

Voices of the Holocaust

*- Atrocity Through the Eyes
of Children*

Rebecca Harvey

English Extension 2

Major Work

2014

The atrocity of the Holocaust has occasioned texts of varying forms, representing one of mankind's most notorious crimes against humanity. As texts of this time are typically underpinned by the social, cultural, historical and political elements that contextualise the era and the experiences of its victims, literary works pertaining to the period of Nazism are inclined to favour the trauma of those involved as the crux of their storylines. The ideas and values that are most commonly manifested in literary products of the Nazi era are reflective of the context that overarches Holocaust literature and, more prominently, the attitudes that resonate within society in response to the circumstances of this time. The influence of a child's view has proved the use of perspective as an effective tool in manipulating the ways in which such circumstances are portrayed and interpreted in Holocaust literature. By observing juvenile texts of this time, a relationship between vulnerability and age can be established through the idea of children as victims of the debauchery of an older and more dominant entity. As the portrayal of Holocaust events is explored across various literary mediums, the purpose of the child's view in the representation of this era emerges as evidence of the intentions of youth perspective, and the bias of audience perception. With the differing perspectives of World War II personalities, the empathy associated with minors as subjects of atrocity reveals the role of the child in the depiction of Nazism in literature, identifying youth as a means of both heightening and censoring the emotion attached to Holocaust events.

Peter Fischl's poem and accompanying photograph of *The Little Polish Boy Standing with His Arms Up* demonstrates the purpose of a child in the humanisation of Holocaust imagery. As a text of two components, the poem and photograph can be recognised as separate entities, both of which are tied by the commonalities of personal and historical context. Fischl's relationship with the era of Nazism is established through the tone of

empathy that emerges in his retrospective discussion of the Little Polish Boy, labelling the author's context as the catalyst for his response to the photograph of the child. Although the poem, which is simplistic and earnest in both its style and structure, was composed in adulthood, the essence of Fischl's youth is resonant in his poem, helping him to achieve a sense of sympathy within his audience. With recognition of context, it is evident, through the perspective maintained within Fischl's poem, that the author's partiality to the Little Polish Boy is a consequence of his own experience. Due to the personal nature of the text, *The Little Polish Boy* is effective in emotionalising both the past of its composer, and the history of the era's victims.

The social climate of Nazi-occupied Poland, underlined by the politics of anti-Semitism, became the reason for silence in the "world who said nothing"¹. As the Holocaust continued to spread a veil of fear over the Jewish populace, many began to realise that not even the power of faith could protect the innocent from man's inhumanity. The prominence of the author's voice is historically, personally, and poetically resonant in his ode to the boy, as Fischl's past as a child in hiding comes to symbolise his own silence in a time where he, amongst many others, felt voiceless. This is represented through the constant repetition of the line "and the world who said nothing"². The author's text may be interpreted as a means of providing those once silenced by the Holocaust with the consideration they deserve, done so within a contemporary literary domain that allows the freedom of speech that this era's sufferers were deprived of as a direct result of Nazi ideology. The poignant imagery that is provided in the refrain emphasises the complete loss of innocence based on ideological differences and the terror felt by the youth who were victims of it:

¹ Peter Fischl, *To The Little Boy Standing With His Arms Up*, <http://isurvived.org/SmallBoyCaptured.html>

² Ibid., Fischl.

“The star of David on your coat,
Standing in the Ghetto with your
arms up as many Nazi machine
guns pointing at you.”³

The picture itself displays the Little Polish Boy in isolated capitulation, as the adult bystanders watch on in a distanced encirclement. The boy’s aloneness in the photograph has become an emblem for the helpless and disenfranchised Semitic youth of the Nazi era, highlighting the vulnerability of the Jewish populace in the Holocaust period and the enduring unease that existed within the contexts of Jewish culture and religion at the time. The absence of the child’s name, and the label of ‘The Little Polish Boy’ that his character has acquired as a result of his obscurity, is epitomic of the anonymity of his being in the context of Nazism. The boy’s lack of identity renders him faceless in the milieu of Holocaust atrocity, causing him to be more a symbol than an individual. Although nameless, The Little Polish Boy is far from insignificant, as he comes to represent a wider group of Holocaust victims and the universality of human suffering in light of Nazism. It is the young boy’s vulnerability and anonymity as an insignia of the era and its subjects that becomes the reason for the emotional appeal of the poem and photograph. Audience sympathy is incurred by the imagery of a helpless child at gunpoint, while the symbolism of the nameless Polish Boy as a unanimous icon for victims of Nazism alludes to the community-like sufferance experienced within society at the time, and the all-inclusive nature of human tragedy. As a visual emblem, The Little Polish Boy is effective in sentimentalising Holocaust events by highlighting the vulnerability of youth and the inescapability of war-time circumstances. In turn, the use of the

³ Ibid., Fischl.

photograph as an accompanying element of the poem is emphatic of the emotion attached to the circumstances of the Nazi era.

