

From Germany to England: Girls in Exile in the Works of Judith Kerr and Irene N. Watts

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This essay examines the differing experiences of girls growing up in exile from Nazi Germany in two fictional works, *Out of the Hitler Time: One Family's Story* and *Escape from Berlin*, based on the real life experiences of children's authors, Judith Kerr and Irene N. Watts. Blending the biographical, the historical and the literary, what emerges is a study of how these young refugees negotiate new linguistic and cultural spaces and cope with everyday life in unfamiliar environments. The often unstable nature of life in exile will be explored against the backdrop of the loss of language, home and citizenship.

In a recent collection of essays on representations of war and conflict in children and youth media, entitled *An allen Fronten: Kriege und politische Konflikte in Kinder- und Jugendmedien*,¹ Julia Hoffmann argues that, to date, scant attention has been paid to juvenile literature written by authors in exile, '[D]er Kinder- und Jugendliteratur im Exil [wurde] bislang – abgesehen von einzelnen Autoren – generell wenig Aufmerksamkeit zuteil.'² Hoffmann refers here in the opening lines of her essay to works written by Germanophone children's authors who fled the Nazi regime and continued to write stories for young readers while in exile. It could further be argued that the field of *Exilliteratur* Studies would be enhanced by the inclusion of more discussion on fiction written for

children by such authors, which take the *child's* experiences of exile from Nazi-occupied Europe as their central theme.³

A number of children's books, which focus on the exiled child's perspective during the 1930s and 1940s, have been written by authors who themselves were forced to flee Nazi Germany, either as adults or as children. Here, I will discuss the works of two established children's authors who fall into the latter category, i.e. they were forced to flee their native Germany at a young age and wrote stories in their adopted language of English many years later, based on their personal experiences as child refugees. Judith Kerr (b. 1923) is a well-known British author and illustrator whose picture books, *The Tiger who came to Tea* (1968) and *Mog the Cat* series (1970-2002) are popular children's classics. Irene N. Watts (b. 1931) lives and works in Vancouver, Canada and is the author of many award-winning books and plays, such as *A Telling Time* (2004), *Flower* (2005), *No Moon* (2010) and *Touched By Fire* (2013). Both authors were born into rather well-to-do German-Jewish families, residing in the same neighbourhood of Charlottenburg in Berlin. They both also arrived in Britain as young girls before the outbreak of World War II, albeit under different circumstances and via different routes. Kerr is eight years Watts's senior and left Germany at the age of nine, along with her father, renowned writer and literary critic Alfred Kerr,⁴ her mother Julia and older brother Michael on the eve of Hitler's accession to power after the German elections of 5 March 1933. The Kerr family initially took refuge in Switzerland, then in France, before eventually arriving in England in March 1936,

approximately three years after their hasty departure from Berlin.⁵ Watts (originally Irene Kirstein) on the other hand, travelled directly to England, unaccompanied by any family members, on one of the very first *Kindertransport* and was only reunited with her parents in England many years later: 'I was seven and a half years old when I left Germany on the second *Kindertransport*, December 10, 1938, a month after *Kristallnacht* – the Night of Broken Glass.'⁶ Kerr, therefore, did not experience life in Germany as a young girl under Nazi rule with its increasing restrictions on the freedoms and rights of the Jewish population. Watts, by contrast, recalls her early years, growing up in Nazi Germany as follows:

A little girl's world is a simple one: she plays with her friends, goes for a weekend outing with her parents. Perhaps goes to swimming or dancing classes. By the time I was six those simple pleasures were taken away [...] I was small, fair-haired. Later, I realized my appearance kept me safe from taunts walking home from my Jewish school – *Kaliski Schule*.⁷

However, Kerr and Watts, just like Anna, Marianne and Sophie - the young female protagonists in the stories to be examined here - faced similar challenges in learning new languages and negotiating unfamiliar cultures, all of which had a lasting impact on their sense of identity, as they grew up in exile.

The works by Kerr and Watts that I wish to discuss, like the life stories they are based upon, share some common features, both in terms of form and content. Kerr's three novels, *When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit* (1971),⁸ *The Other Way Round* (1975) and *A Small Person Far Away* (1978), collectively published under the title *Out of the Hitler*

Time: One Family's Story (1994)⁹ trace the fortunes of a young 9-year old girl called Anna as she, her older brother Max and parents flee Nazi Germany in early 1933 across Switzerland and France before settling in England. Watts's inter-connected stories of the experiences of two girls, 11-year old Marianne Kohn and 7-year old Sophie Mandel, who first meet when they travel together on the very first *Kindertransport* from Berlin to London, were published a few decades later, also as three separate novels, before appearing in an omnibus edition, to mark the seventy-fifth anniversary of the first *Kindertransport*. Entitled *Escape from Berlin* (2013) this trilogy of novels comprises *Good-bye Marianne* (1998), *Remember Me* (2000) and *Finding Sophie* (2002),¹⁰ each of which has individually received literary awards.

