his anger and hate toward Hitler flood his friend, who remains silent until he is too. Then, she reveals her identity as Heidi, ‘Hitler’s daughter’, and tells him that he should hurt her because she is the nearest evil person he has at hand in Australia if he wants to take revenge for what Hitler did; if he wishes he could kill Hitler, he should kill her. Helga hates herself for being marked by evil since her birth and eventually runs away from Johannes, who must take a decision: does he want to be ‘a boy of hate’ or ‘of love’? Does he privilege his hate or his friendship with Helga? Johannes reaches her and

thought of that small man. Small, like Helga was small, dark-haired like her. He remembered him standing on the balcony, screaming in fury, soaking in ten thousand angry cheers.

Helga was not that. Helga was small and good.

Helga was love. Not hate.

So that was what he said. “You are not him. [...] You’re right — I wouldn’t have been your friend. Not then. But now I am.”

“Even though I am Heidi? Hitler’s daughter?”

“You are you.” (*ibidem* 184-85)

When hate and evil take control, one cannot see the other as a human being, as a peer, as a friend. French’s problematization of evil makes Johannes aware of how he is surrendering to an ideology of evil. Physical traits and her genealogy do not really tell who Helga is: Johannes acknowledges that he had and still has hate inside him and, at the same time, he becomes aware of the opportunity he has to foreground the people and the relationships that make him feel good, rather than dwelling in hatred.

Johannes is not alone in confronting evil directly, as Helga must reconcile with her origins. She does so when she reveals everything to Frau Marks while holding Johannes’ hand. As Sister Columba helped her handling evil, now Frau Marks helps Helga realize that she cannot possibly be Hitler’s daughter because he did not have any children – just adopted children for propaganda purposes, including orphans of officers who fought with him in World War I. Most likely, Helga’s father was one of those officers. However, apart from her origins, what is relevant is that Helga has decided on her own to do good. She prepared a shelter for Jewish people in *Hitler’s Daughter*, she cared about Frau Schmidt and her son, and she helped Johannes and suffering people at the Displaced Persons camp. She has always opted to be ‘a girl of love’ and she will continue to do so, as she will become a pediatrician to help children. Privileging love to evil does not cancel anger or hate forever, but at least makes the individual happier: as Frau Marks says, “that small, angry man, changing the map of

Europe, soaking in the cheers, [was] never happy. Never fulfilled, as I am happy and fulfilled, with my family, my house in the sunlight, my memories, my friends” (*ibidem* 190).

Being ‘a woman or a man of love’ means that each and every day one has the chance to decide between good and evil; it is a difficult decision, but one that has to be done, and this is true for all the main characters in the novel. Helga acknowledges that she has not inherited evil, Frau Marks willingly prefers spreading love instead of rancour, and Johannes understands that he was forced to experience evil both physically and emotionally and that it cannot be ascribed nor limited to one person, even if that person is Hitler. Evil is an ideology that has infected Johannes and that is based on anger, revenge, hatred. As Frau Marks tells him, hate easily spreads among people. It is useless to oppose it with further evil because only positive relationships can vanquish the mesmerizing power that evil has. Even though evil and suffering for his past cannot be eliminated, Johannes has defeated hate – Hitler – because now he knows that he has the chance to oppose it by acting in a different way: “Hate will nibble at my soul at four in the morning, with memories that wake me screaming. Hate will try to flood me [...]. But I have defeated [Hitler] at last. I am no longer in the belly of the ogre. Goodbye, Mr Hitler. You are no longer part of me” (*ibidem* 191).

As Felix narrates to child readers, he will tell to cruel and violent people another way to live, more similar to Zelda’s. He willingly decides to be ‘a boy of love’, not of hate. Evil is a choice, as respect and open-mindedness towards peers are. Considering the novels discussed in this chapter, young readers have the chance to empathize with protagonists by recognizing them as peers who experience difficult situations and take decisions that they are themselves knowledgeable about, even though in other form. This means that they can parallel the protagonists’ experiences during the war with less threatening examples belonging to their everyday life. For example, some characters suffer from being separated from their parents (either because they are far away or dead), or because they are distant from relevant adult figures. Child readers may parallel this with the fear they feel when they are alone and wish they had their parents with them, or when they are in an unknown place, among unknown peers, and they must be ‘brave’ to find their own way to handle both of them. They may also be acquainted with the idea of ‘betraying’ a friend or an adult they care about out of fear, revenge, or desire to excel or having more advantages, so they may ‘feel with’ (see J. Smith 720; see also ch. 7) Yolen’s Bruno. At the same time, they may be ashamed of this kind of behaviour, therefore they can empathize with Chaim, who acts protectively towards his peers, because they know the value of real friends. Some more ordinary situations in which children

can experience feelings similar to the protagonists' ones are: when they have quarrels with their siblings, when they play and adults demand to know who is responsible if someone accidentally gets hurt or, in an analogous situation, when something gets broken in the classroom while the teacher is not paying attention.