Fischl's words, described as "understated, genuine [and] accessible"⁴ by educator Nancy Gorrell, are considered an embodiment of the author's context and his perceptions of the Holocaust period. Audience interpretation, typified by feelings of guilt, remorse, and sympathy, is punctuated by the connotations that underpin Fischl's address to the boy in the image, and his choice to use the child demographic as a means of expressing his personal reservations regarding the era of Nazism. Fischl's use of the Little Polish Boy as the central aspect of the poem is purposeful in modelling basic human instinct as the impetus for such impassioned reactions within audiences of the text. By employing the young boy from the photograph as the addressee of the poem, Fischl has highlighted the vulnerability of children in light of atrocity, and the role of adults as the inherent caregivers of the young, citing parental and protective intuition as the cause of the receiver's grief in reply to the text. Fischl's simple concluding words emphasise the immense guilt felt by those who should have been the protectors of innocence:

"I

am

Sorry

that

It was you

and

⁴ Peter Fischl, *Educator Nancy Gorrell discusses Fischl's Poem, 'To the Little Polish Boy Standing with His Arms Up'*, www.youtube.com/watch?v=IzcAqCrD_kk, 28 May, 2009.

Not me”⁵

The capitalisation of the word “Sorry” is a direct appeal to the pathos of the audience, and also serves to unburden Fischl’s own sense of grief. The concept of a child’s submission to adult power causes audiences to sympathise with children of texts dealing with atrocity, reinforcing the connections between age and vulnerability, and the sense of condolence that is characteristic in the reception of youth literature pertaining to this era in time. Fischl institutes connections between adult empathy and child suffering within a medium of literature that allows him to reflect and relate to his own past and the experiences of others, exemplifying the use of youth perspective as an instrument in the projection of the emotion associated to the Holocaust era.

In contrast, *The Diary of a Young Girl* demonstrates the use of youth perception as a mechanism for emotional desensitisation, wherein the narrative perspective adopted by the author, Anne Frank, is more a manifestation of her adolescent experience than the social and political circumstances of the world in which she lives. Although an overarching sense of awareness is exhibited throughout her diary as she discusses the Holocaust and its implications on Jewish society, the issues within this war-time context are intertwined with more prominent themes consistent with the Bildungsroman genre that observe the trials and tribulations of pubescence. This is evidenced in Frank’s concern regarding the way others perceive her:

“I sometimes wonder if anyone will ever . . . overlook my ingratitude and not worry about whether or not I’m Jewish and merely see me as a teenager badly in need of some good, plain fun.”⁶

⁵ Fischl, P. *Little Polish Boy*

It can be argued that the conceitedness of teenage mentality makes Frank somewhat ignorant to the realities of life beyond the annexe, as she becomes preoccupied with the concepts of adolescence, and her own moral and psychological growth in her transition from youth to adulthood.

While Frank's diary entries confirm her acquaintance with circumstances beyond the margins of her life in hiding, they also define the scope of her social and political understanding. By observing the content of the text and the use of composer perspective, the author's lack of comprehension in regards to the context of Nazi Germany emerges as evidence of the effects of confinement, causing one to presume that Frank's knowledge is limited by the walls that surround her. Readers of *The Diary of a Young Girl* observe Frank's life in hiding through the perspective of her adolescent self, revealing the role of composer perception in the construction of a text, and the ways in which a child's view is influenced by facets of their individual context and existence. The facets of Frank's life are manifested as thematic concerns within her diary, wherein the author's contemplation of her adolescence, and the changes to her body and psychology that are brought about by the processes of puberty, become the most predominant concepts discussed in her work. As a child withheld from society for the purpose of self-preservation, insularity becomes a consequence of the author's lack of affiliation with the outside world. The boundaries of the annexe serve as a metaphorical shelter for mind and being, protecting Frank from the atrocities of life as a Jewish teenager in an anti-Semitic society, and censoring audiences of the novel from events beyond the perimeters of the author's knowledge and existence.

⁶ Anne Frank, *The Diary of a Young Girl: The Definitive Edition*, Doubleday, New York, 1995. Pg.153.