Although drawing heavily on their childhood experiences as a source of inspiration for their works, Kerr's and Watts's trilogies of novels cannot be deemed autobiographical. Yet, nor are they wholly fictional. Instead, they could be considered to exist on a spectrum somewhere in between autobiography and fiction. Such fictionalised autobiographies are not preoccupied with precise political and historical details, as would be the case for a memoir, but rather, as Gillian Lathey posits in her study of autobiographical children's books set during Nazi times and World War II, the focus is more on conveying the lived experiences of those times, as viewed through the eyes of the young protagonists.¹¹ The merits of this fictional approach are highlighted by Christine Wilkie-Stibbs in *The Outside Child: In and Out of the Book*. Her reflections on the important role

of fiction in informing young readers about the plight of displaced children could just as easily apply to *Out of the Hitler Time* and *Escape from Berlin*:

They are works of literature, not case histories, but they do more than exploit for the purposes of entertainment the sorts of distressful situations in which some real children find themselves. Literature at its best is what most convinces us of the realities of other peoples' identities and selfhoods, so that these novels responsibly written and attempting authenticity, act as powerful and memorable case histories which are as true as, or truer than, factually accurate ones.¹²

The focus on the personal, emotional aspects of exile renders both Kerr's and Watts's stories particularly authentic, given they are related from the perspective of a child or adolescent who were likely to have had an incomplete comprehension of some of the historical events of the time.¹³ Kerr, for example, states: 'As the story is told from the point of view of Anna (someone approximately like myself), it automatically cannot include any information that was not available to Anna at the time.'¹⁴ It is the description of the domestic, personal, daily round of existence in exile rather than political details that are foregrounded, as these were the central concerns of their young female protagonists. This does not imply that the historical and political contexts are factually incorrect but rather that they serve as the framework or backdrop for both trilogies. Watts, for example writes, 'I deal in stories and it never occurred to me to write a history, though I am obsessive about research and every detail has to be just right so that though my characters are imagined what happens around them is truth.'¹⁵

It is also important to take into consideration the female authorial voice in reflections on Kerr's and Watts's stories about girls in exile. Lathey, for instance, notes that many of the accounts of childhood during World War II and in exile she analysed were written by women.¹⁶ This concurs with findings by other scholars, who posit that many female writers place great emphasis on their childhood experiences. One reason mooted is that this can be due to loss of a sense of self in adulthood for many women due to marriage or motherhood.¹⁷ However, a more likely reason in the case of the works to be discussed here is that such authors, as Lathy suggests, 'found themselves turning to literature, seeking to anchor and give meaning to the duality of their experience in accounts initially designed for the next generation.'¹⁸ Kerr very clearly states that her reason for writing stories about a young girl growing up in exile was to 'describe what it was like – what it was really like to flee from the Nazis, go to schools where they don't speak your language, live through air raids and – in those days - grow up.'¹⁹ In particular, she was motivated by a desire to relate these experiences to her own children.²⁰ In her preface to *Escape from Berlin*, Watts highlights how her fictionalised narratives reflect what many other refugee children fleeing the Nazis underwent: 'I am not Sophie or Marianne. They, their friends and their neighbors are imaginary, though their experiences are similar to those of many young refugees of that time.'²¹ She chose to write about the experiences of children and adolescents for a young readership because, 'My career has been with young people, and so it was natural for me to write for them.'²²

Kerr chooses not to relate her stories from the perspective of a first person narrator, but instead from the viewpoint of the third person, spanning the transition from childhood to adolescence in exile in the first two volumes. The final volume of her trilogy focalizes the story through a third person adult narrator, confronted by the memories of her childhood Self. Watts uses a combination of narrative perspectives: the third person narration is used consistently in the first volume which relates the experiences of Marianne as a young Jewish girl in Nazi Germany. This narrative perspective is then interspersed with Marianne's thoughts, recounted in the first person, in the second volume when she is in exile in Britain, just before and during World War II. However, Watts switches predominantly to the first person for the last novel, which focuses on Sophie Mandel's story. This suggests that the character of Sophie is most closely modelled on Watts,²³ although some of Marianne's experiences owe much to the author's own memories of exile and evacuation, '*Remember Me* is close to my own experiences in South Wales as an evacuee, and much of Sophie is me too but fictionalized.'²⁴ Interestingly, however, in many of the passages where Sophie recalls her early childhood as young Zoffie in Berlin with her parents, the first person narration switches to the third person, underscoring her disconnection from her previous German existence. Particularly in the case of Kerr's work, where all three novels are related solely from the third person perspective, the choice of a third person narrator suggests a detachment from her childhood identity prior to exile.²⁵ This would concur with the argument that:

Alienation from the native culture is particularly acute for those who were exiled as children, since exile occurred at a point when their potential to make a mark in the social world had not been fully realized; as a result, immersion in the new culture was – after initial difficulties – likely to be more complete.²⁶

It is also significant that both Kerr and Watts chose to write in their second language of English and remain in their adopted homelands of England and Canada respectively. Whether the narrative choices are those of first or third persons, channelling the stories through child or adolescent protagonists renders the experiences of growing up in exile more immediate for a young readership and encourages empathy, so that ‘the reader feels *for* the characters, if not *as* the characters.’²⁷

