

REPRESENTATIONS OF THE SHOAH IN PICTURE BOOKS FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

An Intercultural Comparison

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This article investigates the recurring patterns in narration and visual aesthetics with which the Shoah is commemorated in children's literature.¹ On the one hand, the essay undertakes an intercultural comparison of the differing iconographic, narrative, and commemorative structures found in the varying contexts of publication, i.e. in Germany, other European countries, and the United States. On the other hand, the article analyses the heterogeneous figurations and experiences of childhood on three levels of textuality: the representation of children living in the Third Reich, the intergenerational communication taking place between the narrator – often of the grandparents' generation – and the reader, and the construction of implied child readers of the picture books today.

Of central importance to the following thoughts is the dynamic relationship between forms of representation of the Shoah and the evocation of

childhood in contemporary picture books for children.² In such picture books, figurations of childhood are not only found explicitly in the portrayal of mainly child protagonists in both text and illustration, but also implicitly in the ideas which the authors and illustrators apparently have of their young readers. Woven into the narratological and the aesthetic texture of picture books are cultural concepts which pertain to the "pedagogic, psychological, and aesthetic educational needs" (Thiele 2003, 37) of children as well as to their ability to grasp both cognitively and psychologically the underlying context. Moreover, the medium of the picture book can show how different generational experiences and attitudes meet each other. According to Jens Thiele, adults look for "traces of memory of their own (lost) childhood. They look at picture books with the projections and wishes for their children in mind, and they thus become afraid when these books

take on serious and difficult topics” (Thiele 1991, 7).

Since the 1960s, literature addressing the Nazi persecution of the Jews and intended for a young readership has increasingly been published and discussed in the German-speaking countries.³ The tendency to take on this difficult subject matter in children’s picture books has been on the rise since the late 1980s (a.o. Wyrobnik 2003, 5-19). Of course, questions have arisen concerning the specific pedagogic purpose behind such books for children and youth. These topics have been discussed very broadly in the relevant academic literature, oftentimes in a controversial manner (von Glase-napp 1991, 141-81). In the first part of this article, I am going to address three constellations of questions which concern less the pedagogic aspects, but instead focus on the aesthetic and narrative form and mediality of such picture books for children and of the figurations of childhood portrayed therein. Based on these questions, I will discuss specific picture books in detail in the second part of this article. Through an analysis of *Erika’s Story* by Ruth Vander Zee and Roberto Innocenti, I will approach the constellation of topics concerning the visual arts and Auschwitz. I will then turn my attention to a comparison of four further

picture books and look into the cultural context of their publication: *Judith und Lisa* by Elisabeth Reuter deals with the fate of Jewish and non-Jewish children and their childhood friendships in Germany, *La grande peur sous les étoiles* by Jo Hoestlandt and Johanna Kang concerns the persecution of the Jews in France, and *The Feather-Bed Journey* by Paula Kurzband Feder and Stacey Schuett as well as *Tattooed Torah* by Marvell Ginsburg and Martin Lemelman are good examples of the American post-war context and its corresponding forms of remembrance.

Strategies of Communication with the Reader

An important challenge for any children’s book about the Holocaust is to address, reflect upon, and possibly overcome the chronological, cultural, and emotional distance between the Holocaust and the environments and experiences of today’s young readers. Here, I refer exemplarily to Jean-Marie de Becker and Jaosch Nieden’s Dossier Pédagogique entitled *Tu seras encore là?* (“Will you still be there?”), published in 2002 by the Fondation Auschwitz in Brussels. This brochure is intended for use in early elementary education. Its images are black and white photographs contemporary to

the Shoah. Some of the persons depicted in the photographs are presented in the brochure's text as the characters mentioned by its first person narrator. Through this technique, historical photographs and fictional protagonists are blended together. The narrator, a girl named Sarah of perhaps six years of age, does not know how to interpret the events surrounding the deportation of her family and the corresponding discussions held by the adults around her. Thus, she relates these events to the reader from a naive and childlike perspective. Through the use of this technique, the distance between the Shoah and today's young readers is approached in the form of questions placed to them about their own everyday lives. Such questions refer at first to their routine environment, such as school and family, and then lead to more alarming topics. With questions like "tu as déjà eu très très peur, toi? Raconte-moi comment c'était!" ("Have you ever been really, really afraid? Tell me what this was like!") (De Becker and Nieden 2002, 27), the authors not only try to create parallels between the environment of children today and that of Sarah during the Shoah, but also strive to leave intact the difference between the two (ill. 1). On the one hand, the idea to create active interac-

tion between the protagonist and the readers of the brochure is appealing, being that it leaves the various negative situations and the corresponding forms of fear to exist side-by-side with the goal of bringing the readers to participate emotionally in the historical turn of events. On the other hand, however, this suggested closeness of the readers to Sarah even in the



Comme il y avait du monde et du monde, cela prit beaucoup de temps !

