

Between Instruction and Delight: A Comparative Study of Irish Fictional Treatments of the Kindertransport for Juvenile Readers

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ABSTRACT

Questions concerning truth, authenticity and memory are increasingly crucial as we progress through the twenty-first century, drawing further away from the lived memory of the National Socialist era (1933-1945) and its terrible impact on society. This includes the displacement of thousands of Jewish children through the Kindertransport rescue operation (1938-1939). For many children, fictional narratives continue to be their first meaningful encounter with historical events. This underlines the importance of writing narratives for child readers that depict historical events accurately and striking a balance between instruction and delight. Such considerations will be discussed, focussing on two children's novels by Irish writers Marilyn Taylor and Claire Mulligan as case studies. In this analysis, we will discuss these authors' motives for writing stories depicting the experiences of Kindertransportees, their representations of this particular historical context and the experiences of child exiles in their works for current and future generations of young readers.

KEYWORDS: Cultural memory, Kindertransport, historical children's fiction, Irish authors.

Entre la enseñanza y el deleite: estudio comparado de las ficciones irlandesas juveniles sobre el Kindertransport

RESUMEN

Las cuestiones relativas a la verdad, la autenticidad y la memoria son cruciales conforme avanzamos en el siglo XXI, alejándonos de la memoria viva de la era nacionalsocialista (1933-1945) y su terrible impacto. Esto engloba el desplazamiento de miles de niños judíos en la operación de rescate Kindertransport (1938-1939). Para muchos lectores infantiles, las narraciones de ficción continúan siendo su primer encuentro significativo con los acontecimientos históricos. De ahí la importancia de escribir novelas infantiles que representen eventos históricos con precisión y con un equilibrio entre enseñanza y deleite. Abordando tales aspectos, estudiamos los casos de dos novelas infantiles de las escritoras irlandesas Marilyn Taylor y Claire Mulligan. Discutiremos los motivos de estas autoras para escribir historias sobre las experiencias del Kindertransport, sus representaciones de este contexto histórico particular y las experiencias de los niños exiliados en sus obras, de cara a las generaciones actuales y futuras de jóvenes lectores.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Memoria cultural, Kindertransport, novela histórica infantil, autores irlandeses..

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1. INTRODUCTION

In early 2023, while browsing through Reuters news website, the following headline caught my attention. “Almost a quarter of young Dutch deny Holocaust or think it's exaggerated – survey” [Reuters 25 January 2023]. The article reported that: “Nearly a quarter of Dutch people born after 1980 believe the Holocaust was a myth or that the number of its victims was greatly exaggerated, according to a survey.” It went on to state that “Survey after survey, we continue to witness a decline in Holocaust knowledge and awareness. Equally disturbing is the trend towards Holocaust denial and distortion” [*Ibid.*]. The survey referred to here was part of a wider study on knowledge and awareness of the Holocaust conducted by the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany (or ‘Claims Conference’ for short).¹ Between 2018 and 2023, the Claims Conference carried out detailed surveys in six countries —Austria, Canada, France, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the United States— to gauge current levels of knowledge about the Holocaust amongst younger generations, the results of which are published on the Claims Conference website. (www.claimscon.org).

Another of the Claims Conference’s findings, this time from a survey conducted in the United Kingdom in November 2021 in conjunction with researchers in the Centre for Holocaust Education, University College London, concluded, “It is particularly disappointing to find that the Kindertransport, an important historic chapter... is being forgotten. Now more than ever it is critical that we find new and innovative ways to perpetuate the memory of the Holocaust through education. This is imperative for generations to come.” (www.claimscon.org/uk-study). Highlighted here is the current significant lack of knowledge about the British rescue operation of over ten thousand Jewish children, the Kindertransport, between November 1938 and September 1939.² In addition, the findings emphasise the importance of finding new ways to educate future

¹ This international organisation was established in 1951 as a result of discussions between the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany) and various American Jewish organisations. Its headquarters are based in New York. Its main purpose is to seek restitution for Jewish victims of Nazism and their heirs.