The opening chapters of the first volume of Kerr’s trilogy, *When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit*, are set in Berlin shortly before the 1933 elections. Anna, the 9-year old daughter of a famous writer, leads a carefree childhood in a wealthy suburb of Berlin and is not particularly worried about the impending elections, as is evident when she and her friend return home from school one day, casually discussing the election posters of Hitler and Anna’s recent discovery that she is Jewish, ‘My father was talking to us about it only last week. He said we were Jews [...]’.²⁸ However, both this Jewish aspect of her identity and the hostility of the Nazi Party towards Anna’s father, as an outspoken critic of Fascism, very quickly destabilises her previously secure world. Soon she and her family are forced to leave their home and nearly all they possess as they

commence a new and uncertain life in exile. Amongst the belongings left behind are Anna's oldest toy, her cuddly Pink Rabbit, which she rashly decided to leave behind in favour of a new toy, a decision she deeply regrets once she learns that the Nazis have confiscated their home and all their possessions:

Anna tried to imagine it. The piano was gone...the dining-room curtains with the flowers ...her bed...all her toys which included her stuffed Pink Rabbit.[...] How could she ever have chosen to pack that characterless woolly dog in its stead? It had been a terrible mistake, and now she would never be able to put it right.²⁹

Anna's dismay over Pink Rabbit, her companion throughout her early years in Berlin, not only stems from the loss of a favourite toy, but also represents the disappearance of a secure childhood in the familiar surroundings of her home. Furthermore, as later becomes apparent in Kerr's trilogy of novels, the loss of Pink Rabbit symbolises Anna's loss of identity as a young German girl, from a well-to-do, educated family. Instead, her sense of identity gradually evolves into that of an impoverished Jewish exile stripped of German citizenship as, on both a temporal and spatial level, she distances herself from her origins. The process of gradually replacing one identity with another is marked by the ambivalence of not belonging to any one group, being somewhere in between self and other. As Anthony Coulson points out:

In the exiles and migrants of the twentieth century that same ambivalence marks both external and internal relationships: here, the movement and

mediation between self and other is enacted both spatially, between the societies left and entered, [...], in the recollection of the past and the anticipation of the future. The exile and migrant must live between identities, negotiating with a strangeness that is both within and around them.³⁰

All children undergo a process of identity construction as they grow up to become adults. For the child exile, however, construction of identity is complicated by the fact that s/he is forced to leave the familiar behind and often adopt new cultural practices, perhaps one or more new languages in unfamiliar, at times difficult or hostile, surroundings:

Such a displacement, perhaps even more for a child than an adult, takes away kin, ancestry, habits, memories, and all those material, historical, and political determinants of culture which create and sustain identity. The habits, customs, beliefs and values, and the familiar contingencies of a child's perception which constitute the defining and protecting envelope of both their selfhood and their sense of outside reality, are all destabilized or destroyed.³¹

By the third volume, *A Small Person Far Away*, when the reader encounters Anna as a grown woman, she appears to have resolutely adopted an English identity. In the previous two volumes integration into her host cultures (Swiss, French and English), as well as the dissociation from her German past, are still in the process of being established. Nevertheless, her determination to suppress her German identity ('She had no wish to be thought even remotely German.'³²) is challenged when, as a young married woman living

contentedly in London, she is obliged to return for a stay, more prolonged than some of her previously infrequent and more hurried visits, to nurse her hospitalised mother in post-war Berlin. During this return to her country and city of origin and her encounters with the half-forgotten German language and culture, she is confronted by her past and German childhood self: ‘The sound of the Berliners eating and talking seeped into the silence. Familiar, long forgotten words and phrases.’³³ On an impulsive last visit to her old home, before her departure from Berlin, she attempts, in vain it would seem, to reconnect with her past childhood self:

‘Someone had played here once but it did not feel as though it were her.’³⁴ Nevertheless, her very attempt to reconcile her past and present selves in returning to this site of her early childhood indicates that she has made peace with the past and ‘the small person far away’.

The milestones of exile for Anna as a young girl are demarcated by a six month stay in Switzerland before the family moves to Paris for two years, where Anna’s father, who speaks fluent French, hopes to earn a living as a journalist and finally by the family’s arrival in England, all outlined in *When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit*, which sets the stage for Kerr’s second novel, *The Other Way Round*. Everyday life must continue, even in exile and Anna’s and Max’s education is resumed. However, while Max travels by train every day to a prestigious boy’s school in more cosmopolitan Zurich, Anna must remain in their new domestic sphere, a small, inexpensive guesthouse run by the kindly Zwirn family in a village on Lake

Zurich, and attend the local school. This is the first time the siblings are sent to different schools and although it is clear that the family place great importance on both children's education, it can be surmised that financial concerns lead their parents to prioritise their son's education over their daughter's when a choice needs to be made. Not only does Anna observe that the village school teacher is not nearly as knowledgeable as her teachers in Berlin, she also finds her new schoolmates' behaviour puzzling at times. As the 'new girl' she has to negotiate some difficult and frustratingly obscure codes of conduct, which in particular apply to interactions between members of the opposite sex. Anna finds herself ignored by the other girls in her class and hounded by the boys, who throw stones and even their shoes after her, when she transgresses these inscrutable rules by attempting to chat and play with the boys in the schoolyard. However, when she is given to understand that Swiss country boys demonstrate their attraction to girls by throwing things at them, her initial feelings of hurt bewilderment subside. She regains the friendship of the girls in her class by deciding in future to conform to their more demure behaviour in the wake of her 'digression'. Anna's treatment in her new school, notwithstanding the shared language of German,³⁵ demonstrates not just the challenges of adapting to life as a young exile in an unfamiliar culture but more specifically as a girl, where more stringent rules can apply.