Tu t'imagines, plus de soixante personnes entassées sur un espace pas plus grand que le salon et la salle à manger !

Quand les soldats ont refermé les portes, nous étions dans le noir... et il faisait chaud, chaud...

J'ai commencé à avoir très peur !

Tu as déjà eu très très peur, toi ? Raconte-moi comment c'était !

.....

ill. 1: From *Tu seras encore là?* (de Becker/ Nieden, Fondation Auschwitz)

deportation train – with the chimney of Auschwitz in the background – as portrayed in the last photograph in the brochure, is rather dubious.

A correlative question asks how it is possible to bring into accord the childlike experiences often central to picture books for children with the experiences of the Shoah. In other words, how do the artists handle the aporia found in evoking the remembrance of persecuted children, whose childhood was stolen from them, in a manner appropriate for children?

One common narrative model used for such purposes consists of placing the main focus of the narrative upon the early years of the persecution, during which childlike experiences – e.g. in school, in the family, and with playmates – are still possible. Later, everyday life becomes alarming and precarious, and the environment in which the children live is shown as increasingly hostile.

A second approach consists of placing young figures of identification and their specific experiences in the post-war period, thus constructing a frame story full of hope and joy and confirming the continuation of life after the catastrophe. In *The Feather-Bed Story* by Paula Kurzband Feder and Stacey Schuett from 1995, the post-war siblings Rahel and Lewis play, romp around, and struggle with one another in such a care-free manner that they ruin their grandmother's feather pillow. After the whole family

gathers together as many feathers as possible – i.e. a well-articulated symbol for the process of remembering together – the grandmother begins to speak of the pillow's origin in Poland, of her experiences as a small girl in a ghetto, in hiding, and with partisans.

A third approach, one which is often used in the adult literature on the Shoah as well,⁴ focuses on utilising the narrative to create friction between the various levels of knowledge. In this manner, an author – or a filmmaker such as Roberto Benigni in his Film *La vita è bella* – highlights the fantastical thoughts and misunderstandings of a child protagonist as specifically childlike experiences amid the cruellest persecution. The problem here is that this narrative model works only because the present-day readers of such books and films already possess at least some knowledge of the Holocaust. The readers are thus able to recognize, interpret, and compare the different narrative levels found in the story. In the typical children's picture book, a knowledge gap between the young reader (or listener) and the protagonist's view of the world is an often-used stylistic device. How, though, can the correlating friction between the different levels of knowledge in children's books be cast regarding the Shoah? Are books about

the Shoah for children damned to leave the young addressees unknowledgeable and therefore passive recipients of the educational intentions of adults? How, in turn, can this effect be brought into accord with the either implicit or explicit goal of these books to help educate children to be responsible and discriminating persons after, and because of, Auschwitz?

Limits of the Picture Book Genre

A crucial question imposes itself at this point: how can the complex subject matter pertaining to the Nazi persecution and the genocide of the Jews be conveyed in the genre of the picture book for children, i.e. in a genre that consists primarily of books of short length, simple language, and often rather unproblematic plots? Kertzer's plausible hypothesis is that literature for children sometimes handles the aporias of the presentability/non-presentability of the Shoah in a more conscious manner than the literature for adults. She writes:

While some might object that these very limits make the idea of any children's literature on the Holocaust itself incomprehensible and trivial, children's books may simply be more honest

about the limitations than adult works. The objection to limits of representation in children's books implies that there may be another kind of literature – adult literature – that is somehow free of such limits and can therefore provide the reader with full knowledge (Kertzer 211).