² The Kindertransport was a British rescue operation of unaccompanied Jewish children from Nazi-controlled areas of Europe in response to the November pogrom or “Night of Broken Glass” on 9 November 1938. It was coordinated by various groups and volunteers under the auspices of the Refugee Children’s Movement, from 1 December 1938 up to the outbreak of World War II. This rescue operation is estimated to have saved the lives of approximately 10,000 children aged between 3 months and 17 years who were brought to safety to the UK without the usual necessary visa requirements. Usually, the Kindertransportees were fostered by families or else lived in residential care. Many remained in the UK after the war as their families perished in the Holocaust.

generations so that they have a better understanding of the Holocaust. Both are central concerns of this article. Neither the Dutch nor UK survey paints a reassuring picture of contemporary levels of awareness amongst young people. Their findings underline how crucial it is to ensure future generations are better informed about the past. What is interesting also is how these findings are making headlines in the media and attracting the public's attention to increasing levels of misinformation or gradual forgetfulness about the Nazi-era. Like the results of the Dutch survey, the UK survey findings were picked up by the media and reported in various leading British newspapers at the time of their release. In particular, they highlight concern about educating future generations of young people on the Holocaust and the Kindertransport. Given that the literary case studies to be discussed later in this article centre around the experiences of Kindertransportees, the main focus here will be on the Kindertransport.

Published factual accounts such as memoirs, history books and articles all contribute to the conservation and manifold representations of the Kindertransport experiences. So too do unpublished archived materials, such as diaries and letters, as well as crucial, personal eye-witness testimonials based on interviews with those who experienced the Kindertransport at first-hand. However, much of this material is more suitable and destined for adult consumption, rather than for a more juvenile audience. Bearing in mind awareness of the need to counter misinformation and accurately inform future generations about the Nazi-era, the Holocaust and the Kindertransport, how can one engage children of the 21st century then with the events of an increasingly distant past in a way that is relevant to them? One obvious way is through the school curriculum and school-related activities such as history lessons or class project work. It is important that children are educated about the facts and historical contexts but, as Venken & Röger point out “the focus in history books tends to be on the collective experience” (Venken & Röger 200). This tends to have a lesser impact than stories of an individual's experiences, which are easier to relate to and can stimulate feelings of empathy. There is a danger that in teaching young people about the Nazi-era and related traumatic events, predominantly through history lessons, it can remain at a remove, sealed off, consigned to the classroom and to a progressively remote past.

One way to mitigate this distancing from the past is through exposure to age-appropriate cultural treatments of historical events, such as historical fiction for a juvenile readership which centres more around *Alltagsgeschichte* —on individual, everyday experiences and concerns— focalised through a child protagonist. Mediating the past in this way would be

of more relevance to children. Children's historical fiction on the Kindertransport, if it is well researched and engages the young reader, can have a powerful role to play in conveying the past experiences of Kindertransportees to present and future young readers. Indeed, it could have as much —or perhaps even more?— impact than factual historical accounts. Such literary treatments become even more crucial as we move from the era of lived experience to that of cultural memory.

2. THE KINDERTRANSPORT: FROM LIVED EXPERIENCE TO CULTURAL MEMORY

In her recent publication *The Kindertransport in literature*, Stephanie Homer points out that we will soon be confronted by a “shift in memory” where “with the dwindling number of Kindertransportees alive today, the living memory of this rescue operation is being transformed into cultural memory” (Homer). Cultural memory is succinctly described by Juliane Tomann as referring “to events of a pre-biographical past, which can no longer be experienced by living individuals and instead are mediated by culture” (Tomann 139). Due to the natural decline in the number of Kindertransportees with the passing of time, there is an inevitable move away from the narrative representation of the Kindertransport in memoirs or fictionalised autobiography, given that both these genres are predicated (to varying degrees) on their authors' personal, lived experiences and an increase in fictional treatments of this rescue operation. This is borne out by Homer's findings that “since the turn of the century, there has been a steady publication of fictional Kindertransport novels” (Homer 21). Thus, as we progress through these first three decades of the 21st century, fictional texts by authors of the post-witness generation (i.e., with no direct involvement in the Kindertransport) are emerging as an increasingly significant way in which to preserve and transmit the memory of this rescue operation to current and future generations.

Indeed, as Emilie Pine informs us “[T]he creation of public works such as novels, films and plays is an important element in the processing and understanding of historical traumas...[and] it often remains the remit of culture to continue to remember.” (Pine 25). Literature (and other cultural works) can convey truth in a powerful manner and bring historical events vividly to life. Some such as Christine Wilkie-Stibbs even go so far as to argue that “novels responsibly written and attempting authenticity, act as powerful and memorable case histories which are as true as, or truer than, factually accurate ones” (Wilkie-Stibbs 26).