When the family decides to move to Paris for financial reasons Anna is at first daunted by the idea of attending a school where everyone spoke French, a language she had yet to master.

However, it transpires that this is a challenge she will not face for many months. Max's education is again prioritised and he is the first to be sent to school. He finds this as difficult as Anna finds her increasing sense of isolation at home, where she feels bored, frustrated and lonely:

She began to feel cooped up in the flat day after day, and by evening both she and Max were so bad-tempered they could hardly say a civil word to each other. Max felt it was unfair that he should have to struggle through long, difficult days at school while Anna stayed at home, and Anna felt that Max was making enormous headway in this new world they were going to live in and worried in case she might never catch up.³⁶

This challenge is replaced by another one, once she finally does attend school. She is quickly accepted socially at her new all-girls school and delights in having friends of her own age again but struggles to master the French language which hinders her academic progress. The description of Anna's arrival in Paris underlines the sense of alienation she experienced by her family's move, not just across a cultural boundary but also a linguistic one: [N]ow that she was standing on the platform in Paris she was overwhelmed [...]. As the taxi swayed and turned in the traffic [...] coloured electric signs which she could not read loomed out of the darkness and disappeared again.³⁷ Happily, both Anna and Max soon excel in the French language and in their new schools and soon Paris begins to feel like home to them.³⁸

Anna's parents, however, have less success in thriving in their new environment and become increasingly anxious, both about their own situation in exile and the bleak situation back in Germany. Disturbing stories of Nazi brutality reach them, conveyed by an ever-growing number of exiles in Paris and more subtly in the correspondence of their beloved family friend 'Onkel' Julius who remains in Berlin, against the advice of Anna's father who was cognisant of the dangers of the Nazi regime from the outset. The consequences of Julius's decision not to go into exile have a tragic outcome when the family learns that he kills himself and indicate that no matter how far they fled from Germany they were still very much affected by the events taking place there. Given that Anna spends more time at home in her parents' company than Max, she appears to be more aware of the worrying events taking place in Germany. The subsequent unease and anxiety of the grown-ups affect her so much that she resolves to try and forget about Germany completely, thus consciously reneging on her German origins.³⁹ As a sensitive and intelligent observer, Anna is also very conscious of her parents' difficulties in trying to make ends meet and adapt to a wholly different existence, so unlike the life of ease and comfort they had once led in Berlin. Anna's father now finds it almost impossible to provide for his family. Already quite elderly, he does not know what to do, other than write, to earn a living and becomes ever more dependent on his young wife. Used to having housemaids as well as Heimpi, the children's beloved housekeeper and *Ersatz*-mother, at her command, Anna's mother must now adopt a more active

maternal role: shopping and cooking for her family and mending their clothes, often with disastrous results, which are humorously recounted. Anna observes how her mother, the more practical one in the couple, worries incessantly about their precarious financial situation but also struggles tirelessly to improve it, so that Anna's father assumes that she would always find a solution to their problems.⁴⁰

Yet, it is Anna's father who provides them with the means to escape their increasingly straitened existence in Paris and move to London to begin anew, when he is offered an advance of a thousand pounds for a film script (the film itself never transpires). This brings the story of two and a half years in exile to a close and with the family's arrival in a wet and cold England it also marks the end of *When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit*. Anna and Max are initially reluctant to leave Paris where they have settled in so well, 'It seemed strange to be leaving again for yet another country. "Just when we'd learned to speak French properly," said Max.'⁴¹ However, en route to England Anna's father comforts her by remarking that if even if they now didn't really belong anywhere, "'we'll belong a little in lots of places.'⁴² Throughout this first volume the importance of the family bond for a young girl in such unstable times, 'who doesn't really belong anywhere', is constantly underlined. Anna at one stage remarks, 'I don't really mind where we are...as long as we're all together.'⁴³

In *The Other Way Round* five years have passed since Anna's arrival in England. The story is set partially against the backdrop of

the outbreak of World War II, when many more refugees from all over Nazi-occupied Europe live a life of exile in Britain. Now an adolescent, we learn that Anna did not enjoy her experiences in an English boarding school as a charity case where she is mockingly labelled 'that clever little refugee girl'.⁴⁴ The usual challenges of adolescence, such as self-consciousness and the pressure to conform, are compounded by a sense of alienation and not quite fitting in, despite her excellent command of the English language. She is now more aware of her appearance and shabby dress, as she and her family have no money to spend on clothes and instead is obliged to accept second hand clothes from some wealthy American acquaintances. Her self-consciousness is exacerbated by a crush on, John Cotmore, one of the teachers at her evening art classes, a little later on in the story, when she is unable to decode his subtle references to love-making. This causes her to bitterly remark: 'I wish we had always stayed in one country, then Mama would have been able to tell me what people do and don't do and I'd know!; An English girl would know [...] Why couldn't she have grown up in one country like everyone else?'⁴⁵