Through narrative empathy, the novels discussed in this chapter invite child readers to take an active stance towards evil and to do what they feel right; before that, they must acknowledge their negative emotions and do not let them take control over them. Since readers tend to empathize more easily with protagonists (see Harrison 255-88; see also ch. 7), young readers can feel empathy towards Gittel, Chaim, Hannah, Georg, and Johannes – characters who understand that, rather than resorting to more evil actions, there is a better way to oppose evil: they can turn to positive, nurturing relationships with peers and adults and privilege sharing, loyalty, respect. Letters, poems, and stories are means to stay loyal and close to one's peers and relatives (either natural or adoptive) and to defeat the perverse ideology at the basis of Nazi evil as represented by the authors considered.

Child readers' experiences cannot be compared with the threats and horror of the Holocaust; nonetheless, young readers can use them to empathize more easily with the protagonists and internalize attitudinal postmemory. It is human to feel negative emotions like anger, fear, hate, but the novels analyzed in the present chapter invite readers to adopt another way to respond to the evil that caused them, even though it is not easy being 'children of love' or, in Felix's words, "mending people" (Gleitzman, *After* 13), individuals who refuse to further destroy the world around them.

Problematization of evil, empathy towards 'Jewish' protagonist (in the sense proposed in chapter 8.1), and the relevance of emotions and relationships all contribute to convey attitudinal postmemory because they encourage child readers to understand that evil easily spreads as an ideology and, if this happens, everyone can be picked on for something. Through narrative empathy, children learn that they can and should decide on their own what to do and that positive relationships with peers and relatives can oppose evil. Therefore, by acquiring attitudinal postmemory through reading the above historical novels, contemporary young readers will better know how to relate with others and how to do good while they grow. In this way, they will actively remember the Holocaust.

Conclusion

This dissertation has focused on the role of contemporary Anglophone children's historical fiction written by non-related authors in the context of Holocaust memory transmission. In particular, I have proposed and investigated the idea of 'attitudinal postmemory' as a specific kind of Holocaust memory that child readers may acquire by means of narrative empathy with the protagonists. Since the concept derives from joining theories and approaches pertaining to Holocaust Studies, Memory Studies, and children's historical fiction, it was necessary to probe many themes and theories in order to provide a scholarly contextual framework to the analysis of the novels herein considered.

In Part One, the main aim was to dwell on Holocaust Studies and Memory Studies so as to weave a chronological overview of the interrelated development of mediated and literary Holocaust representations as well as of Holocaust memory. These have always been inextricably associated to what Aleida Assmann calls 'mediators of memory' (see Assmann, "Canon" 97-107), also including literature. As claimed by David G. Roskies, the literary production on the subject never stopped, not even during the war years. The 1980s was an exceptionally relevant decade in the scholarly debate within the historiography area in dialogue with new critical discourses in literary studies; in particular, chapter 1 investigated two great controversies of the period. The first debate involved Martin Broszat and Saul Friedländer and it concerned the historicization of the Nazi period, while the second one was between Hayden White and Saul Friedländer regarding the use of literary devices and the historian's influence in historiographical writing.

The following decade, which was inaugurated by Art Spiegelman's *Maus* in 1989, showed how the 1990s were central in the development and dissemination of new forms to commemorate the Holocaust. The period was also marked by a renewed interest in Memory Studies that continued well into the present century, when Holocaust memory became the topic of many scholarly studies focusing on two broad themes: Holocaust memory and trauma inherited by descendants (see the critical works by Marianne Hirsch and Victoria Aarons and Alan L. Berger), and comparative approaches concerning other cultures and disciplines (as in the works by Jeffrey C. Alexander, Wulf Kansteiner, Alison Landsberg, Berel Lang, Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider, Michael Rothberg, and Dan Stone). After considering Peter Novick's as well as Amos Goldberg and Haim Hazan's criticisms against the idea of a globally shared memory of the Holocaust, to highlight the relevance of empathy I have

offered a differentiation between this and the concept of identification on the basis of Alison Landsberg's reflections on prosthetic memory.