It is important for authors to write responsibly and authentically to avoid manipulating readers (whether intentionally or not) by writing literature based on inaccurate historical details. Cultural works can —and do— treat history with varying degrees of truth, so there is a danger of reconstructing a past that is inaccurate or that fictional details may be confused with fact. This is an issue of critical concern. One could argue that when it comes to writing about sensitive historical topics for younger readers, such ethical considerations about truth and authenticity are even more crucial.

In her article “Holocaust narratives and the ethics of truthfulness”, published in *Bookbird*, a journal specialising in international children’s literature, Lydia Kokkola poses the questions “When fiction deals with real historical events, what is its responsibility to the truth? What about its responsibilities to its readers?” (Kokkola 5). Given that Homer has identified a steady increase in the publication of Kindertransport fictional novels since the turn of the 21st century, Kokkola’s questions have lost none of their relevance and indeed are of increasing importance as we progress through this new century. This is particularly pertinent when it comes to fictional novels dealing with potentially traumatic or sensitive topics for a juvenile readership. For a new generation of child readers fictional narratives continue to be one of their first meaningful encounters with historical events and influence how they conceptualise the world around them in terms of its past. Or as Emer O’Sullivan describes it, “Children’s literature ... provides children with their earliest images of the world into which they are gradually venturing as well as the vocabularies they need to read that world” (O’Sullivan 6). Kokkola underlines the ethical obligation for authors and publishers to write and publish narratives for child readers that depict historical events accurately, even if the characters and their stories are fictional. Her study of literary treatments of the Holocaust, critically assessed a selection of six children’s novels spanning thirty years between the 1960s and 1990s and examined their varying approaches in depicting traumatic subject matter for young readers. She argues that interpretations of historical facts can and do change over time. Therefore, how historical events such as the Holocaust are mediated, particularly when it is for a juvenile audience, needs to be continually scrutinised. Kokkola’s findings led to the conclusion that there is an onus on children’s authors and publishers to strike a balance between distortion of truth and too much truth which may traumatise young readers. Furthermore, she argues that secrets —through omission of certain traumatic details— rather than lies are sometimes necessary and that there is an important ethical difference between the two. Similar considerations can be applied to Kindertransport narratives for young readers.

3. CHILDREN'S LITERATURE: FROM INSTRUCTION TO DELIGHT

In his essay "Instruction and Delight", Peter Hunt, argues that Children's Literature is important because it is embedded in our cultural, educational and social formation (Hunt 12). His description of children's literature has been summarised as "both varied and complex [and as] a unique literary system that is inherently functional, educating and entertaining its readers in *almost* equal measure" (artpublikamag.com, my emphasis). The inclusion of the word 'almost' here is significant, highlighting how some children's literature tends more towards didactic purposes (instruction) and some more towards entertainment (delight). This duality of purpose in children's literature between instruction and delight to varying degrees, reflects a desire to teach children about the world they live in (past, present and future) and to socialise them. It also reflects a desire to engage and entertain them, to stimulate their imaginations. The question —to what extent children's literature should entertain or instruct is an ideological one, as is the question of what children should learn through literature. Indeed, as has been argued by many children's literature scholars, all texts are inherently ideological but perhaps none more so than those written for children (see for example Stephens, and Keyes & McGillicuddy).

Children's historical fiction, as we have seen, can have an important and influential role to play in teaching young people today about sensitive and traumatic topics such as the Holocaust and the Kindertransport. But there are many challenges for children's authors and publishers —the story needs to be factually accurate without traumatising young readers with too much graphic detail, as Kokkola points out, yet authors also need to avoid writing overtly didactic stories.

Given that another important function of children's literature is to entertain, care needs to be taken too not to trivialise the real-life experiences of subjects or distort facts for the sake of writing an exciting story to engage the child reader's interest. Thus, a balance needs to be struck in historical children's works between fact (instruction) and fiction (delight) if it is to both appropriately inform and engage a 21st century readership. As Homer aptly describes this challenge: "authors find themselves caught between the historical past and the reader's present" (Homer 22).

