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4 ‘Michelle comprend le malheur’:¹ Reading Writings by Children Displaced in the Nazi Era

ABSTRACT

This chapter is an important intervention for the study of Nazi-era childhood exile. While there is existing scholarship on this subject, it tends to focus on the adult and/or retrospective view rather than children’s responses at the time. Taking Judith Kerr’s texts from and about childhood exile as a case study, this chapter establishes how and what can be learned about this phenomenon from contemporary children’s writings.

Introduction

Since the late 1990s, scholars working in the fields of exile studies and children’s literature studies have sought to examine children’s experiences of exile, but often only from an adult’s standpoint, either by analysing fiction crafted by adults who as children went into exile in the Nazi era, or by gathering oral histories. This research provides insight into how childhood exile is remembered and interpreted as adults in adulthood, but not so much about children’s responses at the time. As historian Rebecca Clifford explains, ‘When we remember our childhood selves, we map our adult understanding of what is important and relevant onto our narratives, and in the process we change the story.’² But how do we know the

- 1 [Michelle understands the misfortune]. Seven Stories: The National Centre for Children’s Books, UK, Judith Kerr Collection, ‘Pierre et Michelle’ [Pierre and Michelle], JK/01/01/01/18 (Newcastle upon Tyne). All translations are my own.
- 2 Rebecca Clifford, *Survivors: Children’s Lives after the Holocaust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020), 13.

story has changed without access to the earlier narratives created in childhood? Moreover, where these earlier narratives are available and accessible in written form, how can we read them, and what might they reveal about children's experiences of exile in the Nazi era?

When reading child-authored texts, it cannot be assumed that raw experiences or events can be uncovered. As Peter Cumming cautions, to 'assume that "the child" is directly and transparently accessible "inside children's writing" would be to fall straight into a [...] trap'.³ Similarly, as Andrea Hammel writes in her study of letters between Kindertransportees and their parents it is vital not to 'overstate' the authenticity of these texts because, as written narratives, they are 'representations and not the events themselves'.⁴ Children, like adults, map their knowledge and priorities onto their narratives at given points in their young lives.

Recently, children's literature scholars have sought to establish a methodology for reading child-authored texts based on the similarities they share with adult-authored ones. Clémentine Beauvais has proposed a reading of juvenilia whereby child-authored texts are put in conversation with adult-authored ones of similar genre or themes and read for their 'meeting points'.⁵ Beauvais terms this approach a 'kinship reading', drawing on Marah Gubar's understanding of 'kinship' as what children and adults 'share across generational divides or constructed age categories'.⁶ Such a 'kinship reading', Beauvais explains, might involve such texts as Anne Frank's diary, another child-authored diary and a fictional child's diary written by an adult.⁷ The

3 Peter Cumming, 'What Children's Writing? Read by Whom, How, and To What Ends?', *Canadian Children's Literature/Littérature canadienne pour la jeunesse*, 34/1 (2008), 110.

4 Andrea Hammel, 'The Future of Kindertransport Research: Archives, Diaries, Databases, Fiction', in Andrea Hammel and Bea Lewkowicz, eds, *The Kindertransport to Britain 1938/39: New Perspectives: Yearbook of the Research Centre for German and Austrian Exile Studies*, vol. 13 (2012), 149.

5 Clémentine Beauvais, 'Next of Kin: "The Child" and "The Adult" in Children's Literature Theory Today and Tomorrow', in Clémentine Beauvais and Maria Nikolajeva, eds, *Edinburgh Companion to Children's Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 270.

6 Beauvais, 'Next of Kin', 268.

7 *Ibid.*, 270.

reading of these texts would not ‘focus primordially [sic] on the differences between adult and child viewpoints in writing the self, but rather on writing the self as a human endeavour modulated by a great number of things – historical context, medium of writing, individual experiences, etc. – with the age of the writer as just one among many variables.’⁸