With the novel's autobiographical nature, reader sympathy in the contemporary reception of *The Diary of a Young Girl* is augmented by the knowledge and learning of modern audiences. As a literary product of the Nazi era, Frank's work represents a period of history that has become more intellectually accessible to the minds of succeeding generations with the comings of time and social acceptance. While the author's limited understanding of the outside world can be viewed as a means of numbing the diary's emotional impact, this is counteracted by the heightened sense of historical awareness that is characteristic of audiences from contemporary backgrounds. Critical theorist, Lewis Ward, of the University of Exeter, suggested that the use of "narrative strategies"⁷ – for instance, the choice to employ a child's perspective as a method of manipulating audience response – has allowed authors to "negotiate the ethical and epistemological problems raised by a gap in time and experience"⁸. In terms of Frank's novel, her choice of style and perspective were not a result of calculative narration or the intention to incite sympathy within the responder but, instead, a mere articulation of her thoughts through a first-person medium.

As *The Diary of a Young Girl* was simply a private reflection of Frank's feelings and experiences, it is important to note that any literary strategy found within her narrative was not a consequence of personal intention. Due to the nature of the author's writing, it is evident that the diary was never composed with the purpose of publication in mind and, as one of the few withstanding present-tense accounts of life during the Nazi era, it is hard to deny the air of honesty that lingers within Anne Frank's novel. In the initial pages of Frank's novel, she discusses her hesitance in sharing her diary with others:

⁷ Lewis Ward, *Holocaust Memory in Contemporary Narratives: Towards a Theory of Transgenerational Empathy*, <http://hdl.handle.net/10036/47273>

⁸ Ibid., Ward.

“Paper has more patience than people . . . and since I’m not planning to let anyone else read this stiff-backed notebook grandly referred to as a ‘diary’, unless I should ever find a real friend, it probably won’t make a bit of difference.”⁹

The diary channels Frank’s inner voice, providing her with a personal and emotional outlet as she struggles with the circumstances of her sheltered life. Initially, the author hopes that her journal will become a “great source of comfort and support”¹⁰ for her, suggesting that these are things she doesn’t receive in actuality. As a means of coping with the trauma of her reality, and the confusions of family life in the annexe, Anne Frank immerses herself in diary writing to escape her real-world troubles. Although the content of her diary, with adolescent themes and the distractions of pubescence, can be perceived by audiences of the text as a mechanism for desensitising the emotional aspects of her existence as a victim of Nazism, it is also presumed that the process of writing the diary itself becomes Frank’s way of sheltering her own mind from the atrocities of the world in which she lives.

While the intimacy of journal writing evokes candidness and creates an ostensibly transparent representation of the composer’s thoughts and emotions, even the most vulnerable of journalistic accounts can be misshapen by the workings of an author’s imagination. The lines between creative and autobiographical narrations become blurred when the freedom of an individual’s literary voice is taken into account, causing one to question whether it’s the author talking, or simply a character that they have fashioned from the figments of their imagination. In *The Diary of a Young Girl*, it is evident that Frank relies on her journal as a friend and confidant. As the author struggle to discuss “anything but ordinary everyday

⁹ Frank, *Diary of a Young Girl*, Pg.6.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, Pg.1.

things”¹¹ within her existing friendships with schoolmates, her desire for a true companion emerges as the pretext for her diary writing:

“To enhance the image of this long-awaited friend in my imagination, I don’t want to jot down the facts in this diary the way most people do, but I want the diary to be my friend, and I’m going to call this friend *Kitty*.”¹²

Diarists, including Anne Frank, are often expected to articulate the essence of their character through the open discussion of private thoughts and feelings, but it is seldom considered that the voices that resonate within the works of such authors are, perhaps, reinventions of their inner-selves in the form of a character or caricature¹³, created as a means of personal distraction, escape, or creative expression. In Anne Frank’s circumstances, the difficulties of discovering her personal identity within the confines of her annexed environment give her further reason to compose, as journal writing allows her to explore her individuality without the judgements or limitations of truth. Frank expresses in her journal a desire to represent herself, or at least perceive herself in a way that is not entirely truthful, highlighting her adolescent struggle of discovering her own identity:

“... the strange feeling of wanting to be different from what I am or being different from what I want to be, or perhaps of behaving differently from what I am or want to be.”¹⁴

The idea of character creation within diary writing in this instance is further enhanced by the means of publication. Works that are published posthumously are susceptible to the influence of other parties, “particularly if the omissions have to be made in order to protect the feelings or reputations of the living”. Deborah Martinson, author of the essay *In the Presence of*

¹¹ Ibid., Frank, Pg.7.