Bearing these considerations in mind, we will turn our attention to the novels of two contemporary Irish children's authors on the Kindertransport. To date, these are the only Irish authors to have published fictional works on this topic for a child readership. Both

works have been received very positively in Ireland, as we shall see, but are under-researched. Therefore, an analysis of these novels contributes fresh insights into the study of the growing body of fictional treatments of the Kindertransport in the English language by members of the post-witness generation. First, however, some brief contextual detail concerning Ireland and Jewish exiles at the time in question will be provided.

4. IRELAND: A «TERRA INCOGNITA»

A “terra incognita” in the field of German & Austrian Exile Studies is how Gisela Holfter describes Ireland in the Introduction to her 2006 ground-breaking study, entitled, *German-speaking exiles in Ireland 1933-1945* (Holfter 1). This can be attributed in part to Ireland’s peripheral location on the margins of Europe but also due to political developments in Ireland in the early part of the twentieth century. As part of the United Kingdom, the Northern Irish political context was, and still is, quite different to that of Southern Ireland.³ This meant that in the 1930s and 1940s policies North and South of the border differed greatly in relation to the acceptance of Jewish refugees. Ireland, south of the border retained a neutral status throughout World War II (or ‘the Emergency’ to use the term adopted by the Irish government) and, as a poor country with high unemployment levels, emerging from British domination and political turbulence accepted very few Jewish refugees, either before or during the war. The 1937 census records that about 4,000 Jews lived in the Republic of Ireland whereas 1,472 Jews lived in the much smaller territory of Northern Ireland, with the majority (1,284) residing in Belfast. Southern Ireland did not participate in the Kindertransport rescue operation, unlike Northern Ireland, which as part of the United Kingdom, did participate. Despite Southern Ireland’s lack of engagement with the Kindertransport rescue operation, these two contemporary Irish-based children’s authors, south of the border in the Republic of Ireland, chose this as a significant theme in their fictional works many decades later.

5. KINDERTRANSPORT NOVELS BY TWO IRISH AUTHORS

*Faraway Home*⁴ by Marilyn Taylor and *The Hunt for David Berman*⁵ by Claire Mulligan, published in 1999 and 2022 respectively, are the titles of the two children’s Kindertransport novels to be discussed. Both are written by Irish female authors and

³ The term ‘Southern Ireland’ is used here as the title ‘Republic of Ireland’ was only officially adopted in 1949.

⁴ Marilyn Taylor, *Faraway Home*. The O’Brien Press, 1999.

⁵ Claire Mulligan, *The Hunt for David Berman*. The Moth, 2022.

published by Irish publishers. Neither of these children's authors have personal experience of the Kindertransport, unlike authors such as Irene N. Watts who wrote *Escape from Berlin* a trilogy of novels for children, fictionalising her own experiences as a seven-year old Jewish girl who travelled from Germany to England on a Kindertransport.⁶ However, Taylor's and Mulligan's motivations for choosing to write fictional works about the Kindertransport for young readers are quite different.

As she outlined in a speech for Holocaust Memorial Day in Northern Ireland in 2013, Marilyn Taylor was born in England during World War II. Later, learning what was then the recent history of the war and of the Holocaust, she began to realise how as a Jewish person whose ancestors had moved to England in the 19th century how fortunate she had been, sheltered from the terror in Europe by an accident of birthplace. "This realisation has stayed with me, and I think eventually led me much later to try to write about the Holocaust in a way that I hoped would capture the imagination of both young and adult readers and help keep the memory alive." (Taylor <https://obrien.ie/blog>) Taylor subsequently moved to Ireland as a young woman and was a school and college librarian in Dublin for many years. Her work as a librarian gave her the initial impulse to write for young people, amongst which are two historical children's novels about Jewish children in Ireland during World War II: *17 Martin Street* and *Faraway Home* for which she is best known.

Faraway Home, set in Northern Ireland, is an award-winning novel published by The O'Brien Press, and it is still used extensively with 6th class (12-13 year olds) in Irish primary schools. Teaching materials to accompany the novel are provided on the publisher's website, clearly indicating a sign of didactic intent to educate children about the Kindertransport through this novel. Taylor herself has visited many schools both in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland to talk about the history of the Jewish community in Ireland, the Kindertransport, *Faraway Home* and the inspiration for writing it. This suggests that she is keen to inform young people on lesser-known aspects of Irish history and society, such as Jewish life both north and south of the border. Given that Taylor wrote her novel in the late 1990s, she was able to meet in person with and interview some of the Kindertransportees who came to Northern Ireland and the adults responsible for them. She was also able to contact other Kindertransportees who had moved from Northern Ireland overseas. All of this provided her with a significant amount of authentic and hitherto unknown material for her book.