Still, the question remains how historical experiences of a collective trauma of such proportions can be depicted without them leading to a "secondary traumatisation" of young addressees.⁵ What must be communicated through the text when the child is in the company of a trusted person while reading the book, and what does the child formulate for itself when it looks at the picture book on its own? Moreover, what can be autonomously provided for a child to discover in the illustrations of picture books when the illustrations concern the Shoah? Regarding picture books for children about the Shoah in general, the frequent discussion on what is acceptable for the young readership concerns both the textual and illustrative aspects of the books. Hence, the question is asked again and again whether these books should convey hope and have a happy ending in order not to overburden the children reading them. Can or should one convey a positive meaning out of the

Shoah? Or does this trivialise and distort the Holocaust as it actually occurred?

Some authors and illustrators opt for an attempt to realistically render the Holocaust's horror and cruelty. Judith S. Kestenberg's and Vivienne Koorland's *Als Eure Großeltern noch jung waren* ("When Your Grandparents Were Still Young") from 1993 is intended "for children over three years of age."⁶ In this historical book aiming to educate children about the Shoah, the black-and-white pictures, which imitate a childlike style of drawing pictures, portray among other things the persecution of the Jews even in a concentration camp. In one illustration, one catches a glimpse over the camp's fence and sees how detainees are hung, shot, beaten, and dragged along the ground. The perspective of the illustration focuses more on the perpetrators than on the victims, the former are drawn in a larger and more detailed manner than the latter. This style of illustration corresponds to the intentions behind the book to address the oftentimes negated, palliated, or ignored actions of the perpetrators. However, how is this illustration perceived by the young viewer? Does it provoke identification with the perpetrator or sympathy with the victim? Or are children

able to interpret the illustration in its historical context, as something which imparts knowledge without presupposing identification with one side or another? By using the possessive pronoun in the title – "your" grandparents – a distancing gesture is seemingly made on the part of the author and illustrator, one which leaves non-Jewish German children in today's world alone with the confrontation with the difficult past and the violence portrayed in the book, thus seemingly indirectly implicating their own grandparents. *Als Eure Großeltern noch jung waren* ends on a positive note, however, showing the results of coming to terms with, and learning from, the past. It portrays not only the liberation of the concentration camps, but also the newly-founded state of Israel and a happy international community of children, holding hands and raising their arms together, chanting: "No more war! No more Hitler! We are all friends!" (Kestenberg/Koorland 1993).

In contrast to Kestenberg and Koorland's picture book, Miriam Nerlove's *Flowers on the Wall* from 1996 ends with the ghettoisation of the child protagonist Rachel and her family. Nerlove's book also mentions their deportation to the concentration camp Treblinka in its

final sequence. This ending allows for little hope for the young reader, as shown in the last sentence of the book: "Rachel's dreams, along with those of thousands of other Warsaw Jews, faded like the flowers on her apartment walls. And then they were gone forever" (Nerlove 1996). On the visual level, the depiction of a deportation convoy conveys a gloomy atmosphere. In the foreground to the left, one sees Rachel in her orange dress, her older brother, and their parents huddled together in the line of deportees. At the same time, though, the illustration is colourful and shows people drawn in a round, compact, and, despite their great dispiritedness, healthy-looking manner. All children in the illustration are shown in the company of adults, the latter who often appear to be protecting their children. In this book, a belief in humanity, the commemoration of the murdered, and an adherence to art as a form of human expression even in the face of distress and persecution are not realised through a didactic statement, but rather are hidden in the narrative and its poetic and artistic composition.

Reflections about the Meanings of Paratexts

Another cluster of questions concerns what the paratexts, i.e. the forewords or epilogues, almost always found in books for children about the Shoah, actually convey. How are these paratexts positioned in regards to the illustrative, aesthetic, and narrative levels of children's books? What are the pedagogic intentions and the historiographic models of explanation behind them? Here as well, the use of paratexts in picture books for children about the Shoah must be interpreted concerning the intended relationship between the young readership and adults, for in these paratexts it is explicitly an adult voice, mostly one which is knowledgeable and explanatory, that guides the interpretation of the Holocaust for the children reading or listening to them.

