Out of the Hitler time: growing up in exile

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In ‘The road from Damascus; children’s authors and the crossing of national boundaries’, Gillian Lathey points out that ‘[w]hatever their origins, cultural transitions in children’s books are as infinitely varied as the lives of those who write about them’.[1] For Judith Kerr, British children’s author and illustrator, who was born in Berlin in 1923, the cultural transitions described in her autobiographical trilogy, *Out of the Hitler time* (1994)[2] are very much informed by her personal experiences. As a 9-year-old German refugee, she was forced to leave her native land and cross linguistic, cultural and national boundaries during her childhood and adolescence. The forthright, public criticism of Nazism by her father, Alfred Kerr, a renowned writer, journalist and theatre critic,[3] coupled with the family’s Jewish origins, meant that the family had to flee Berlin just before Hitler came to power in 1933. So began a new and often unpredictable existence for young Kerr and her family, as political refugees moving first to German-speaking Switzerland, then to France before finally settling in England, where Kerr has remained ever since. As author and illustrator of the much loved children’s picturebooks, *The tiger who came to tea* (1968) and the *Mog* series, written between 1970 and 2002, Kerr’s work continues to delight young readers today.

Scholars debate as to whether or not her picturebooks should be read in light of the upheaval she experienced in her childhood. Louise Sylvester, for example, argues that ‘traces of Kerr’s traumatic childhood experiences may be found throughout her writing’ in contrast to Lathey’s suggestion that ‘the picturebooks and autobiographical fiction […] be viewed entirely separately’.[4] Other scholars discuss Kerr’s trilogy within the genre of Holocaust and war fiction and see in it valuable lessons about the past and a warning that ‘[i]gnorance of history is an invitation to tragedy’.[5] The first volume of *Out of the Hitler time*, entitled *When Hitler stole Pink Rabbit* (1971), has garnered widespread praise both in its original English and translated German versions, for its poignant and compassionate portrayal of the experiences of a Jewish child refugee.[6]

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[1] Gillian Lathey, ‘The road from Damascus: children’s authors and the crossing of national boundaries’ in M. Meek (ed.), *Children’s literature and national identity* (Stoke on Trent, 2001), p. 5.

[2] Judith Kerr, *Out of the Hitler time* (London, 1994). All citations from the trilogy will be from this edition, rather than from the three individually published volumes: *When Hitler stole Pink Rabbit* (London, 1971); *The other way round* (London, 1975); *A small person far away* (London, 1978). However, for the sake of clarity, all quotations will refer to the relevant novel title.

[3] Alfred Kerr, originally Kempner, (1867-1948) was nicknamed the ‘cultural pope’ (Kulturpapst) in interwar Germany, due to the enormous influence he wielded in matters of culture and literature, particularly as drama critic for a leading German newspaper, *Berliner Tageblatt* (September 1919-January 1933). He often used the opportunity in these articles to criticise the growing power of the Nazi party and repudiate their fascist ideology.

[4] 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), 17. Sylvester here refers to Gillian Lathey, *The impossible legacy. Identity and purpose in autobiographical children’s literature set in the Third Reich and the Second World War* (London, 1995), p. 33. Sylvester argues that the eponymous tiger in ‘*The tiger who came to tea*, does not observe the rules of civilized society and reveals Kerr’s underlying fears that, ‘a knock at the door offers real menace’ (Sylvester, ‘A knock at the door’, 23). In the same article, she points to the significance of the title of another of Kerr’s picture books, *Mog and Bunny* (1988) and how the illustrations throughout depict a pink toy rabbit (24). The same pink rabbit re-appears in another *Mog* tale, *Mog on Fox Night* (1993), underlining how ‘Kerr cannot help but return again and again to the trauma of being severed from the toy that she represents as the chief companion of … childhood’. (Sylvester, ‘A knock at the door’, 25).

[5] Judy Mitchell, ‘Children of the Holocaust’, *The English Journal*, 69:7 (1980), 18. See also Lydia Kokkola, ‘Holocaust narratives and the ethics of truthfulness’, *Bookbird. A Journal of International Children’s Literature,* 45:4 (2007), 5-12.