However, in comparison to the desperate plight of her parents now living in a shabby hotel for refugees in Bloomsbury, Anna's self-consciousness is a minor complaint. Her father's hopes that he might at last be able to provide for his family by writing film scripts are dashed. As he cannot speak or write fluently in English and 'could do nothing but put words together beautifully' he is unable to help in more practical ways. Instead, it is her mother who supports

the family through a series of low-paid secretarial jobs. The strains of the previous years in exile now catch up on Anna's parents and her mother in particular rails against their impoverished plight. When Anna returns to live with her parents in the hotel at the age of sixteen she is even more painfully aware of the difficulties for her parents and feels a duty to help. Instead of continuing her education she trains as a secretary in order to find some work to help support them. However, living in close quarters with her parents causes tension between Anna and her mother – a relationship that doesn't greatly improve once the war is over. Max, who lives and studies law in Cambridge, thanks to a scholarship, and who has enjoyed both academic and social success since his arrival in England, is more removed from these domestic pressures and tensions. He faces his own challenges when he is temporarily interned as an enemy alien on the Isle of Man, like so many other male German refugees during the war.⁴⁶ Although assimilation is most difficult for the family in England for a variety of reasons (financial, linguistic, family tensions, internment), they all become English citizens. For Max and Anna, this new identity is easier to adopt as they have disconnected from their German identity and language more completely than their parents. Their increased independence and ability to thrive in England prompts Max to remark: "I suppose it's the other way round [...] the only times *they* don't feel like refugees is when they're with us."⁴⁷

In *Escape from Berlin*, Watts offers us differing perspectives of her two female protagonists Marianne Kohn and Sophie Mandel,

whose paths cross at the moment of departure from Berlin on the same *Kindertransport* and again years later at the end of WWII in London. Some of Anna's experiences in Kerr's novels are similar to those of Marianne's and Sophie's, in particular in the second and third volumes of the trilogy, which focus on the experiences of exile for both protagonists. However, Marianne and Sophie face these experiences alone, whereas Anna is not separated from her family, due to their much earlier departure from Germany. Although *Good-bye Marianne*, is not primarily a novel about the experience of exile itself, it eloquently and poignantly describes the desperate situation in which Jewish children, like Marianne, found themselves in Nazi-ruled Germany and the reasons for their exile. The young reader thus better understands why children were sent away from their families, leaving behind all that was familiar, to travel to a land where they knew no-one nor spoke the language, with an uncertain future ahead of them. As Deborah Hodge informs her young readers in *Rescuing the Children: The Story of the Kindertransport*:

Jewish parents knew that their children were in danger. Even though they could not leave Nazi-ruled countries themselves the parents did what they could to get their children out. Many of the *Kinder* believe that their parents gave them life twice: once when they were born and a second time when they were sent to safety on the *Kindertransport*.⁴⁸

Good-bye Marianne is set in Berlin, 1938. Germany has been under Nazi rule for five years. The novel's portrayal of 11-year old Marianne's life is a chilling insight into the treatment and experiences of Jews once the Nuremberg Laws of 1935 have been

passed, restricting their rights and freedoms to an unbearable degree. Germany has become a dangerous place to live in if you are Jewish, as Marianne's mother repeatedly warns her:

Marianne, you have to understand, we aren't safe. No Jew is safe anywhere in Germany [...] The Nazis are everywhere. [...] We are no longer considered citizens. If we are attacked in the street, or in our homes, no one will help us.⁴⁹

Descriptions of Marianne's fear and loneliness depict the isolation of Jewish children living in a society, which increasingly marginalises and demonises Jews. She confides in her mother, with whom she enjoys a close, warm relationship, "Mutti, I don't have anyone to play with, or to tell stuff to [...] I don't have friends anymore."⁵⁰ Her rejection by other German children because of her Jewish identity is highlighted for example in her encounter with a girl called Inge in a public park, who initially is delighted to play with Marianne. Inge assumes, that Marianne, like her, is playing truant from school. In reality, having just learned that Jewish children were no longer permitted in German public schools, Marianne underwent the humiliation of being turned away from the doors of her former school, followed by the jeers and taunts of her classmates. When Inge, as a devoted supporter of Nazism, discovers that her new friend is a Jew, her attitude towards Marianne alters swiftly and radically, "Kohn, that's a Jewish name – you're a Jew [...] Keep away from me you hook-nosed witch. I hate you."⁵¹ This contrasts with an episode in Kerr's *When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit*, where a reference

to the stereotype of the Jewish hooked nose also appears. Elsbeth, Anna's 'Aryan' school friend, remarks, "I thought Jews were supposed to have bent noses, but your nose is quite ordinary" but immediately mitigates her comment by declaring "It's silly about Adolf Hitler and people being Jews and everything!"⁵² Given that the Nazis have not yet come to power and begun official anti-Semitic indoctrination, Anna does not suffer Marianne's discrimination. Nonetheless, it is clear that both she and Elsbeth are already well aware of negative stereotypes of Jews.

In light of the hostility and violence Marianne regularly witnesses on the streets of Berlin, her home, and in particular her bedroom, become a safe haven in an increasingly unsafe environment, 'Marianne [...] ran into her bedroom, the one place that had always calmed her. She loved her little room'.⁵³ However, eventually even here she is no longer safe and after the Gestapo break into their home one night and destroy it, Marianne's mother is determined to get her out of Germany:

"I can't keep you safe anymore. I don't know how [...] You need to lead a normal life, to go to school, to have friends over. To play and walk anywhere you want [...] I don't want you to grow up afraid because you are Jewish [...] One day it may be safe to live here again."⁵⁴

When Marianne's mother secures her a place by chance on the very first *Kindertransport* to leave Germany, Marianne is devastated when she realizes she must now leave her home and parents behind,

particularly as she cannot even say good-bye to her father who has been forced into hiding.