Especially in the German-language context, but not only there, the reflective paratexts to the story being told are often rather irritating. Why, for example, does Antoinette Becker in her German epilogue to Elisabeth Reuter's picture book *Judith und Lisa* from 1988 (translated into English in 1993 under the title *Best Friends* and published with a more convincing foreword), literally begin with Adam and Eve in order to attempt to explain anti-Semi-

tism in Europe and the persecution of the Jews in Germany? And, in doing so, why does she argue affirmatively along the lines of the Christian history of salvation? To quote Becker:

During this time, the Roman people ruled over the Jews. They killed Jesus because they feared his power. This was acceptable to many Jews; for them, Jesus was a liar. Others, however, were saddened by Jesus' death. After he was resurrected on Easter, they were overjoyed and believed that he was the son of God. These people called themselves Christians.⁷

The epilogue is riddled with clichés that drift very close to anti-Semitism. Among them: one first finds Jews in the “Orient,” and only afterwards in other lands; moreover, Jews are “diligent and intelligent” – and clannish as well.

The appeals to protect the weak and excluded and to create a children's community of solidarity – also found in Becker's epilogue to *Judith und Lisa* – are apparent in almost all forewords and epilogues of this sort. To mention another example, Hanna-Renate Laurien, a former Senator of Education and President of the House of Representatives of the federal state of Berlin, writes the following in a foreword to Inge Deutschkron and Lukas Ruegen-

berg's picture book *Papa Weidt*, first published in 1999 and republished for the second time in 2006:

We protect the weaker one; we neither beat him, nor spit on him. He is a human being as we are. ... I am not great when I show the weaker one or the foreign one how well I can use my fists. I am great when I position myself in front of the weak. And, when I come across a child who looks foreign, then I do not need to be afraid. I am allowed to be curious and to learn how one lives in its country.⁸

What does this imply? Are “foreign ones” always to be looked upon as ‘foreigners’, and do they always have other countries in their backgrounds, other places from where they come? Are our young, picture book-reading children really so ill-natured that we must keep them from threatening, spitting on, and beating the weaker members of society? Furthermore, are altercations amongst children, which can indeed sometimes be aggressive and violent, truly on the level of the persecution of the Jews in Germany? With what are we burdening our children, what are we projecting onto them with the remembrance of the Holocaust in this fashion?

The Visual Arts and Auschwitz: On *Erika's Story*

One of the first picture books for children about the Nazi persecution of the Jews, *Rosa Weiss*, written by Christophe Gallaz and illustrated by Roberto Innocenti, sparked a controversial debate on a number of the aforementioned questions (Thiele 1988, 137-47). Due to the wide debate on this book, I would like to concentrate on Innocenti's second publication on the Shoah, one which has received much less attention. With *Erika's Story*, a picture book from 2003 written by Ruth Vander Zee, Innocenti reflects in a very sophisticated manner on the following question: how can the illustrations in picture books self-reflectively deal with the question of how Auschwitz should be depicted or, indeed, whether it should be depicted at all?

With the exception of one illustration, which captures a scene in front of the city hall of a small Bavarian city as part of the contemporary narrative setting, freight trains are shown in all of the ten illustrations in the book. The trains, as well as the surrounding technical and architectural details, are drawn in a photo-realistic manner. In contrast, the few human beings in the illustrations are rather simplified and stylised. It is quite noticeable in the illustrations that their faces are always hidden from sight (ill. 2). The illustrations are drawn almost completely in black, white, and brown tones; only a bit of colour appears in them, for instance in a bundle thrown from the deportation train, which is actually a baby wrapped in a pink cloth, or in the yellow star on the coats of the deportees. Innocenti's illustrations give the impression of emptiness, and the



ill. 2: From *Erika's Story* (Vander Zee/Innocenti, The Creative Company)



ill. 3: From *Erika's Story*

many trains depicted in them always travel towards the horizon, i.e. towards uncertainty and nothingness. Towards the end of the book, the deportation train is shown as it travels through the iconographically recognizable gate to Auschwitz (ill. 3). Even behind the gate and the elongated building, the horizon remains empty in the illustration. In contrast to Kestenbergs and Koorland's book, *Erika's Story* provides no indication of the cruelty that happened there, but it also refrains from offering promise or hope. Rather, the illustration seems to correspond with Vander Zee's symbolic narrative style, as seen in the following passage: "It was once said that my people would be as many as the stars in the heavens. Six million of those stars fell between 1933 and 1945" (Vander Zee/ Innocenti 2003).