¹² Ibid., Frank, Pg.7.

¹³ Suzanne Bunkers, *Whose Diary Is It Anyway? Issues of Agency, Authority, Ownership*,

<http://www.intech.msnu.edu/bunkers/whosediary.html>

¹⁴ Frank, *Diary of a Young Girl*, Pg.75.

Audience: The Self in Diaries and Fiction, comments on Virginia Woolf's representation of self in her works, stating that ". . . diaries magically depict a life – but not the whole life, perhaps not even the 'real' life."¹⁵ Martinson further explains that elements of truth only emerge through "careful reading"¹⁶. This fragmented sense of self, disciplined by an author's "selectivity, self-censorship, and shaping of self-image"¹⁷, is also evident in *The Diary of a Young Girl* as Frank navigates the obstacles of her teenage life with the aid of a literary outlet. The escapism of journal writing provides Frank with the power to sanitise her world of the atrocities of war and conflict, protecting both the composer and responder from the emotions that would ensue if the author's work was more emphatic of the era's social and political context, and the afflictions of Holocaust victims.

Youth perspective in cinematic representations of the Holocaust also proves purposeful in humanising the era and its events. The portrayal of Nazism, and its effects, within the realm of film demonstrates how certain elements of cinema, including the use of the child in depictions of the Holocaust, come to define visualisations of atrocity and the ways in which these visualisations are interpreted by the viewer. As with written representations, the features of a film text are significant in the shaping of audience reception and understanding, and can determine the level of emotion that is experienced by responders in the viewing of Holocaust-related cinema. While the medium of written literature allows for the manipulation of audience response through the features and perceptions of a text, as observed in *The Little Polish Boy* by Peter Fischl, and Anne Frank's *Diary of a Young Girl*, techniques implemented within a visual realm are also effective in both weakening and intensifying the emotion attached to events represented in film. The films, *Au Revoir Les*

¹⁵ Deborah Martinson, *In The Presence of Audience: The Self in Diaries and Fiction*, <https://ohiostatepress.org/Books/Book%20PDFs/Martinson%20In.pdf>

¹⁶ Ibid., Martinson.

¹⁷ Ibid., Bunker.

Enfants by Louis Malle, and *Life is Beautiful* by Roberto Benigni, serve as examples of how varying cinematic devices and perspectives can form contrasting representations of similar circumstances in time, and the ways in which a child's view can influence an audience's reception of texts that identify atrocity as the centre of their respective Holocaust-driven storylines.

Both films explore the essence of juvenile innocence in the midst of atrocity provoked by the actions of adults, and how the dominance of an older entity can be used to exploit or protect such innocence. Whilst *Au Revoir Les Enfants* considers the loss of a child's virtue as a result of the Nazi era, *Life is Beautiful* juxtaposes this concept by examining the importance of protecting the innocence of youth in light of war-time tragedy. The contrasting views of the certitudes of childhood that resonate within the two texts exemplify the malleability of viewer response, and the role of perspective in the shaping of audience interpretation.

As a fictional illustration of factual circumstances, viewer understanding of *Life is Beautiful* is impacted by the pre-existing perceptions of the Holocaust that have developed within society over time, and the accompanying aspects of emotion that pertain to the era and the people who were involved. In the film, the comicalities of Benigni's depiction of Nazism have been described as a way of "reducing atrocity to absurdity"¹⁸, a process that could be considered a method of censoring the otherwise heightened sentimentality that is innate in literary portrayals of Holocaust events. The film is representational of the adult role in the protection of the innocence of youth when both parent and child become subjects of Nazi internment. Guido, the father of Joshua, begins to fictionalise their surrounds through the

¹⁸ Grace Russo Bullaro, *Roberto Benigni's Life Is Beautiful and the protection of innocence: fable, fairy tale or just excuses?* <http://www.freepatentsonline.com/article/Post-Script/114593963.html>

creation of ‘games’ in order to pacify the horrors of imprisonment. However, with the naivety of childhood, Joshua’s obliviousness to the reality of his situation is palpable, and he seldom questions his father’s intentions. In a critical response to *Life is Beautiful*, Grace Russo Bullaro discusses the ‘game’ that Guido uses to “insulate his five year old son from the brutal realities of the Nazi death camp in which they have been interned”¹⁹, stating that it is, “by implication”²⁰, a means of saving “both his life and his innocence”²¹. By adopting humour as a key element of the film’s storyline, and focusing on the virtue of youth as an attribute that necessitates protection by an older entity against the consequences of adult misconduct, Benigni has created a text that, while not without loss or calamity, is far less emotionally intrusive than many of its literary equivalents. As a tragicomedy, *Life is Beautiful* represents the effect of absurdity in the suppression of atrocity and suffering, and how the thematic structure of a literary work, including the emphasis of children’s innocence in cinema as modelled in the film, can alter the audience’s emotional reception and understanding of a text through unintentional censorship.