Elisabeth Wesseling has also proposed a kinship reading of child-authored texts that involves reading child- and adult-authored texts alongside one another.⁹ By way of finding the similarities between the texts, Wesseling suggests ‘discourse tagging’, an approach devised by Theresa Rogers and Elizabeth Marshall, which assembles texts that deal with a particular societal issue, such as homelessness. The shared societal issue in their texts is what Rogers and Marshall term a ‘structuring statement’.¹⁰ Reading texts through discourse tagging and their structuring statements can shed light on societal issues as perceived by different generations of writers and, as Wesseling argues, is ‘productive for cultural inquiry,’ because it takes child- and adult-authored texts ‘equally seriously without essentializing either one of them.’¹¹

These approaches are helpful for integrating what might be termed the first iteration or earlier version of the story into study of narratives constructed at later points in the life course of child émigrés. Kinship readings allow for conversation between child- and adult-authored texts. Taking childhood exile as the structuring statement, texts can be read as investments in certain moments of exile, and the childhood self as modulated by sociohistorical context, medium of the text, (inter)generational concerns and individual experiences.

8 *Ibid.*.

9 Elisabeth Wesseling, ‘Researching Child Authors: Which Questions (not to) Ask’, *Humanities*, 8/2 (2019).

10 Theresa Rogers and Elizabeth Marshall, ‘On the Road: Examining Self-Representation and Discourses of Homelessness in Young Adult Texts’, *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 55 (2012), 726.

11 Wesseling, ‘Researching Child Authors’, para 14.

Kinship reading in practice: Judith Kerr's texts from and about childhood exile in 1930s' Europe

Judith Kerr (1923–2019) is one child émigré who produced texts about her childhood exile at various points throughout her life, including in childhood. As recounted in her fictionalized autobiography, *When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit* (1971), Kerr's family fled Germany in 1933 when Judith was 9 years old. They sought refuge in Switzerland, France and the United Kingdom, where they became naturalized British subjects in 1947. Judith Kerr made Britain her home, where she became a highly successful children's author-illustrator, best known in the United Kingdom for her picture books, *The Tiger Who Came to Tea* (1968) and *Mog* volumes (1970–2020) about her family cats. *When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit* is used in British and German schools to introduce children to the study of the Holocaust, but it is not the first text Kerr made about the Nazi era. Since she was a girl with heightened artistic and literary facilities, Kerr's parents encouraged and found the materials for her to write and draw in exile, so that she could develop her artistic and literary skills, practise her newly acquired languages and begin to work through the challenges of childhood exile. A selection of Kerr's childhood outputs was preserved and now forms part of the Judith Kerr Collection at Seven Stories, The National Centre for Children's Books in Newcastle upon Tyne, United Kingdom. Additionally, the Alfred Kerr archive at the Akademie der Künste [Academy of Arts] in Berlin holds fifteen poems in German, French and English and 310 letters to and from Judith and her parents between 1927 and 1965.

Exile for Judith Kerr involved a succession of geographical removes as her family sought refuge from Nazi Germany. However, as Áine McGillicuddy writes of the family as they are depicted in Kerr's fiction: 'No matter how far they have fled from Germany they are still very much affected by the events taking place there.'¹² Family correspondence from the

12 Áine McGillicuddy, 'From Germany to England: Girls in Exile in the Works of Judith Kerr and Irene N. Watts', in Charmian Brinson and Andrea Hammel, eds,

time attests to the difficulties Kerr's parents faced in adapting, particularly her mother Julia. Judith's awareness of their struggles at the time and her fears about National Socialism are also evident. Letters in the Alfred Kerr archive document the times when Julia Kerr was so overwhelmed that she spoke of suicide, on two occasions saying that she would also end one or both of her children's lives.¹³

In exile, Judith not only worried about her mother and was aware of the situation in the Third Reich; but interviews conducted in the 2000s reveal her childhood concerns about her own safety from the National Socialists. When the family moved to France at the end of 1933, 10-year-old Judith began to fear that Hitler was hiding behind the lavatory curtain of their small Paris apartment and, as in the trilogy, she had a nightmare about the National Socialists offering a reward for her father's capture.¹⁴ Then, at the commencement of the Spanish Civil War in 1936, when Judith Kerr was 13, she began to dwell on what it would be like to live in a country the Nazis invaded.¹⁵ Although living outside of Nazi Germany, Judith Kerr was significantly affected by an ever-present and growing sense of menace from the regime.