⁶ Irene N. Watts, *Escape from Berlin*. Tundra Books, 2013.

Claire Mulligan is part of a younger generation of Irish children's writers. *The Hunt for David Berman*, published by independent publisher The Moth, is her debut novel. Her Kindertransport story is set on a farm on the Moray and Banffshire coast in north-east Scotland. Although Mulligan is Irish, and unlike Taylor has no Jewish ancestry, she is also of partial Scottish origins, which, as she explained in a recent email interview with me, inspired her to set the story in Scotland. Her decision to write about the Kindertransport was quite accidental — in the same email exchange she relates how she only learned of the Kindertransport while participating in a creative writing course a few years ago. Given that Southern Ireland did not participate in the Kindertransport programme, this lack of knowledge is not unusual. As she finds World War II an exciting backdrop for adventure stories, the Kindertransport sparked her interest, leading eventually to the publication of *The Hunt for David Berman*.

Unlike Taylor, Mulligan is less enthusiastic about her book being used in the classroom as is clear from her following statement:

When a book gets on a school curriculum or reading list there is a risk that the prescription of it and subsequent analysis kills the magic so I definitely did not set out to write a book about the Kindertransport to be used for teaching. My story is about friendship and home and loss and kindness and longing for things that can no longer be. (Email exchange 2023)

Thus, already we can see from these two authors' quite dissimilar backgrounds and from their attitudes towards the balance between instruction and delight, Taylor's and Mulligan's children's novels on the Kindertransport reflect different aims.

6. BETWEEN INSTRUCTION AND DELIGHT: FARAWAY HOME AND THE HUNT FOR DAVID BERMAN

a. Faraway Home

Faraway Home is a 210-page novel recommended for readers between 11 to 14 years old. It is divided into five parts, tracing the story of the fictional 12-year old Karl Muller and his 7-year old sister Rosa from Vienna at the time of the Austrian Anschluss in March 1938 to Belfast in Northern Ireland up to Easter 1941, outlining the reasons for their flight and their subsequent experiences as Kindertransportees. The story is predominantly focalised through young Karl who ends up living on a Jewish refugee-run farm near Belfast, while his sister Rosa is fostered by a wealthy Jewish couple. The focalisation of the refugee experience through Karl renders the historical context, feelings of displacement and Karl's

everyday life on the farm and in school more accessible and immediate to a young readership, given that it is recounted from the perspective of a child. However, in the third part of the novel, the narrative perspective switches to that of Judy Simons, a young Irish Jewish girl from Dublin who volunteers along with some other teenagers from Dublin's Jewish community to help out at the farm during her school holidays. So, although *Faraway Home* is principally set in the Jewish exile community of Northern Ireland, young Jewish characters from Dublin as well as characters of the Protestant faith community in Northern Ireland feature in the story (all focalised through child characters). This provides the young reader with a variety of cultural-historical perspectives, sometimes in quite a humorous manner. It is also in line with Homer's reflection on the increasing flexibility of fictional treatments of the Kindertransport, that "Representations are likely to become more multidirectional with references to other cultures' (Homer 211-212).

Despite her flexible, multidirectional approach in *Faraway Home*, Taylor has meticulously conducted research for her novel and it adheres very closely to historical fact. For instance, in her 'Afterword' to the novel, Taylor provides her young readers with some contextual historical detail. She outlines for them how of the 10,000 'Kinder' who came to the UK between 1938 and 1939, seventy were sent on to Belfast in Northern Ireland. Thirty of those seventy Kindertransportees did indeed live and work on a Refugee Resettlement Farm, known as Millisle Farm on the Ards Peninsula in Co. Down, about 20 miles south-east of Belfast. Millisle Farm was purchased by the Belfast Jewish community with the help of the Jewish community south of the border in May 1938 and was run by Jewish refugees based on *kibbutz* principles. Young Jewish volunteers from Dublin came to help out on the farm during school holidays once World War II broke out. Approximately three hundred refugees in total (eighty at any one time) lived on the farm until its closure in 1948.