Like Anna, she also has a favourite cuddly toy, ‘her teddy bear skinny from so much hugging’,⁵⁵ but ensures she brings him with her, ‘Marianne squashed her teddy bear down the side of the case. [...] She couldn’t go to sleep without him.’⁵⁶ Travelling alone to England without any family or friends she needs to bring this token of familiarity and security with her. It also provides a much needed link with her home and family in Germany, as well as comforting her when homesick once in exile. Unlike Anna, for whom exile at first seemed more akin to an adventure, Marianne is more aware of the gravity of the situation, both because she is older and because she realizes the extent of danger to her family and herself. As Marianne, along with many other children, bids a tearful farewell from the train that would bring her to safety, Sophie Mandel is entrusted to her care, ‘[A] woman threw in a rucksack, then lifted a little girl and stood her beside Marianne. “Please look after her. Thank you.”’⁵⁷ During their journey Marianne adopts the role of older sister to Sophie as they head towards an uncertain future, thus bringing the first volume of Watts’s trilogy to a close.

In the second volume, *Remember Me*, we follow the story of Marianne, now growing up in exile in London and, once World War II breaks out, how she is uprooted yet again, when evacuated along with her school-friends to South Wales. The narration is conducted principally in the third person. The experiences of exile, recounted from Marianne’s perspective, effectively convey the bewilderment

and uneasiness of a young girl living and going to school in an unfamiliar environment, where she is neither acquainted with the language or cultural practices. To underscore the reader's identification with the female protagonist, the reader is also privy to Marianne's thoughts and observations, related at times in the first person. Switching between first and third narrative perspectives also indicates at times a split between the 'real' Marianne and how she is viewed by others as 'a poor little refugee girl'.⁵⁸ On her arrival into Liverpool Street Station, along with all the other exhausted children wearing identification labels around their necks, Marianne is overcome by the strangeness of her surroundings, reminiscent of Anna's arrival in Paris, 'The station overwhelmed her with its incomprehensible words and signs.'⁵⁹ Marianne is reluctantly sponsored by Mrs. Abercrombie Jones or 'Aunt Vera' who had hoped for an older girl to train as a servant, "You did specify a girl, didn't you?" The woman's mouth set in a straight line. [...] "My husband and I agreed to take in a refugee to help around the house."⁶⁰ Marianne's first negative impressions of Aunt Vera, 'not even attempting to pronounce Marianne's name correctly'⁶¹ and her husband, Uncle Geoffrey, who 'made the word "foreigner" sound like a disease'⁶² do not improve over time. In contrast to her bedroom back in Berlin, she finds her room in her new home, [...] the loneliest place in the world.⁶³ Her sponsors are both irritated and amused at Marianne's attempts to pronounce English words correctly and at her initial failure to understand English cultural practices. Marianne, a perceptive child, is often distressed by her hosts'

unsympathetic attitudes and feels miserable in this cold house, which manifests itself physically, ‘She didn’t know if she wanted to cry, or be sick. Her stomach hurt, the way it always did when she was upset. It hurt a lot. *I want Mutti.*’⁶⁴ Over time Marianne’s unease at living in this unfriendly atmosphere does not much improve, nor does her homesickness abate to any great extent, ‘*How could our lives have changed so fast? One minute we were all together and the next, I’m here in this cold, green room, in a house where people talk loudly at me and laugh at things I can’t understand.*’⁶⁵

Once Marianne attends a local school and begins to mix with children her own age she begins to feel better, ‘It was good to get back to a routine.’⁶⁶ On her first day she meets Bridget O’Malley, with whom she strikes up an immediate friendship. As the daughter of an Irish doctor, Bridget is to some extent regarded as an outsider too, which may explain why ‘Bridget had this knack of knowing what Marianne was really thinking.’⁶⁷ Like Anna, Marianne is a bright student, who must first overcome the obstacle of learning through a foreign language. Once she masters the English language, she begins to excel and thrive in this environment, helped along by kind, well-meaning teachers. To her delight, ‘Aunt Vera’ grudgingly permits her to accept a scholarship to St. John’s Grammar School for Girls. Given her uncertain circumstances, she realizes that a good education is vital, if ‘[s]he wanted to have a choice.’⁶⁸ Not long after she begins in her new school, and just nine months after her arrival in England, she and many of her classmates are evacuated to a small town in South Wales. Just before her departure she receives a rare,

and it transpires a last, card from her father asking her to remember him - one of the possible inspirations for this volume's title.⁶⁹

Once again Marianne has to negotiate issues of identity in the home of 'Auntie Vi' and 'Uncle Dai' who want 'Mari', as they call her, to replace their recently deceased daughter Elizabeth. Marianne finds both their insistence on changing her name and attempts to turn her into their daughter deeply unsettling ('She didn't really know who she was anymore.'⁷⁰) and more than ever she suffers from homesickness, 'She wanted her mother, her own bed in her room.'⁷¹ Unlike Anna, Marianne is unable to suppress memories of Germany because, 'Home is the place where your parents are'⁷² and she desperately longs for her mother to join her. *Remember Me* can, therefore, be regarded as a plea to her mother not to forget her and follow her to England. It can, however, also be interpreted as a struggle to retain her own identity and sense of Self, especially in Wales. Happily, in the end Marianne and her mother are reunited, when she finally manages to come to England on a permit to work as a domestic, just as Watts's own mother did.⁷³