What we are faced with here is a reversal of the tenets of learning and the possibility of the 'discovery' of

knowledge on the part of the child typically found in picture books for children. It is not the child looking at the illustrations and listening to the text who recognizes and interprets the iconography depicted in the book, for example the locomotive's smoke rising into the sky on the other side of the gate, but rather the adult reading the book with the child. All the child sees are train tracks, a freight train, a tower with a gate through which the train is travelling, and a long, stall-like building before the backdrop of a grey sky. But, with the exception of the things that first capture the child's eye, it is also seemingly confronted with the unknown and the indefinable, something that allows room for imagination and questions. What happens behind the gate? What happens behind the barbed wire visible around the second gate? In turn, one must ask what kinds of discussions must take place between the child and the adult reader while they look at the illustrations together.

The last illustration of Vander Zee's book (ill. 4) is a colourful and picturesque panorama of a scene in the post-war period portraying the young protagonist in a pink dress looking towards a freight train travelling by on the horizon. This is the first illustration in the book in which a train is not trav-

elling towards the empty horizon, but instead parallel to the horizon, i.e. from point A to point B. Once again, though, one cannot see any faces in the illustration, neither of the woman hanging laundry to dry, nor of the girl, nor even that of the cat. Their backs are all turned towards us, thus allowing for a dual interpretation of the facelessness of all figures presented in the illustration. Firstly, the persecuted individual was figuratively made faceless through the mass deportation; indeed, the German population was not supposed to – and did not want to – see the Jews on their way to deportation. Secondly, the girl, who was thrown from the train as a baby, has no visual memory of this time. Her parents will always remain faceless to her.

At the end of the book, illustration and text complement each other in a temporal manner. The immediate post-war period seen in the picture is not evoked on a textual basis; at best it is hidden in the word “sadness,” whereas the happier life afterwards, with an intergenerational future, finding one’s own face in the mirror of



ill. 4: From *Erika's Story*

one’s children and grandchildren, is not represented on the visual level: “when I was twenty-one, I married a wonderful man. He lifted the sadness that often filled me, and he understood my desire to belong to a family. We had three children together, and now they have children of their own. In their faces, I see mine” (Vander Zee and Innocenti 2003).

The German Cultural Context: *Judith und Lisa*

Before the backdrop of the aforementioned questions and topics, I would now like to draw intercultural comparisons regarding four children’s picture books from the German, French and American cultural contexts. The first book, *Judith und Lisa*, was written and illustrated by Elisabeth Reuter and published in German by the Munich publishing house Heinrich Ellermann in 1988. The story tells

of the friendship between a blonde-haired girl Lisa and a dark-haired girl Judith. In the beginning of the book, the girls go to the same school. We only learn that Judith is a Jew because of her increased sense of insecurity due to the increasingly anti-Semitic propaganda of the Nazis. At this point, Judith's father remarks to her mother: "They won't do us any harm, even though we are Jews," (Reuter 1993) thus identifying their family as Jewish. In contrast to *Erika's Story*, Reuter's book makes less use of symbolic representation and is illustrated in a figurative-narrative manner. The protagonists' feelings are mirrored in the faces of the people depicted in the illustrations, faces which are drawn in an overproportionally large and sometimes rather strikingly exact fashion. On the textual level, the beginning of the story is told from both Judith's and



ill. 5: From *Judith und Lisa* (Reuter, Ellermann)

Lisa's perspectives. On the visual level, though, all of their meetings occur in Lisa's room or in public places where Nazi symbols or other propaganda are prominently displayed. As Jens Thiele shows, Reuter does not only work with explicit and recognisable Nazi symbols such as flags depicting the swastika, but also with skillfully-used imagery taken from then-contemporary photographs and posters (Thiele 1988, 142-43).

Lisa and Judith are portrayed as small girls who are more or less identical. For example, upon witnessing a parade, Judith wants to swing a small Nazi flag like Lisa even though her parents have forbidden her to do so. Judith is given a flag by a nice older man (ill. 5). It is only the increasing anti-Semitic propaganda and the teacher's corresponding actions against Judith – she makes her sit alone in the back of the classroom and allows the other children to ridicule her – which turns Judith into a Jew. After *Kristallnacht*, the 'night of broken glass', the reader sees the shattered display window of the pharmacy belonging to Judith's father from the perspective of the German people in the street. Regardless, the reader is still not allowed entry into a 'Jewish' interior space. (ill. 6) Moreover, Judith and her family disappear from the story