Chapter 2 investigated some major issues in Holocaust representation: naming, the need to represent, authorship, and the 'right to' represent the Holocaust. As far as naming is concerned, this dissertation has adopted an inclusive rather than an exclusive meaning of the term Holocaust after discussing the ideas conveyed by Lydia Kokkola, James E. Young, and the authors of the UCL Centre for Holocaust Education collective volume on Holocaust teaching and knowledge in UK secondary schools. Thanks to Silvia Albertazzi's work on postcolonial theory and Édouard Glissant's meaning of *comprendre* and *donner-avec*, I differentiated between 'positive' and 'negative' appropriation to suggest that a combination of multiple perspectives and cultural products is advisable to preserve Holocaust memory. In the second subchapter, Irving Howe's opinion on first-hand accounts and Sue Vice's ideas on Holocaust fiction were strictly linked to the third issue about forms and genres considered 'appropriate' to represent the Nazi genocide. Despite the well-known Holocaust representation 'rules' of the 1980s, many scholars have voiced the necessity to go beyond the traditionally accepted canon. Terrence Des Pres's, Sara Horowitz's, Lawrence Langer's, and Samantha Mitschke's ideas were the basis to claim that 'non-related' authors can positively contribute to Holocaust representation and, thus, to its memory, despite the risk of voyeurism.

'Non-related' authors are postmemorial individuals who elaborate their own postmemory also by means of writing historical fiction for children. I claimed that the historical novels herein discussed may convey what I call 'attitudinal postmemory'. This new concept was explained in chapter 3 while considering previous scholarly works and theories within Memory Studies, which were useful to frame it. In particular, the chapter referred to Alison Landsberg's prosthetic memory, Patricia Leavy's iconic events, and Jeffrey C. Alexander's idea of social trauma, among others, to introduce a more elaborate discussion of Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory and of how the relevance it attributes to the emotional component is linked to 'attitudinal postmemory'.

Part Two of this dissertation aimed to probe how history can convert into an informed attitude by means of historical fiction also in the case of the Holocaust and young readers. After a brief overview of the development of the literary genre, I referred to two historical-literary controversies that took place in the years immediately after the war and that show how history and literature have always been interrelated. Those debates introduced chapter 6, focusing on definitions and characteristics of children's historical fiction, its potential weaknesses, and its uses in the educational context with the relevant risks. In particular, I

discussed some common criticisms to children's historical fiction and how these are interwoven with the representation of the Holocaust: factual knowledge quantity, simplification, the ideas of exploitation and abuse, and appropriateness concerning authorship, readership, and the subject matter.

Since 'attitudinal postmemory' is acquired by means of narrative empathy with protagonists who encounter evil and must decide how to respond to it, in chapter 7 I considered Joanne Pettitt's and Lydia Kokkola's ideas about the representation of Nazi perpetrators in literature for older readers and in children's literature. Then, I examined children's development of emotional and socio-relational skills, Mary-Catherine Harrison's "synechdocal theory of narrative empathy" (Harrison 257), and Joel Smith's ideas on the distinctive epistemological role of empathy. These theories claim that children start developing socio-emotional skills in their infancy and that they can empathise with people, including fictional protagonists, because they have experienced emotions "affectively matching" (J. Smith 713) the ones felt by their literary peers. Therefore, those studies constitute the theoretical basis for the literary comparative analysis of the novels proposed.

Empathy is a powerful means that enables young readers to recognise child protagonists as their peers as well as to 'understand' their difficulties and the corresponding emotions. In historical fiction representing the Holocaust, this means that, through narrative empathy, readers can 'feel with' (see J. Smith 720) protagonists who actively stand against evil by privileging interpersonal positive relationships with relatives and peers. Characters have the chance to decide what to do after acknowledging that they feel hate, anger, and desire for revenge because they have been 'infected' by Nazi evil. By means of narrative empathy, the problematization of evil and the foregrounding of positive relationships enable child readers to acquire attitudinal postmemory, which will hopefully develop into a 'postmemorial attitude'.