The fictional Karl Muller's experiences are based on German Kindertransportee and former Millisle Farm resident Walter Hirsch (originally from Dresden), whom Taylor interviewed in London for her novel. Taylor also interviewed Edith Kohner in Belfast for her book. Kohner was a Jewish refugee from the Sudetenland who ran the farm with her husband, Franz. She was one of the few Jewish refugees to remain in Northern Ireland after the war, as most emigrated to England, the US or Canada.

Faraway Home offers the reader a rare insight into the experiences of a *Kindertransport* refugee in the Northern Irish context or as Taylor puts it "one of the little-known secret histories' of the Second World War in Ireland (Taylor *History Ireland* website 2001). Not

only is the novel based on real people and places, such as Vienna and Millisle Farm, but also on actual events, such as the Belfast Blitz, which occurred on Easter Tuesday, 16 April, 1941, which Taylor also outlines in the novel's *Afterword*. As a fictionalised account its focus remains, nonetheless, on the stories of its young imaginary characters —their daily life, emotions, friendships

and even budding romance. This more effectively conveys an emotional truth and the lived experiences of exile from the child's perspective helping to foster empathy and understanding in a way that a wholly historical account could not achieve. Ultimately, this Kindertransport novel ends on a sober note. Karl on receiving a last note from his mother through the Red Cross that his parents are being sent "East" realizes that he will never see them again. Yet, this tragic news is tempered by a more hopeful message that deep and lasting friendships between people of different backgrounds can emerge out of the tragedy of war and trauma of displacement.

b. *The Hunt for David Berman*

Mulligan's novel can be situated closer to the fictional end on a spectrum between fact and fiction, as *The Hunt for David Berman* is primarily an adventure story, 268 pages in length, for a slightly younger readership of 9 years+, using World War II as its backdrop. Nevertheless, as Mulligan informed me, she ensured all the historical details were accurate.

I thought that it was important to use actual events and correct information when dealing with the Kindertransport moments in the story and also when dealing with David and his backstory. I felt it was respectful to get these details as right as possible as the Kindertransport was a real thing, involving real families. (Email exchange 2023)

She describes works such as *Into the Arms of Strangers: Stories of the Kindertransport* by Deborah Oppenheimer (Bloomsbury, 2017) and *Escaping the Nazis on the Kindertransport* by Emma Carlson Berne (Capstone Press, 2017) as being particularly useful in their vivid portrayal of the personal stories of some of the Kindertransport children. Online research, such as the websites of the Imperial War Museums, the Kindertransport Association, the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, BBC Newsnight's documentary *Kindertransport: A Journey to Life* (2012), newspaper reports and interviews provided extra, personal details about what some Kindertransport children experienced. This contrasts with Taylor's more first-hand approach in conducting research for *Faraway home* and it reflects also how the gathering of data, recording of interviews and studies of many different aspects of the

experiences and lives of German-speaking Kindertransportees is of huge and indeed, as time passes, of increasing importance.

The Hunt for David Berman is recounted in the third person, principally from the viewpoint of 10-year old Robert who, along with his younger sister Elsa, has been evacuated from London to stay with their grandparents on a remote farm near the fictional village of Inchbrakie on the north-east coast of Scotland, while their father is off fighting in the war and their mother is working for the government on an undisclosed and mysterious mission. While exploring the rugged coastline, Robert encounters a boy, about his own age, called David who is in hiding in a sea cave. Robert is initially wary of David, due to his German accent. However, once David explains that he is Jewish and escaped the Nazis in Berlin on a Kindertransport, they soon grow to be firm friends, not least due to their similar experiences of displacement, loneliness and feelings of anxiety about their parents' safety. The young reader's insights and understanding about David's experiences as a Kindertransportee, are not only informed by David's descriptions but are also often facilitated through the lens of Robert's experiences as an evacuee. David, as the reader gradually learns through his confidences to Robert, initially stayed a few months in the small seaside town of Dovercourt in South England when he arrived in the UK, as in reality did many young Kindertransportees on arrival in England. He was then fostered by Mr McKettridge, a farmer living near Banff in north-east Scotland, who badly mistreated him. This is why he runs away and is now trying to survive alone. The bond between the two boys becomes even stronger, when together, with the help of David's pet jackdaw Blitzen, they thwart a Nazi spy, the sinister Mr. Braun/Brown, who has been ordered by the Gestapo to retrieve an enigma codebreaker hidden in David's suitcase unbeknownst to him and then to kill him. The story is dramatic, fast-paced and suspenseful, a real page turner. Yet, there are also many moments of introspection where the reader is privy to both Robert and David's emotions, the challenges Robert in particular faces in an unfamiliar environment as well as David's memories of leaving Berlin and journey on the Kindertransport. These more introspective episodes in the novel, add depth to the story and make it more realistic, balancing some of the more unrealistic aspects, such as the likelihood of a displaced child managing to survive for long in a chilly cave with no money and little food or that two young boys could defeat an armed Nazi spy.