Finding Sophie is preceded by a prologue which comprises some of the concluding chapters of *Remember Me*, thus clearly linking both these stories and the fates of their two young protagonists. The opening chapter of this third volume of Watts's trilogy has moved the narrative forward by six years, 'I've had six birthdays in England.'⁷⁴ Unlike Marianne, Sophie's experiences of exile have been much more positive in the warm atmosphere of the home of her beloved 'Aunt Em', a friend of her parents. The contrast is indicated

in small but significant details. For example, Sophie loves her bedroom in her adopted home,⁷⁵ whereas Marianne yearns for the room of her Berlin childhood. Also, Sophie only adopts a beloved cuddly toy once she arrives in England, rejecting the doll she had brought with her from Germany, ‘Aunt Em bought me a furry gray monkey, which I loved passionately. He still sits on my desk.’⁷⁶ Aunt Em’s connection to her parents, her acquaintance with German culture, as well as her kind temperament, play an important part in this more positive experience of exile. Indeed Sophie has grown to love her and regards her as a mother figure. This would concur with Hodge’s description of some of the experiences of the *Kinder* researched for her book:

As the years passed, the Kinder became more settled in Britain. Young children became teenagers and teenagers became young adults. They spoke English, went to school or worked, and made friends. Some grew very close to their foster families.⁷⁷

Sophie left Germany at such a young age that she even has difficulty remembering her parents, ‘They seem like photographs you haven’t seen for a long time.’⁷⁸ However, memories of her early childhood do re-surface as flashbacks narrated in the third person, indicating that the past may be distant but never really disappears. In particular, the emotional intensity of her reunion with Marianne, soon after the end of the war, almost seven years later, indicates that their shared experiences on the *Kindertransport* have forged a very strong bond between them. The main challenge for Sophie growing up in exile is not exile itself but the fear of being sent back to Germany – a place

she no longer regards as home. This disconnection from her origins is underscored by her loss of the German language. Once it is established that her father survived the war and she is faced with the possibility of having to leave England, she is deeply resentful of the lack of control she has over her own future, as a minor, causing her to bitterly exclaim at one point, 'I'm not a thing to be shuffled back and forth. Doesn't what *I* want matter at all?'⁷⁹ In the end a happy compromise is reached when Sophie's father, moves to London to be near her and Aunt Em. In Watts's trilogy of novels we witness how the *Kindertransport* brings both Marianne and Sophie out of physical danger. Nevertheless, in quite different ways, they are confronted with the challenges of growing up in exile, questions of identity and continue to be affected by what is happening back on mainland Europe.

Out of the Hitler Time and *Escape from Berlin* powerfully exemplify the dislocation and destabilisation, but also the resilience, of the child refugee fleeing Nazi Germany. The start and end locations of these novels are the same but they offer thought-provoking insights into the differing experiences of exile for children of that time – either across different countries and cultures with their families or on a *Kindertransport* without their parents. Informed by their own remarkable experiences and recollections of those times, Judith Kerr's and Irene N. Watts's stories can certainly be regarded as, what Geoff Fox in *Children At War* describes as 'narratives [which] have a unique intensity because '[t]he writer *needs* to tell this story.'⁸⁰

Notes

¹ Ingrid Tomkowiak,, Uwe, Dettmar, Gabriele von Glasenapp & Caroline Roeder (eds), *An allen Fronten. Kriege und politische Konflikte in Kinder- und Jugendmedien* (Zürich: Chronos, 2013).

² Julia Hoffmann, 'Kinder im Krieg gegen den Krieg. Die Kinder- und Jugendbücher der Exilautorin Maria Gleit', in *Ibid.*, pp.257-280 (p.260).

³ See for example, Gillian Lathey, 'A Child's View of Exile: Language and Identity in the Autobiographical Writings of Judith Kerr and Charles Hannam' in *Keine Klage über England? Deutsche und österreichische Exilerfahrungen in Großbritannien 1933-1945*, ed. by Charmian Brinson, Richard Dove, Anthony Grenville, Marian Malet and Jennifer Taylor (Munich: iudicium, 1998), pp.190-199; Áine McGillicuddy, 'Out of the Hitler Time: Growing up in Exile' in *Politics and Ideology in Children's Literature*, ed. by Marian Thérèse Keyes & Áine McGillicuddy (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2014), pp.127-140.

⁴ Alfred Kerr (1867-1948) was a famous and influential drama critic, particularly during the years of the Weimar Republic. Due to his outspoken criticism of the Nazi Party he had to flee Germany on the eve of the 1933 elections that brought Hitler to power. His experiences of life in exile are documented in his published diary, *Ich kam nach England: ein Tagebuch aus dem Nachlaß* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1979).

⁵ Judith Kerr, *Judith Kerr's Creatures* (London: HarperCollins Children's Books, 2013), p.19.

⁶ An example of one of Irene N. Watts's introductions at book fairs to promote Deborah Hodges' publication, *Rescuing the Children. The Story of the Kindertransport*. (Toronto: Tundra Books, 2012). Email correspondence with Irene N. Watts (23 January 2015).