In the last chapter of this dissertation, I offered a comparative analysis of some historical novels from Anglophone countries. In the first subchapter, I claimed that the protagonists' socio-cultural or religious belonging is not relevant in enabling the passage of attitudinal postmemory because this is based on 'peer-ness', that is, the fact that both the protagonists and the readers are peers, children. To do so, the subchapter discussed the concept of being 'Jewish': everyone can 'become a Jew' – a rejected, abandoned, persecuted human being, who nonetheless should avoid to surrender to the evil that surrounds him or her.

The suggested literary works range from the USA to Australia, including Ireland and the UK, and they have been read under the lens of the representation of evil, which the

characters encounter in person, also through synecdoches, or in metaphorical terms. To the first case belong *Milkweed*, *Children of Bach*, *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, *The Boy at the Top of the Mountain*, *Hitler's Daughter*, *Then, After, Soon*, *Waiting for Anya*, and *Number the Stars*; whereas child protagonists especially meet metaphorical examples of Nazi evil and they use their words to contrast and defeat it in *Mapping the Bones*, *The Devil's Arithmetic*, *Pennies for Hitler*, and *Goodbye, Mr Hitler*. Both subchapters 8.2 and 8.3 claimed that the majority of child protagonists decides to defend and care about the positive relationships they have with relatives and peers, be it through direct actions such as when Annemarie tears off her friend Ellen's necklace, or in metaphorical form, such as when Chaim decides to mourn and remember Sophie by writing a poem about her, although only in his head. These emotional and nurturing links are the characters' main weapon to oppose the Nazi ideology. Child readers are invited to acquire attitudinal postmemory by empathizing with their feelings and, thus, by adopting their same behaviour towards others.

The comparative analysis highlighted a double tendency: on the one hand, authors from countries that are geographically nearer to Europe tend to offer more ambiguous and debatable representations of the Holocaust and of Nazi evil, like Michael Morpurgo's *Waiting for Anya* and John Boyne's *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*. Nonetheless, *The Boy at the Top of the Mountain*, a companion work to *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, seems to offer a slightly better problematization of evil, and Eilís Dillon founds her novel *Children of Bach* on close family relationships, despite the edulcorated narration that spares the protagonists more dangerous circumstances. On the other hand, authors from the USA (like Jane Yolen) and Australia (like Morris Gleitzman and Jackie French) are more successful in problematizing evil and in representing Nazi ideology as 'infective'. They propose interpersonal relationships recognizing the Other as a human being as the best way to defeat evil, also through the use of words – be they spoken, written, or just thought. A fairy tale-inspired representation of Nazis, Lois Lowry's *Number the Stars*, does not hinder the aim to convey postmemory because the story highlights how the protagonist bravely stands against evil despite feeling fear and worry.

Widening the genres and the countries considered may be a productive way to further develop the idea at the basis of this dissertation, therefore consolidating the role of 'attitudinal postmemory'. For example, it could be carried out a comparative study including picture books about the Holocaust to reflect upon the kind of postmemory – if any – that they convey. Picture books pose specific issues and interrogatives concerning the representation of the Holocaust at the visual level so as not to traumatize little children. Are there any 'distancing techniques' like the ones identified by Lindsay Myers in Roberto Innocenti's works (see

Myers L., “What” 32-39; see also ch. 7)? What is the kind of memory pursued through picture books? Are positive relationships as relevant as they are in historical novels for children?

Another potential comparative study may bring together scholars researching children’s historical fiction by non-related authors from non-English speaking countries: what are their approaches to promote Holocaust memory? Can the concept of attitudinal postmemory be applied also to their works? Similarly, another scholarly reflection may include historical fiction regarding the Holocaust and historical novels representing other genocides. This could investigate whether attitudinal postmemory is common to both literary productions or, if any relevant differences can be foregrounded, why a different kind of postmemory is privileged.

These are only some suggestions of potential further research about attitudinal postmemory, which can be useful to consolidate the need to consider recent literary attempts moving the Holocaust closer to contemporary readers and linking Holocaust memory to other examples of evil. Literary works like the ones analyzed in this dissertation foreground how it is necessary to promote and safeguard Holocaust memory and, at the same time, how the ideology at the basis of the Holocaust cannot be considered something belonging to history, to the past, to the pages of a textbook. Hate is still alive. Children should not only remember: they should have an ‘active’ and “resonant” (Hirsch, *Generation* 33) Holocaust postmemory. They should acquire attitudinal postmemory because, as the narrator acknowledges at the end of *Goodbye, Mr Hitler*, “[t]he world has many ogres” (French 194) that can be defeated only by opposing positive, respectful relationships.

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