Exile for Kerr, then, involved both geographical removes from her country of birth (and the cultural, linguistic and emotional transitions tied to such physical removes) and the need for a mental remove from the world of National Socialism. Kerr's mental separation is clearly illustrated in *When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit*: when Anna learns of Nazi atrocities happening in her former home country, she tries to block all thoughts about it. As early as 1933, during the first few months of the family's exile in Switzerland, Anna vows to 'try never to think about Germany at all' after hearing about the persecution of a professor who was made to act

Exile and Gender I: Literature and the Press: Yearbook of the Research Centre for German and Austrian Exile Studies, vol. 17 (2016), 198.

- 13 Akademie der Künste, Berlin, Alfred Kerr Archive, Family Correspondence, 'Anna Ollendorf', Kerr 409; Family Correspondence, 'Julia Kerr', Kerr 432.
- 14 Claire Armistead, 'Tiger! Tiger! Burning Bright', *The Guardian* (29 November 2008), <<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2008/nov/29/judith-kerr-tiger-came-tea>>, accessed 31 January 2020.
- 15 Joanna Carey, *Judith Kerr* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2019), 33.

like a dog and put in a kennel in a concentration camp.¹⁶ In an interview for *The Guardian* in 2015, Kerr explains that the Nazis really did treat this Jewish man in this way, and, on hearing about it from a German-Jewish refugee who fled to Switzerland after the Kerrs, she was ‘totally disturbed’ and tried not to think about Germany any more.¹⁷ These mental removes are also evident in Kerr’s juvenilia. However, far from running away from or attempting to deny the ways that National Socialism affected her childhood, as a girl Kerr was creatively responding to her situation and finding ways to communicate about her experiences of exile that are both emulated and changed in her adult-authored texts.

‘Pierre et Michelle’: Judith Kerr’s first attempts at writing about childhood exile

‘Pierre et Michelle’ is one of Judith Kerr’s earliest manuscripts in the Judith Kerr Collection at Seven Stories. Written (in French) between 1935 and 1936 when Kerr was 12–13 years old, it is ninety-three pages long and contains eighteen illustrations in pencil and black ink. The story revolves around two children’s – Pierre’s and Michelle’s – summer holiday with their aunt and uncle, Monsieur and Madame Bidon. In the first chapter, the children arrive alone by train from Paris to a rural location close to the forest and sea where their aunt and uncle live in a cottage with a garden full of roses. The roses in the garden and the cottage’s vicinity to the sea suggest that it takes some inspiration from *La Roseaie*, the villa in Nice at which Kerr’s maternal grandparents rented a maisonette in exile, where the garden was also full of roses and close to the sea. But the maisonette

16 Judith Kerr, *When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit* (1971, London: HarperCollins, 2013), 82.

17 Judith Kerr, ‘I Wasn’t Scared Enough: That’s How I Nearly Gave Us Away’, *The Guardian* (18 February 2015), <<https://www.theguardian.com/childrens-books-site/2015/feb/18/judith-kerr-interview-when-hitler-stole-pink-rabbit-mog>>, accessed 30 April 2017.

was no cosy cottage, rather a site of anxiety and uncertainty for the girl. In the autumn of 1935, when Judith Kerr was 12 years old, she was separated from her parents for what, at the time, seemed indefinitely, and she felt insecure since the only connection she had with them was sporadic written communication.¹⁸

The construction of the cottage in 'Pierre and Michelle' is both a refuge from and a way, for Kerr, of building responses to her exilic existence and the implications of Nazism on her life. The cottage in this story, in contrast to the maisonette, is idyllic. Moreover, the children are away from their parents for a set – and short – time and they are not concerned about their absence. But, in the second chapter, in which the children spend the day in the garden with their uncle, it is possible to read some of the reality from which the child author was trying to escape.