Contrarily, *Au Revoir Les Enfants* examines the implications of war-time circumstances on the innocence of youth, and the loss of virtue that can follow one’s exposure to atrocity. The film’s protagonist, Julien Quentin, exemplifies the obliviousness of adolescence through his childlike whimsicality. As a student of a provincial Catholic boarding school in the French countryside, Julien’s lack of awareness in regards to the contexts of war and Nazism is a consequence of his own immaturity, the geography of his rural surrounds, and the ignorance of his peers whom, in the naivety of puberty, are equally as unaware of the state of their war-torn country. As in *Life is Beautiful*, the adults within the

¹⁹ Ibid., Bullaro.

²⁰ Ibid., Bullaro.

²¹ Ibid., Bullaro.

boarding school, who are conscious of the war crisis in France and the dangers of German authority, are desperate in their attempts to shelter the children from the atrocities of Nazism. However, due to the insularity and lack of understanding amongst the student body, the adults are met with an adverse response from the school's pupils, who become contemptuous in reaction to the protective efforts of their superiors. The guardianship of adults does little to preserve the innocence of the students and shield them from the realities of warfare, as the cohort begin to realise the pragmatisms of life beyond their ritualistic boarding school existence. Julien's "gradual awakening to a sense – still limited by a child's perspective – of the larger world and the consequences of war"²², is provoked by his first encounter with Jean Bonnet, a boy of Jewish faith who has been enrolled in the Catholic school as a hidden child. The cultivation of friendship between the two boys is symbolic of the beginning to an end of both parties' childhood and innocence, emphasising the naivety of twelve-year-old Julien as his lack of awareness becomes even more apparent when contrasted to the "silent, enigmatic"²³ personality of his counterpart, Jean. Bonnet's forced abandonment of youth and entry into "adulthood at such a young age"²⁴, as discussed in an article by Glenn Heath Jr., is attributed to his lack of contact with his parents whom he has not seen for two years, and his subsequent awareness of life as a Jew in Nazi-controlled French society. The context of Jean Bonnet's character is juxtaposed by the credulity of young Julien, whose "perceptiveness and curiosity lead him to the truth"²⁵ about his classmate. The relationship between the children of the film and the loss of innocence that results from war-time atrocity epitomises the emotion attached to Holocaust events, revealing the true nature of Nazism and the implications of war on the psychology of youth at the time.

²² Gary Teetzel, *Au Revoir Les Enfants*, *Home Video Reviews*. <http://www.tcm.com/tcmdb/title/67786/Au-Revoir-Les-Enfants/home-video-reviews.html>

²³ Ibid., Teetzel.

²⁴ Glenn Heath Jr., *Au Revoir Les Enfants*, *Blue-Ray Review* www.slantmagazine.com/dvd/review/au-revoir-les-enfants, March 17, 2011.

²⁵ Teetzel, *Home Video Reviews*.

As both representations in film are emphatic of the innocence of children in the wake of Holocaust trauma, the contexts of the composers, and their choices of genre and perspective, serve as elements for comparison between the two film texts. In critical responses pertaining to *Life is Beautiful*, “the most acrimonious of the criticism concerns Benigni’s choice of genre”²⁶, wherein the manner of his portrayal of the Holocaust, now considered “the most emotionally charged historical event of the twentieth century”²⁷, was done so deliberately to “avoid explicit representations of the violence and horrors”²⁸ of the time. Benigni’s use of comedy and the trivialisation of juvenile innocence in his depiction of Nazism, characterised by a “lack of realism”²⁹ and a “sanitised and prettified”³⁰ portrayal of the events of the era, was an intentional decision that allowed him, as a director and actor in the film, to censor audiences from Holocaust atrocity. Although criticised for making “a comedy out of a tragic event”³¹, Benigni defended his choice of genre by stating that *Life is Beautiful* “is not a film about the Holocaust”³², but a “fable about a father’s love and his attempt to protect his child’s innocence”³³. As Benigni has referenced his work as a fable, it is evident that *Life is Beautiful* is not representational of the filmmaker’s personal experiences. This juxtaposes the autobiographical nature of the aforementioned texts, thus allowing Benigni to censor his portrayal of events.