ill. 6: From *Judith und Lisa*

after *Kristallnacht*; the reader is given no clue of their fate. “They’ve all gone” and “they are not coming back,” are the only explanations that Lisa gets from her mother (Reuter 1993). Elvira Armbröster-Groh provides a reason for the condensed account of the historical developments in Reuter’s picture book. In her opinion, reducing the eight-year time frame from Hitler’s rise to power via the flight of the Jews and finally the implementation of the wearing of the yellow star down to a few months can be explained by the “necessity of didactic reduction” (Armbröster-Groh 1999, 91-97). That Lisa never sees her friend again is evidently even more painful, saddening, and distressing to her because she had, just a day before Judith’s disappearance, cursed at Judith as a Jew. “You are just a Jewish

girl anyway!”, she says to Judith as they both fight over a teddy bear. Later, Lisa’s mother is portrayed as an exemplary ‘Nazi follower’ in that she does not want her daughter to concern herself too much over the disappearance of her friend. “Don’t think about it, just forget everything,” she recommends to Lisa after seeing the destroyed pharmacy and Judith’s teddy bear next to the shards of glass.

The German narrative context of *Judith und Lisa*, however, becomes clear not only through the plot and the characterisation of the figures that appear in the book, but also through the – as I view it, very problematic – absence of Judith’s family and its perspective on the visual level. Surely, it is historically justifiable for the author and illustrator to address the complex topic regarding acculturated Jewish people in Germany who were essentially turned into Jews by the Nazis. At the same time, though, the negation of all differences between Judith and Lisa, e.g. their equal enthusiasm for the regime, seen in both of them raising their arms in Nazi salute and both wanting to wave the Nazi flag, appears to function as a moment of relief for the German readership. Here, a sensitive and intelligently-written epilogue could have been effective, and not the aforementioned Christian

history of salvation which accompanied the story.⁹

This tendency to erase the difference between Jewish and non-Jewish Germans during the Nazi period by means of illustrations can also be found in Inge Deutschkron and Lukas Ruegenberg's book *Papa Weidt* (Deutschkron/Ruegenberg 1999, ill. 7). In this case, though, it happens under reversed circumstances: at the turn of the year 1942/1943, Germans are depicted publicly cheering (!) as blind



ill. 7: From *Papa Weidt* (Deutschkron/ Ruegen berg, Butzon & Bercker)

Jews, whom Papa Weidt had protected as long as possible, were saved from deportation one last time and taken back to their workshop for the blind.

The French Cultural Context: *La grande peur sous les étoiles*

First published in 1993 by the publishing house Syros in Paris, *La grande*

peur sous les étoiles ("The Great Fear under the Stars") was written by Jo Hoestlandt and illustrated by Johanna Kang. A German-language edition was published by Hanser in 1995. The plot is similar to that of *Judith und Lisa*. A close friendship exists between two girls who have a fight right before the disappearance, presumably the deportation, of the Jewish girl Lydia and her family. Here, too, Hélène regrets for the rest of her life cursing at her friend Lydia, even though she was not being anti-Semitic, but

rather only lacking in empathy for the dangerous situation into which her friend was forced. In contrast to *Judith und Lisa*, the similarities between Lydia and Hélène are not depicted by the use of outward symbols such as Nazi insignia, but instead in a genuine manner. Both girls, drawn in a stylized

manner, wear the same clothing, both are about the same size, and both have a similar posture and use similar gestures and facial expressions.

The narrative is told from the perspective of Hélène, who is, according to the frame story, now an elderly woman. As the first-person narrator, she wishes to keep alive the memory of her childhood friend Lydia. The em-

bedded narrative is set in Nazi-occupied northern France in 1942 and describes the night from July 15 to 16 as an unprecedented turn of events. The Jews already have to wear the yellow star, but Lydia can still sleep over at her friend H el ene's house, who will celebrate her birthday the next day. However, when Lydia finds out that something bad is going to happen to the Jews that night, she insists on returning home to her parents, despite the great disappointment expressed by her friend. H el ene's father takes Lydia home. As H el ene observes from a window, a large number of Jews are deported the next morning. Lydia and her family have disappeared as well. Nevertheless, another Jewish woman is able to hide in H el ene's parents' flat and is taken the next day – without the yellow star – on to safety. Concerning Lydia, the text reads as follows:

When father returned, I said sadly: 'Lydia has disappeared.' He sat down onto the edge of the bed and seemed to be at a loss. Mama said: 'we shouldn't have taken her back.' Papa began: 'maybe we should have...,' but he didn't end his sentence (Hoestlandt and Kang 1995).