When the children join their uncle in the garden, Monsieur Bidon asks Pierre to dig the holes for the plants, but as Monsieur Bidon considers Michelle 'trop petite' [too small] to dig, he gives her the task of watering them.¹⁹ Michelle is 'très contente' [very happy] in her task, and the accompanying illustration offers an idyllic picture of the girl, absorbed in her task as water from the watering can she is holding arches towards the rose plant.²⁰ Pierre, however, is dissatisfied when Monsieur Bidon does not let him – indeed forbids him from planting the roses after having dug the holes for them. It is a 'très délicat' [very delicate] task that 'tu ne saurais pas comment t'y prendre' [you wouldn't know how to], Monsieur Bidon explains to his nephew.²¹ He sends Pierre and Michelle off to play while he plants the roses. Monsieur Bidon is not, however, a very attentive gardener: he forgets to plant three of the roses. Upon discovering these forgotten roses

18 For discussion of the spatial connection between Kerr and her parents during this period of separation, see Lucy Stone, 'Trains to Life, Trains to Death: Judith Kerr's Writing and Drawing from and about Childhood Exile in the Nazi Era as Intergenerational Solidaristic Practice', in Justyna Deszcz-Tryhubczak and Zoe Jaques, eds, *Intergenerational Solidarity in Children's Literature and Film* (Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 2021), 101–15.

19 Seven Stories: JK/01/01/01/14.

20 *Ibid.*, JK/01/01/01/14.

21 *Ibid.*, JK/01/01/01/15.

later that day, Pierre sees his chance to take on the task he believes is his own. Ignoring his sister's protests, he plants each rose only to accidentally cut their roots when covering them with soil. The children are horrified and reduced to tears.

Kathryn V. Graham has found in fiction that when a plant is cut 'humans, particularly children, identify with the pain inflicted on plants just as if they themselves were plants', but, in this instance, the children do not identify with any pain felt by the roses.²² Rather, Pierre and Michelle are upset by how distraught their uncle will be by the destruction of some of the roses he 'aime tant' [loves so much].²³ Moreover, Michelle understands the misfortune, and so she attempts to mend the roses. She finds a pot of glue and attempts to stick the roots and stems back together. Unsurprisingly, Monsieur Bidon, however, is 'consterné' [dismayed] by his niece's 'ingénu' [naïve] attempt at salvage and repair: the narrator makes it clear that the roses cannot be mended.²⁴

As a story that, if not specifically for Kerr's parents, was at least written at a time when she was in correspondence with them, the choice of the phrase 'Michelle understands the misfortune' when Pierre severs the roses is striking. It suggests that the child author is addressing her parents here. The story could work without this phrase, but its inclusion draws attention to the girl. This phrase reads as the child writer telling her parents that she *understands* what it is for an adult to be caused and feel sorrow. Moreover, given her awareness of the difficulties her parents faced in exile, Judith is effectively writing that it is *their* sorrows she understands.

The 'death' of the roses is an apt allegory in this case. The rose is most commonly considered as a symbol of love, but it also symbolizes the young and vulnerable. One example of a rose representing a young and vulnerable woman can be found in Goethe's poem 'Heidenröslein' ['Rose on the Heath, 1771] in which, Ellis Dye suggests, the rose stands for a young

22 Kathryn V. Graham, 'The Devil's Own Art: Topiary in Children's Fiction', *Children's Literature*, 33 (2005), 111.

23 Seven Stories: JK/01/01/01/16.

24 *Ibid.*, JK/01/01/01/21.

woman 'struggl[ing] against a force stronger than herself'.²⁵ This is a poem that Alfred Kerr taught Judith to recite in Berlin when she was 3 years old, and Dye's reading of the poem as an 'allegory of our common vulnerability to violence at the hands of things that are bigger than we are' is particularly pertinent here.²⁶ In 'Pierre et Michelle', it may be only by mistake that the roses lose their roots; nonetheless they are also at the mercy of a violent force infinitely greater than them – the shovel blade. Moreover, the fact that it is made clear that the roses cannot be mended after an integral part of their being is cut from them does suggest that in this story Judith is working through thoughts of death at the hands of another as permanent and irreversible.

In the world of literature, roses are also linked to notions of knowledge and awakening. In *Sleeping Beauty*, or *Briar Rose*, Seungyeon Lee suggests that '[t]he princess in her deep-sleep state can be likened to a rose in winter; as the rose appears to be dead during its hibernation, the princess lies dormant, appearing lifeless'.²⁷ However, the time in which she appears to be dormant is actually one for which she 'prepare[s] for the world outside once awakened'.²⁸ 'Once awakened,' Jack Zipes argues, 'Sleeping is the knowing one, and we know, too.'²⁹ The roses in 'Pierre and Michelle' are not hibernating, they really are dead. Neither they – nor any princess – can be brought back to life. But their death does precipitate an awakening, namely Michelle's knowledge of death and the pain that death can cause those left to grieve.