Au Revoir Les Enfants contrasts the comedic style of its comparative through the “realistic approach”³⁴ of writer and director, Louis Malle. As with Fischl’s poem *The Little Polish Boy*, and *The Diary of a Young Girl* by Anne Frank, *Au Revoir Les Enfants* is

²⁶ Bullaro, ... *fable, fairy tale or just excuses?*

²⁷ Ibid., Bullaro.

²⁸ Ibid., Bullaro.

²⁹ Ibid., Bullaro.

³⁰ Ibid., Bullaro.

³¹ Ibid., Bullaro.

³² Ibid., Bullaro.

³³ Ibid., Bullaro.

³⁴ Teetzel, *Home Video Reviews*.

autobiographically resemblant of the life of Malle who, during adolescence, “witnessed the unflinchingly heinous Nazi occupation of France”³⁵. Audiences of the film and the work of Anne Frank are familiarised with the act of self-censoring one’s cultural and religious identity as a method of defence in a time where faith was the line between life and death. While responders of *Au Revoir Les Enfants* and *The Diary of a Young Girl* observe the characters of each text as they struggle with the notion of self-discovery and personal identity, the child protagonists of both the film and novel are forced to experience adolescence within the inhibitive contexts of religious abandonment and conformity, self-suppression, and the ubiquitous fear of being found by the enemy. The loss of childhood innocence due to Holocaust trauma is explored in a coming-of-age context that serves as a direct manifestation of Malle’s experience as a child of the Nazi era. The composer’s emphasis of “the characters and the emotional truth of the scenes”³⁶, achieved through the story’s linearity and the sense of rawness that emerges in light of the text’s autobiographical nature, provides audiences with an air of authenticity that *Life is Beautiful* lacks. As Malle’s version of events is consistent with his personal context, the film is both pragmatic and anecdotal, and connotes a heightened emotional response within audiences of the text.

Through the study of literature pertaining to the Holocaust era, the role of the child in the depiction of Nazism has emerged as a key element in the humanisation of texts of the time. It is clear that audience understanding of literary products of the Nazi period is influenced by the context of both the composer and responder, and that these facets of personal context can be further manipulated by a juvenile perspective. Through these features, the significance of interpretation in the construction and deconstruction of Holocaust literature is demonstrated, reinforcing the importance of perspective in audience

³⁵ Heath Jr., *Blue-Ray Review*.

³⁶ Teetzel, *Home Video Reviews*.

understanding. As discussed by critical theorist Adrienne Kertzer, and historian Debórah Dwork, an audience's reluctance to "examine child life under the Nazis is partly derived from the different ways we respond to the murder of children"³⁷, and that "our unwillingness to accept the murder of children is emotionally different from our incomprehension of the genocide of adults"³⁸. In light of this statement, youth literature of the Nazi period is evidential of the contrasting roles of children and adults in the contexts of trauma, demonstrating how the connections between vulnerability and age can serve as the impetus for sympathetic responses within audiences of Holocaust texts. After examining the differing perspectives of World War II personalities within Holocaust literature, it is concluded that the purpose of a child's view in the portrayal of Nazi events is a means of both heightening and censoring the emotion attached to the era and its atrocities.

³⁷ Adrienne Kertzer, (Quoting, Debórah Dwork), *Like a Fable, Not A Pretty Picture: Holocaust Representation in Robert Benigni and Anita Lobel*, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.act2080.0039.213>

³⁸ Ibid., Kertzer.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- BENIGNI, R. (Dir.), *La Vita e Bella (Life Is Beautiful)*, Cecci Gori Group, 1997.
- BUNKERS, S.L. *Whose Diary Is It Anyway? Issues of Agency, Authority, Ownership*
Retrieved from <http://www.intech.msnu.edu/bunkers/whosediary.html>
- FRANK, A. *The Diary of A Young Girl: The Definitive Edition*, Doubleday, United States, 1995.
- FISCHL, P.L. *To The Little Polish Boy Standing With His Arms Up*, Archives of Simon Wiesenthal Centre, Los Angeles, 1994.
- FISCHL, P.L. *Educator Nancy Gorrel Discusses Fischl's Poem, 'To The Little Polish Boy Standing With His Arms Up'*, Video File, retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IzcAqCrD_kk . Posted 28 May, 2009.
- HEATH Jr., G. *Au Revoir Les Enfants; Blue-Ray Review*, Retrieved from www.slantmagazine.com/dvd/au-revoir-les-enfants March 17, 2011.
- KERTZER, A. *Like a Fable, Not A Pretty Picture: Holocaust Representation in Roberto Benigni and Anita Lobel*, Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.act2080.0039.213>
- MALLE, L. (Dir.), *Au Revoir Les Enfants*, Nouvelles Editions de Films, 1987.
- MARTINSON, D. *In The Presence of Audience: The Self In Diaries and Fiction*, Retrieved from <http://ohiostatepress.org/Books/Book%20PDFs/Martinson%20In.pdf>
- RUSSO BULLARO, G. *Roberto Benigni's Life Is Beautiful and the Protection of Innocence: Fable, Fairy-Tale or Just Excuses?* Retrieved from <http://www.freepatentsonline.com/article/Post-Script/114593963.html>