The story does not close with a happy ending, but rather with perplexity and H el ene's vague hope, even

in the frame story, that one day she may see her childhood friend once again. Symbolising the various sides of French society, H el ene's parents help to bring a Jewish person to safety, but they also, out of a position of helplessness, indirectly help Lydia's deportation. At the same time, though, the narrative explains that the "German army" is occupying northern France and that it is the "French police" who guard the deportation convoy and search for Jews who have gone into hiding. Although the text works with didactic reduction and symbolic means of conveying historical developments, and despite its use of simple language for children, it is historically correct and thus highly credible on the narrative level. For example, the fact that H el ene remembers the exact date, July 16, is convincingly explained by her birthday being on that day. Moreover, the fact that from July 15 to 16, 1942 almost 13,000 Jews were detained in Paris, is not mentioned in the book. It is a fact which does not need to be explained to the child by a knowledgeable adult commenting on the narrative. This speaks for the literary density and coherence of this picture book, for it manages to function autonomously in the context of the child reader. The book contains further levels of meaning which can be under-

stood through the input of additional knowledge.

Two of the conspicuous visual strategies of this picture book are the lack of contrast in the colouring of the illustrations and a dominance of ochre tones. The facial expressions and the possibilities for physical expressions are reduced due to the stylised figures. Regarding the illustrations of interior rooms, which comprise by far the majority of the depictions in the book, the perspectives appear to be no longer coherent, but instead they break apart. Sometimes, seemingly sinister light and shadow effects also catch the eye. Here, the illustrator is clearly working with expressionistic elements and, in doing so, chooses an art form which is not only representative of the time, but which was also considered to be 'degenerate art' by the Nazis. In this sense, the illustrator is invoking the memory of this art form in a children's book. Moreover, what convinces me here is the distorted perspective conveyed in the illustrations and the abandonment of a distinct and constant observer's point of view. On the narrative level, in contrast, the perspective is quite unambiguous: H el ene acts as the first-person narrator, Lydia no longer has a voice – but through the aesthetics of

the illustration we recognize that someone other than H el ene would surely have told the story differently.

The American Cultural Context

The narrative models in many American picture books for children about the Shoah differ from those from European countries. They frequently focus on an intergenerational passing on of history within a Jewish family,¹⁰ as is the case with the aforementioned *The Feather-Bed Journey* by Paula Kurzband Feder and Stacey Schuett. In the end, grandparents, parents, and children are harmoniously united before the grandmother's token of memory, her symbolic bridge to the past. It is the remains of the feather pillow that the person who saved her sent to her after she left for the USA – and that once came from a feather bed made by the grandmother's own mother. The pillow is, after its feathers were scattered around, much smaller than it was before; nonetheless, it fulfils its function in the narrative. The trauma of the past is alleviated through the image of a whole family, and the token of memory as well serves as a symbol of warmth, interpersonal help, and familial continuity. Even when depicting the persecution, the

naive-childlike illustrative style, which tends to be somewhat fairy-tale-like, avoids a too intense confrontation with the past. This protective gesture towards the young addressees can be found even in the details of the illustrations. In this sense, not only do alarming soldiers' boots march over the little girl's hiding place, the girl who later became the grandmother in the story, but also a motherly figure is seen, who hides her child's gaze from the fearful events. This child in the background of the illustration symbolises not only the possibility for a child to be protected and comforted, but also creates a link above and beyond the hiding place: the marching soldiers are a danger for all children, all children need protection.