- 25 Ellis Dye, *Love and Death in Goethe: 'One and Double'* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2004), 46–7.
- 26 Dye, *Love and Death in Goethe*, 47. See Judith Kerr, *Eine eingeweckte Kindheit* (Berlin: Argon, 1990), 6, for Kerr's anecdote about learning this poem as a girl.
- 27 Seungyeon Lee, 'Enchanted or Endangered by Sleep? Modern Interpretation of the Heroine's Consciousness in Tales of Sleeping Beauty', *Interdisciplinary Humanities: Beyond the Binary*, 33/2 (2016), 12–13.
- 28 Lee, 'Enchanted or Endangered by Sleep?', 13.
- 29 Jack Zipes, *The Brothers Grimm: From Enchanted Forests to the Modern World* (New York: Routledge, 1988), 215.

Contemplation in nature: Death in *When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit*

Nature is also a motif Kerr uses to explore ideas around death in *When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit*, where the grandmother's dachshund, Pumpel, dies after he jumps from the top of a wall by the lakeside hotel in Switzerland in which the family is staying after leaving Germany. There is nothing unusual about Pumpel being buried in the garden after his death, but it is interesting for its intratextuality with *Pierre and Michelle*. Herr Zwirn digging a hole for Pumpel recalls Pierre digging holes for the roses; the holes for the roses were of course meant for their further growth but become their graves.³⁰ Shovelling soil on them is effectively their burial; like the children, Omama (Grandma) and Herr Zwirn, throw shovelfuls of soil on top of Pumpel.³¹ In the novel, there is also focus on the reactions of those affected. While the children are not upset – the little girl Trudi is particularly glad that Pumpel can no longer bite her – Omama is devastated: she had loved Pumpel as Monsieur Bidon had his roses.

Pumpel's death serves a particular function in the novel: it introduces the subject of suicide as response to the extreme and increasingly reduced and difficult living conditions for Jews in the Nazi era. Pumpel's leap from the wall is considered suicide; Herr Zwirn explains that he has heard of dogs committing suicide when they feel 'they're no good to themselves or to anyone else'.³² Omama believes it 'was all the fault of the Nazis' (80), the forced migration from Germany having deeply unsettled him. The dachshund really was thought to have committed suicide in this way and, in the novel, Kerr gives it additional meaning: Pumpel's burial in the garden is also perhaps a gentler way of introducing the topic of suicide in the trilogy. There is, however, nothing to cushion the news of Onkel Julius' suicide towards the end of the novel. (Onkel Julius is a close family friend who remained in Germany and whose life began to deteriorate after he was

30 Kerr, *When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit*, 80.

31 *Ibid.*

32 *Ibid.*

banned from visiting the Berlin Zoo, one of his favourite activities.) The text simply reads: 'Onkel Julius had been found dead, an empty bottle of sleeping tablets beside him'.³³ In contrast to the emotional outbursts following the severing of the roses and Pumpel's death this news is met with silence by Anna and her family.³⁴

Mog in the Dark (1983): Fear, anxiety and awakening knowledge

It is not only in the juvenilia and trilogy but also in Kerr's *Mog* volumes that the garden appears as a motif that communicates information about the effects of exile on her life. These volumes present a sort of Eden in which the garden features in ten of the eighteen volumes and it is, overall, idyllic: the skies are blue, the trees are leafy-green and the flowers in bloom. There is also very little change in the *Mog* volumes. Although produced over fifty years, time seems to stand still; the members of the Thomas family do not age and the house and surrounding streets remain the same.³⁵ Even when Mog dies in *Goodbye Mog* (2002), some degree of stasis is maintained by what Zoe Jaques terms the 'regenerating pet cat', Mog's ghost helping the kitten perform the role of family pet.³⁶ 'After all the uncertainties of her childhood years', Kerr's son, writer Matthew Kneale, writes, 'she led a quiet suburban London life, of walks on Barnes

33 *Ibid.*, 183.