- TEETZEL, G. *Au Revoir Les Enfants: Home Video Reviews*, Retrieved from <http://www.tcm.com/tcmdb/title/67786/Au-Revoir-Les-Enfants/home-video-reviews.html>
- WARD, L.H. *Holocaust Memory in Contemporary Narratives: Towards a Theory of Transgenerational Empathy*, University of Exeter, 2008. (Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/10036/47273>)

Further Research:

- www.ushmm.org
- www.holocaust-trc.org
- www.peterfischl.com
- www.annefrank.org
- http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0118799/?ref=mv_sr_1 (Life Is Beautiful)
- http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0092593/?ref=mv_sr_1 (Au Revoir Les Enfants)
- <http://arc2.bos.nsw.edu.au/view/default/course/15170/>

Voices of the Holocaust

- Atrocity Through the Eyes of Children

Reflection Statement

*“For the dead and the living, we must bear witness.” – Elie Wiesel, Holocaust Survivor*³⁹

The analysis of history allows the past to echo within the contexts of the present. As man reflects upon the former times of humanity in teaching and learning practices, the study of the past becomes an indiscriminate and all-encompassing exploration of the patchwork of history, pieced together by both the mercy and evil of man. One cannot view the good of past and present civilisation without acknowledging the atrocity that has stemmed from humanity’s sins. Many examples of this inhumanness have emerged throughout the course of history, but the Nazi epoch has become transcendental with its resonance in both the literary realm and the tutorship of historical events. Manifestations of the Holocaust in literature expose the raw and vulnerable wounds of the era’s people, epitomising not only the obvious physical scars, but the emotional and psychological trauma of subjects of the time. This concept of bearing witness to the scars of Holocaust victims has come to serve as the premise for my Major Work.

One may question my motivation to explore Holocaust tragedy. Why would I, as an English Extension 2 student, want to analyse one of man’s most heinous crimes against humanity when I possess the freedom to explore any subject of choice within the criteria of my Major Work composition? Although the initial inspiration for my Major Work stemmed from my interest in the events of the time, my study of literary representations of the Holocaust became the true impetus for my composition as I realised that the analysis of literature provided something that was absent in the realm of history. Emotion. It is simple to

³⁹ Elie Wiesel, *Remarks at the Dedication Ceremonies For the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, April 22, 1993*. Retrieved from <http://www.ushmm.org/research/ask-a-research-question/frequently-asked-questions/wiesel>

seek the information of a textbook to acquire knowledge of the times that precede the contemporary world and, as the past is manifested in the educational practices of modern society, the breadth of history is often remembered in a rigid and impersonal collection of facts and statistics. Throughout the course of my education, I have investigated the era of Nazism in reasonable depth, but within my studies of the time, I have always felt a void that has propelled me to question the personalities, the experiences, the contexts of the anonymous faces pictured in 'Source A' or 'Source B'. Did these people subsist? What did these people experience? How did they feel during the Holocaust? These are questions that history fails to answer. Although the essence of these people may survive in the memory of Nazism through the pages of a history book, they remain as mere entities that are defined not by their attributes, ambitions, or achievements, but by the trauma and suffering of their society. My choice to explore representations of Holocaust in literature was driven by my search for answers, and my personal desire to explore the emotion attached to events of the era.