Unlike Taylor's novel, where the young reader learns by the end that Karl will not see his parents again, Mulligan's story ends on a more hopeful note in relation to David's immediate fate in Scotland. This is not surprising given that *The Hunt for David Berman* is

aimed at a younger readership. Nevertheless, Mulligan's ending does not distort the truth either, as the question of whether David will ever see his own family again remains open and unknown. In keeping with Kokkola's ethical considerations concerning the use of secrets in place of lies and distortion of the truth in Holocaust fiction for children, Mulligan thus avoids traumatising her young readers.

Although Mulligan is careful to conduct background research and includes many accurate historical contextual details in her story, David's placement with a foster family in Banff does not reflect the more usual treatment of Kindertransportees who came to Scotland. According to Frances Williams in her doctoral study *A Kindertransport to Scotland. Reception, care and resettlement*, residential care rather than foster care "was the predominant form of care" for "an estimated 800 children sent to Scotland" (Williams 255, 308), with many staying at either Whittinghame Farm School and Polton House in East Lothian in Southern Scotland (Williams 77) rather than in north-east Scotland where Mulligan situates her narrative. It can be argued that Mulligan's authorial choice to create a Kindertransportee character who is fostered in Scotland is nonetheless an authentic, albeit less usual Kindertransport experience in a more marginalised setting. Indeed, the same is true for Taylor's choice of setting in Northern Ireland. Furthermore, David's abuse by his foster family the McKettridges, although not representative of the experiences of the majority of Kindertransportees was experienced by a certain number, as Andrea Hammel discusses (Hammel 19-33).

These narrative choices highlight again the more flexible approach afforded by fictional treatments of the Kindertransport where authors have the freedom to choose settings and experiences previously unrepresented, such as Northern Ireland or Scotland. Indeed, as Homer points out with the "disappearance of surviving Kinder, writers may be less concerned about appropriating the story of elderly Kindertransportees" (211) and as Mulligan's novel with her emphasis more on Robert's experiences proves, "[I]t is likely that the Kindertransport will be evoked in the storyline but will not be the focus of representation" (Homer 211). What is also less usual in the case of Kindertransport narratives is that both novels are recounted from predominantly male rather than female perspectives⁷ —in the case of *Faraway Home*, this is not surprising as Taylor closely based her story on the real experiences of Walter Hirsch as a young boy in Millisle farm. However, Mulligan's choice of young male protagonists was motivated by concerns that have less to do with historical detail but more so with reception. As she states: "I am a

⁷ For further information on this, see Hammel (25).

mother to three boys and I wanted a book to appeal to boy readers (and hopefully girls too) because they fall away from reading so easily and at such a young age. And I wanted the boys not just to experience adventure but also emotion.” So a different didactic aim is at play here, in fact.

It is clear from the many reviews of Taylor’s and Mulligan’s novels that they have both been received very positively. The following sample are of particular interest in relation to commentary on the use of fact and fiction and the dual aspects of children’s literature in providing both instruction and delight. The Holocaust Educational Trust, in praise of *Faraway Home*, for example recommends that “Every young adult should read this book. It is history, written with the gripping reality of fiction. It is a story which, like Anne Frank’s diary, brings home to us all the horrific misery inflicted by the Nazis —and the need to ensure that we never allow it to happen again”. Sue Wilsher of the Federation of Children’s Book Group recommends that “*The Hunt for David Berman* would be a great book to use in school, both as an excellent story and as the starting point for discussions about events during the Second World War”. She also describes Mulligan’s novel as offering “much in terms of developing empathy and exploring the importance of getting to know others” while Children’s Books Ireland highlights its relevance for contemporary readers, “Although a story set in the past it is a compelling and relevant one with which today’s young readers will empathise” (Children’s Books Ireland, 5 May 2022). Also interesting to note is what the authors themselves have to say about their own works. In an interview published on The O’Brien press website, Taylor clearly emphasises the need to get the balance right between instruction and delight in writing historical fiction as well as on the importance of conducting thorough research:

It seems to me that one of the most important elements of successful writing for modern teenagers is respect for the readers. To show that respect my golden rules are, first, not to preach at them; second, not to underestimate them; and, third, to make sure that what they are being offered is as accurate, authentic and as true as it can be. And for the latter, research, though not the whole story, is the key. (O’Brien Press website).

Although Mulligan is more concerned with universal themes of friendship and kindness as well as writing an absorbing adventure story for her slightly younger readership she too acknowledges the didactic opportunities her novel can offer:

The Hunt for David Berman is a work of fiction... There are certainly teachable moments in the book and it could be used as part of learning about that moment in

history but I did not write it with that outcome in mind... I hope the children who read *The Hunt for David Berman* understand something of the Kindertransport and the difficulties faced by children during the war, but ultimately I want the message to be one of kindness and friendship. (Email exchange 2023).

7. CONCLUSION

So to conclude, we have discussed two Irish fictional treatments of the Kindertransport set in the more peripheral locations of Northern Ireland and Scotland and published almost 25 years apart. Given *Faraway Home* was published in the late 1990s, Taylor still had the opportunity to interview those with first-hand experiences and memories of Millisle Farm which very much informed her novel. Due to her Jewish background, her birth at the time of Nazism and war and engagement with young readers as a librarian, she is strongly motivated by didactic purposes in retelling this once near-forgotten piece of history. Yet, equally, on a fictional level, she creates convincing and engaging characters and absorbing plotlines, which is why her novel remains so relevant and popular today with young readers.

Mulligan is less keen for her novel to be used for “instruction” and more so for “delight”. Nonetheless, she is keenly aware of the importance of including historically accurate details, even if her main motivation is to write an exciting adventure story to entertain young readers. Although only published in 2022, her novel has already received very positive reviews and refocused attention on the Kindertransport for a younger readership, with some reviewers, as we have seen, suggesting it should be used in primary schools to introduce World War II topics.

What is clear from analysis of both works is that to varying degrees they create a bridge between historical fact and individual experience, complementing more factual accounts with imagined experiences and emotions, using narrative devices such as flashbacks, multi-directionality and varying perspectives. Their novels give a voice to displaced children from the viewpoint of the child in that moment. In this sense, it is similar to the fictionalised autobiographies of former Jewish child exiles of the Nazi period, such as Irene N. Watts’s *Escape from Berlin*, Judith Kerr’s *When Hitler stole Pink Rabbit* or Lore Segal’s *Other people’s houses*.

As we progress through the 21st century, away from the lived experiences of the Kindertransport towards its cultural commemoration, fictional historical narratives will have an increasingly important contribution to make to current and future young generations’ better understanding of World War II-related history —but only if the imaginary is scaffolded by truth. With the freedom of authors to include more diverse

perspectives —from more marginal experiences of Kindertransportees beyond England, gender, and the intersection of other childhood experiences— children can gain a more complex and nuanced understanding of the Kindertransportee’s experiences. There is potential too to draw comparisons with and develop empathy for displaced children in more contemporary settings.

It is also interesting to think about other contemporary and future developments of cultural commemoration of World War II Jewish child refugees for young people. These include more multimodal treatments for an increasingly visually literate readership, e.g. through graphic novels and film adaptations of novels: e.g. a film adaptation of *Faraway Home* is currently being filmed in Austria and Ireland, two volumes of Irene N. Watts fictionalised autobiographical trilogy, *Escape from Berlin* have been published as graphic novels, and a German film adaptation of Judith Kerr’s *When Hitler stole Pink Rabbit* was very well received in German cinemas in 2019.

If novels for children are responsibly written and succeed in both educating and engaging young readers, then not only children and children’s literature but also future society will benefit.

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