34 These are not the only instances of suicide in the trilogy. In the second volume, *Bombs on Aunt Dainty* (1975), Anna's parents obtain suicide pills in the event of German invasion in Britain. *A Small Person Far Away* (1978) deals with Papa's assisted suicide after he has a stroke in Hamburg in 1948 and Mama's failed suicide attempt in West Berlin in November 1956.

35 Not even when Mog's birthday is celebrated in *Mog's Birthday* (2020) is her age given. It is only in *Goodbye Mog* (2002) that the reader learns that she had grown 'quite old' (np).

36 Zoe Jaques, *Children's Literature and the Posthuman: Animal, Environment, Cyborg* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 100.

Common, of child-rearing, and of cats – including Mog of course. This was the life she loved and drew.³⁷ In these books, Kerr creates a stability that she did not have as a girl; she had found a ‘relative normalcy’ that many child survivors strived for after the Holocaust.³⁸

For child survivors, this ‘relative normalcy’ was often balanced with ‘worrie[s] about how far to bring their past into their marriages and family homes, how much to say to their children as they grew, and how far to assume an additional burden of remembering when parents passed away.’³⁹ Kerr felt a responsibility not only to her own family, but also to the children who did not survive. In a speech delivered in Berlin in 1990, Kerr speaks of the moral need to remember these children, and to think of them often.⁴⁰ She reflects on the childhoods they might have led had they not been murdered and asks what books they might have written.⁴¹ Such reflections and questions in part determined the way in which she conducted her life, on and off the page. In the *Mog* volumes, Kerr presents a sort of Eden where a family and their cat can live in relative peace and harmony. Although the volumes are clearly set in a London suburb, the setting is somewhat like the childhood Berlin Kerr recalls in her speech in that it is a place without history.⁴²

This Eden is, however, not the only way in which Kerr’s childhood features in the *Mog* volumes. It is a fragile Eden that Kerr creates. As Louise Sylvester has observed, ‘always present in Kerr’s work for young children’ is a ‘sense of disruption and of imminent danger’ that must be overcome.⁴³ This is particularly evident in *Mog in the Dark*, in which Mog must escape

37 Eilidh Hargreaves, “‘This must have been one of her hardest trips’: Judith Kerr’s Son Matthew Kneale Remembers the Family’s Bittersweet Return to Germany,” *The Telegraph* (22 March 2020), <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/luxury/kids/must-have-one-hardest-trips-judith-kerrs-son-matthew-kneale/>>, accessed 18 May 2020.

38 Clifford, *Survivors*, 193.

39 *Ibid.*

40 Kerr, *Eine eingeweckte Kindheit*, 39.

41 *Ibid.*, 38.

42 *Ibid.*, 19.

43 Louise Sylvester, ‘A Knock at the Door: Reading Judith Kerr’s Picture Books in the Context of her Holocaust Fiction,’ *The Lion and the Unicorn*, 26/1 (2002), 23.

the terrifying birds and animals threatening to eat her for their supper in the garden that is transformed into a frightening space in her nightmare. In the 2013 BBC documentary about Kerr's life and works, *Hitler, the Tiger and Me*, Michael Rosen identifies 'will you be eaten' as a 'core fear' in many children's books and fairy tales, including Hansel and Gretel.⁴⁴ The documentary cutting from Rosen's discussion of Kerr's picture book to black-and-white film footage of train undercarriages implies a connection with the Holocaust. But Hansel and Gretel is not the only fairy tale that can be read as an intertext in the picture book. What Joanna Carey has described as the 'dusty pink roses, heavy with sleep, nodding off after a hot day' in the garden in which Mog, too, is close to sleep as she is faced with 'dark thoughts', also invoke *Sleeping Beauty*.⁴⁵ In this case, however, it is not the severing of the roses but Mog's troubled sleep that is like the princess's death-like sleep.