⁷ 'Thoughts on the Trilogy', Email correspondence with Irene N. Watts (26 January 2015).

⁸ Annemarie Böll's German translation of this work, *Als Hitler das rosa Kaninchen stahl* (Ravensburg: Ravensburger Buchverlag, 1973) was the recipient of the

prestigious *Deutscher Jugendliteraturpreis* (German Youth Literature Prize) in 1974. Both versions were often chosen for English and German school curricula.

⁹ Judith Kerr, *Out of the Hitler Time: One Family's Story*. (London: Collins, 1994); *When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit* (London: Collins, 1971); *The Other Way Round* (London: Collins, 1975) and *A Small Person Far Away* (London: Collins, 1978); All citations will be drawn from the 1994 omnibus edition but will refer to the individual title of each volume.

¹⁰ Irene N. Watts, *Escape from Berlin* (Toronto: Tundra Books, 2013); *Good-bye Marianne* (Toronto: Tundra Books, 1998); *Remember Me* (Toronto: Tundra Books, 2000) and *Finding Sophie* (Toronto: Tundra Books, 2002). All citations will be drawn from the 2013 omnibus edition but will refer to the individual title of each volume.

¹¹ Gillian Lathey, *The Impossible Legacy. Identity and Purpose in Autobiographical Children's Literature Set in the Third Reich and the Second World War* (London: Peter Lang, 1995). p.44.

¹² Christine Wilkie-Stibbs, *The Outside Child: In and Out of the Book* (New York: Routledge, 2011), p.26.

¹³ In her correspondence with me Irene N. Watts wrote: "I did not understand the talk that swirled around my head , the comings and goings, the whispered telephone conversations." (Thoughts on the Trilogy, Email correspondence, 26 January 2015).

¹⁴ Judith Kerr, *Judith Kerr's Creatures*, p.8.

¹⁵ Email correspondence with Irene N. Watts (20 January 2015).

¹⁶ Lathey, *The Impossible Legacy*. p.30.

¹⁷See for example, Marian Thérèse Keyes, *Politics and Ideology in Children's Literature*, p.144, fn.14 and 15.

¹⁸ Lathey, 'A Child's View of Exile', p.192.

¹⁹ Judith Kerr, Author's note to *Out of the Hitler Time*.

²⁰ Judith Kerr, *Judith Kerr's Creatures*, p.106.

²¹ Watts, Preface to *Escape from Berlin*, p.x.

²² Watts, 'Thoughts on the Trilogy', Email correspondence with Irene N. Watts (26 January 2015).

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- ²³ 'I was the same age as Sophie when I left for England'. In: *Ibid.*
- ²⁴ Email correspondence with Irene N. Watts (20 January 2015).
- ²⁵ Lathey, *The Impossible Legacy*. p.73
- ²⁶ Lathey, 'A Child's View of Exile', p.190.
- ²⁷ Wilkie Stibbs, *The Outside Child*, p.27. Italics in original.
- ²⁸ Kerr, *When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit*, p.8.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.64.
- ³⁰ Coulson, Anthony (ed.) *Exiles and Migrants: Crossing Thresholds in European Culture and Society* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 1997), p.4.
- ³¹ Wilkie-Stibbs, *The Outside Child*, p.26.
- ³² Kerr, *A Small Person Far Away*, p.645.
- ³³ *Ibid.*, p.627.
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.772.
- ³⁵ Anna's family move to German-speaking Switzerland. Max and Anna find it at first difficult to understand the Swiss dialect. However, 'they soon learned.' Kerr, *When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit*, pp.67-68.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 163.
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.133-134.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.211.
- ³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 114.
- ⁴⁰ Kerr, *The Other Way Round*, p.473.
- ⁴¹ Kerr, *When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit*, p. 264.
- ⁴² *Ibid.*, p.266.
- ⁴³ *Ibid.*, p.141.
- ⁴⁴ Kerr, *The Other Way Round*, p.280.
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.498, p.504.
- ⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p.334.
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p.577.
- ⁴⁸ Deborah Hodge, *Rescuing the Children: The Story of the Kindertransport* (Toronto: Tundra, 2012), p.18.
- ⁴⁹ Watts, *Good-bye Marianne*, p.26.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p.27

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.11.

⁵² Kerr, *When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit* p.9.

⁵³ Watts, *Good-bye Marianne*, p.33.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p.82.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p.33.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p.86.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p.94.

⁵⁸ Watts, *Remember Me*, p.188.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p.108.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p.117.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p.119.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p.170.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p.127.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p.131.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p.134.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p.148.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p.160.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p.191.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p.213.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p.252.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p.264.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p.188.

⁷³ In 'Thoughts on the Trilogy', Watts writes, 'My mother came to England on a Domestic permit, which meant I did not see her for several years. I was evacuated to S.Wales with the Mary Datchelor Girls' School.' (Email correspondence with Irene N. Watts (26 January 2015).

⁷⁴ Watts, *Finding Sophie*, p.282.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p.295.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p.284.

⁷⁷ Hodge, *Rescuing the Children*, p.39.

⁷⁸ Watts, *Finding Sophie*, p.284.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p.388.

⁸⁰ Geoff Fox, 'The Second World War: Mainland Europe' in Kate Agnew & Geoff Fox, *Children at War: From the First World War to the Gulf*. (London: Continuum, 2001), p.138.

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