To conclude, it is important to mention Marvell Ginsburg and Martin Lemelman's *The Tattooed Torah*, which was first published in 1983 and republished by UAHC Press in New York in 1994. Here, the Holocaust is not addressed via the fates of individuals, but rather their fate is symbolized by the experiences of a small Torah scroll from Brno. After the Nazis march into Czechoslovakia, the bare Torah scrolls are removed from their cabinets, the aron kodesh, without their covers and ornaments, by

brutal Nazi soldiers and deported. Hundreds of Torah rolls are senselessly kept in the Prague synagogue as in a warehouse and, in the process, are 'tattooed' with a number. "Many years later in America," (Ginsburg & Lemelmann 1994) as the text notes, a boy in the story explains to his father that the Torah scrolls in their synagogue are too heavy for him. His father therefore decides to fly to London, where the Torah scrolls were taken after the war, in order to obtain a small one for his synagogue at home. Back in the USA, the small Torah is given to Tommy's school and receives a new cover with the inscription *Zachor* ("Remember").

Like the grandmother's feather-pillow in the aforementioned book, this small Torah scroll is transformed into a central and community-strengthening token of memory; here, not only in a familial but also a religious sense. Here as well, in the end, all three generations – "all the children, their parents, grandparents, and teachers" – are happily united. America has accepted the European inheritance: as one can see by comparing the illustrations from the beginning and the end of the book, both the Czech boy and the small Torah from the beginning of the narrative seem to live on in their American



ill. 8: From *The Tattooed Torah* (Ginsburg/ Lemelman, UAHC Press)

alter egos (ill. 8 and 9). What has changed is the structure of the community, which obviously no longer segregates according to gender; also, the American boy no longer wears a *tallith*. According to the programme of UAHC Press, the community depicted in the book stands for the ideas of the reform movement. In addition, it becomes clear by means of the illustrations that the pre-war past of the eastern European Jewish community can only be imagined as an American projection. For example, in the first illustration the colours are more subdued and darker than in the illustration depicting the sunny and bright room in the American synagogue. Otherwise, the illustrations do not differ in style or content from each other. The men's fashion, for instance, their jackets, ties, and hats, remains the same. Even their shaved faces remain the same; with the exception of a single older man

with a long white beard, all of the men in Brno are shaved as they are in America.

The two American books described here attempt to support and affirm a new Jewish existence, one which values the positive aspects of the European past highly. In the process, the Holocaust is not ignored, but its impact is reduced or relegated to a symbolic meaning. In the European books, in contrast, Jewish life has disappeared after the Holocaust; unfortunately, there are no picture books for children about the Shoah explicitly geared towards a Jewish readership either. Moreover, the undoubtedly important topics of perpetration and non-resistance during the Nazi-period, as well as guilt afterwards, seem so central and difficult in the German context that no room is created for contemporary Jewish life in Germany. An intercultural comparison of the picture books thus makes clear the



ill. 9: From *The Tattooed Torah*

significant differences both in cultural context regarding the historical content and also in the implicit and explicit understanding of the situation and identity of today's young readership.

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NOTES

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³ One of the first was Hans Peter Richter's novel *Damals war es Friedrich* (Nuremberg, 1961). This book has been translated into many languages, has been widely read in schools, and in April 2008 was republished in its 57th edition. Today's academic judgement of this work is, however, predominately critical, especially because of the clichés about Jews used in it. See, among others, Shavit 1988, 11-42.

⁴ Regarding the literarisation of a child's realm of experience in the adult literature about the Shoah, see Tanja Hetzer 1999; Eva Lezzi 2001. For a comparative analysis of literature for children and adults, see Annette Kliever 229-245; Kertzer 2002.

⁵ Felman considers this question to be relevant for a classroom situation with students, too (Felman 1992, 1-56).

⁶ As stated in the paratext by Judith S. Kestenberg 1993.

⁷ Antoinette Becker, 'Nachwort', in Reuter 1988.

⁸ Hanna-Renate Laurien, 'Vorwort', in Deutschkron and Ruegenberg 2006.

⁹ The English-language foreword, a letter to the young readers from "The Translators", focusses on Lisa and her becoming anti-Semitic because of Nazi propaganda (Reuter 1993).

¹⁰ See also Adler 1987. This pattern of an intergenerational passing on of the history of the Shoah is also found in picture books for children in Israel, cf. Tal-Kopelman 2002.

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Fondation Auschwitz (ill. 1: *Tu seras encore là*)

The Creative Company (ill. 2- 4, *Erika's Story*)

Elisabeth Reuter (ill. 5- 6, *Judith und Lisa*, www.elisabeth-reuter.de)

Butzon & Bercker GmbH (ill. 7, *Papa Weidt*)

URJ Press (ill. 8- 9, *The Tattooed Thora*)

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