I was aware that the medium of critical response would be the most appropriate for the topic I wished to discuss, as an effective analysis and critique of past events could not be achieved within the other mediums offered. As I began to consider my thesis and a selection of related material in my initial stages of composition, I questioned the relationship between perspective and audience interpretation in fictional and non-fictional depictions of the Nazi era. It was at this point in my investigation that I encountered Peter Fischl's poem and the photograph of *The Little Polish Boy Standing with His Arms Up*. I was intrigued by the innocence of the young boy who, like the people portrayed within historical sources, was nameless in light of the trauma of his time. Although the child in the photograph remained unidentified, the accompanying poem, an autobiographical product of the context of its

composer, paid homage to the boy and emphasised the fear of youth throughout the Holocaust. The texts instilled a sense of sympathy within me as a responder, causing me to hypothesise the impact of a child's view on audience understanding. My questioning of the implications of youth perspective resulted in the development of a thesis, and the collection of my final related material followed the establishment of this statement. In addition to the poem and photograph of *The Little Polish Boy Standing with His Arms Up*, I studied Anne Frank's autobiographical novel *The Diary of a Young Girl*, and the films *Au Revoir Les Enfants* by Louis Malle and *Life is Beautiful* by Roberto Benigni. By using various text types, I was able to create a sense of diversity in my Major Work that allowed me to sustain my thesis for the duration of my composition and explore the chosen topic in the depth that was required of a critical response.

With subject matter in mind, it was presumed that my Major Work would not be of interest to all readers. Although I was aware that the topic I had chosen to discuss limited the demographic of my audience, I intended to appeal to those who shared a similar desire to explore the emotions of Holocaust victims, and analyse the connotations of the era beyond the realm of historical inquiry. Throughout the process of composition, I provided drafts of my Major Work to several people within my school, including my peers, and teachers from both the English and History departments. This allowed me to evaluate audience reception of my critical response, and provided me with the insight I needed to confirm the scope of my Major Work's demographic.

Throughout the construction of my critical response, a clear relationship between the ideas presented in my Major Work, and the ideas explored my other English courses, became

evident. My studies in English Extension 1 and Advanced English have served as key factors in the composition of my Major Work, and have influenced my understanding of the emotions and experiences of war personalities. The concept of bearing witness to atrocity and the suffering of war-time victims in the face of personal and societal afflictions is central to the After the Bomb elective that I have undertaken as part of my English Extension 1 course, providing me with an underlying knowledge of the tragedy of war and its impacts on humanity. I have explored the works of composers such as Sylvia Plath and John Hersey in the After the Bomb elective, which has further enhanced my understanding of war-time circumstances and ways of thinking within society through the post-war contexts of the poems from *Ariel* and the journalistic retelling of events in *Hiroshima*.

As part of my independent investigation, I referred to various sources of critical theory to find evidence in support of my thesis and the ideas proposed in my Major Work. These included the works of Grace Russo Bullaro in "*Roberto Benigni's Life Is Beautiful and the Protection of Innocence: Fable, Fairy-tale or Just Excuses?*", Lewis Ward and his essay regarding "*Holocaust Memory in Contemporary Narratives: Towards A Theory of Transgenerational Empathy*", and other written perspectives in literary criticism pertaining to my topic of choice. My analysis of essays from critical writers further enhanced my understanding of the purpose of children in literary portrayals of Holocaust events, and reaffirmed the concepts within my Major Work, allowing me to develop clear and well-evidenced arguments in my critical response. While my pre-existing knowledge of the Nazi era was advantageous in the composition of my Major Work, I endeavoured to build upon my initial contextual understanding of the Holocaust throughout my independent investigation to ensure accuracy within my response. My studies of context involved research across a variety of literary sources including books, encyclopaedias, websites, films, and documentaries.

In alignment with my medium of choice, I adopted an essay-style format to suit the nature of the critical response criteria and my subject of discussion. In the early stages of composition, I considered the use of subtitles to separate the analysis of individual texts. However, for the purposes of consistency and fluency, I felt it was more appropriate to discuss all texts in one piece of sustained writing. This format enabled me to analyse each text equally and explore the similarities and differences of what each text represented. Through my research, the style of language and level of sophistication required within the parameters of my critical response became evident. I endeavoured to replicate this style by employing a sophisticated vocabulary and a strong use of modality.

Overall, the completion of my Major Work project has successfully demonstrated my ability to compose a sustained argument and think critically about the textual representations of the world in which I live. Through the process of investigation and composition, I have expanded my understanding of the impact of literature from a critical perspective, and I envisage further development of these skills as I enter tertiary education. My investigation of the intended emotional response to Holocaust literature has enhanced not only my critical thinking, but also my emotional intelligence. I am proud of what I have achieved in the composition of my critical response, and through the study of the English Extension 2 course, I have been inspired to continue my study of literature, both critically and personally.