Here, it is helpful to pause and briefly consider a text by Eva Figs, who, like Kerr, fled Berlin with her family in the 1930s. In Figs' *Tales of Innocence and Experience: An Exploration* (2003), the writer uses *Sleeping Beauty* as an intertext to explore her trauma. The girl who sleeps for a hundred years in Figs' retelling has troubled dreams throughout this time.⁴⁶ When she wakes, the thorny briar that had 'strangl[ed] daylight and undermin[ed] the strong foundation' of the castle is 'trimmed but not uprooted: it had its uses'.⁴⁷ That the royal household 'was careful not to discuss their nightmares, and averted their eyes from windows which overlooked the surrounding countryside' suggests that the briar, although it had kept the family imprisoned, also shielded them from what took place beyond the castle walls.⁴⁸ The narrator does not say what this is, but in a tale by a Holocaust survivor she is most likely referring to that.

Like that of the girl in Figs' retelling, Mog's sleep is troubled. When she wakes everything seems as it was before, and Mog appears to be content

44 *Hitler, the Tiger and Me* [video] (BBC Imagine, 2013).

45 Carey, *Judith Kerr*, 76.

46 Eva Figs, *Tales of Innocence and Experience: An Exploration* (2004, London: Bloomsbury, [2003]), 154–5.

47 *Ibid.*, 154–5.

48 *Ibid.*, 155.

to be back in the safety of her home and looked after by her family. The book's title *Mog in the Dark* reads as a reference not only to the cat's nightmare but also to her ignorance. It is through her nightmare, however, that she learns about her fears and anxieties, and she wakes up knowing, like Sleeping Beauty. Significantly, the curtains are not drawn; the garden beneath the dark sky where her nightmare has played out remains visible. Nightmares are 'pervasive' in the *Mog* volumes and *When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit*, Sylvester observes, and it is through nightmares that the darker aspects of exile are dealt with.⁴⁹ Sylvester asks how far children can read the subtext of loss, exile, and the Holocaust in the picture books, if indeed such subject matter is appropriate for young children.⁵⁰ To my knowledge, there has been no empirical work with primary school aged children to test this hypothesis. But equally important questions circle around what we tell children, what they hear when we read these texts with them, and what Kerr as a child survivor is saying. Or, rather, what is it that the child survivor was told and heard when she was living through the Nazi era and what does this have in common with what she says – consciously and unconsciously – about living with the experience of childhood exile and knowledge of the Holocaust after this period? When we read Kerr's child-authored texts alongside her adult-authored ones, we can ask and answer different questions from the ones Sylvester poses, because of what the child-authored texts reveal about Kerr's childhood responses to events at the time.

Conclusion

'Pierre et Michelle' is among Judith Kerr's first iterations of her story of childhood exile, constructed while in flight from Nazi Germany and the atrocities of this era unfolded. This manuscript is a fictional account of Kerr's time in Nice in the mid-1930s when, in the early years of adolescence,

49 Sylvester, 'A Knock at the Door', 24.

50 *Ibid.*, 26.

she was separated from her parents, and it is also an early attempt to explore, on paper, ideas about death and what it means to be caused and feel grief. Kerr omitted her time in Nice from *When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit*, but the garden motif remains in her adult-authored fiction as a way of addressing death and the effects of exile and the Holocaust on her life.

This chapter, then, through the study of one of Kerr's child-authored texts, has shown how her story changes in adulthood. In so doing, it has also contributed to knowledge about childhood exile. While scholars working on Nazi-era childhood exile consider the emotional effects of displacement on children and explore a broad range of different types of exile, the mental remove, or what might be termed a form of inner emigration for children, from the world of totalitarianism is a little-explored phenomenon.⁵¹

The Kerr archive is unique in that it contains a significant number of texts pertaining to childhood exile from an entire life course, but the reading of child-authored texts alongside adult-authored ones does not have to be limited to those by a single author. As I set out in the beginning of this chapter, kinship readings can occur between texts by multiple authors from different life stages, and I would like to conclude this chapter by inviting all scholars interested in childhood exile to consider this approach so that we may reach a richer and more nuanced understanding of this phenomenon. Writing at a time when children across the globe continue to experience forced migration, it is vital that we find ways of providing displaced children with means to tell their narratives and continue to seek ways of understanding them.

51 For discussion of inner emigration and children's mental removes, as found in writing and drawing in the Nazi era, see Lucy Stone, *Childhood Exile Drawn and Redrawn: Judith Kerr's and Tomi Ungerer's Written and Pictorial Texts from and about the Nazi Era*, PhD thesis, Newcastle University, Newcastle upon Tyne (2022).