In this essay, I will discuss Kerr's trilogy from another angle, one that examines issues of identity around growing up in exile, loss of homeland and eventual homecoming (however short-lived the duration of return). This encompasses treatment of differing images of German identity and perceptions of diverse cultural identities, encountered and described by the protagonist Anna, as she and her family move from one country to another. Physical and psychological shifts, in migrating from one cultural and linguistic space to another, as described in *Out of the Hitler time*, can therefore be analysed in terms of self and the other. Questions of identity are notoriously complex, contested and multi-layered. Individuals, for example, can simultaneously identify with quite different groupings, be they ethnic or national or along age or gender lines. Furthermore, individual identification with particular groups is subject to permutation: at the beginning of *Out of the Hitler time*, Anna possesses both a German and Jewish identity; she is a child and a girl. However, over time, her identity and self-image changes, as will be discussed in more detail later. Group identity is described by Joep Leerssen as a balancing act, where cohesion within a particular group is more important than how each member of the group distinguishes themselves from one another. Nonetheless, differences, rather than similarities, are also emphasised to distinguish from the other and reinforce group identity.[7] Thus, as Anna and her family find themselves identified as outsiders in a variety of contexts, the bond between them strengthens, despite differences in their individual identities, characterized by gender or age. They distance themselves from those Germans who support Nazi Germany and increasingly identify themselves as Jewish refugees rather than as German citizens. For Anna and her brother Max, assimilation into their host cultures, through the acquisition of foreign languages and cultural practices, becomes a crucial part of their changing identity formation as they are disconnected from their identity of origin.

In examining issues of identity it is also important to take into consideration that *Out of the Hitler time* is neither a work of pure fiction nor wholly autobiographical but rather a fictionalised autobiography, where Kerr draws upon her own experiences without necessarily having to relate exact political and historical details as they happened. As Lathey argues in her study of autobiographical children's literature set in Nazi Germany and World War II, 'it is not […] carefully documented historical facts which […] writers wish to emphasise, but rather the *emotional* truth of childhood experience in a time of extreme stress and disorientation'. There is 'a need on the part of some writers to fictionalise in order to […] express feelings about the past without the impediment of having to achieve historical accuracy'.[8] Kerr's work certainly supports such an argument, demonstrating as it does, a greater concern with personal, everyday experiences of life in exile and family relations rather than political events of the time.[9] It is important to note too that Kerr chooses not to tell the story from the perspective of an adult/first person narrator, recalling events and emotions from the past but rather in the third person beginning with the voice of her alter ego Anna, a 9-year-old child. Such a narrative choice, which focalizes the story through a child protagonist, renders the experiences of growing up in exile more immediate. However, it also suggests a certain disconnection on the part of Kerr from her childhood self, 'a distancing of childhood which only appears to be resolved in the final volume'.[10]

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[6] *When Hitler stole Pink Rabbit* won the prestigious German Youth Literature Prize (*Deutscher Jugendliteraturpreis*) in 1974 and has often featured on school curricula both in Britain and (in German translation) in Germany.

[7] Manfred Beller & Joep Leerssen (ed.), *Imagology: the cultural construction and literary representation of national characters.* (Amsterdam, 2007), p. 337. Imagology is a domain of study within the discipline of comparative literature studies which examines literary representations of ethnic groups and nationalities.

[8] Lathey, *The impossible legacy*, p. 44.

[9] Kerr's trilogy has been criticised in some quarters for failing to address the history of Germany under Nazi rule in a more thorough and critical manner. See for example Zohar Shavit, *A past without shadow* (New York, 2005). Yet, such criticism seems unjustified when one considers that Kerr left Germany as a child in March 1933 before the Nazi party came to power and her story draws on her life experiences. The first novel is told from the perspective of a child who has an incomplete understanding of the events of the time. The content is adapted to suit a child readership being gently introduced to this historical period and its legacy.

Before proceeding with an analysis of *Out of the Hitler time*, I will outline the significance of each title of the trilogy. These highlight the different temporal stages in the protagonist's life and the shift from a child's to an adult's view of the experience of exile against the backdrop of Nazism, war and its aftermath. The first book of the trilogy, *When Hitler stole Pink Rabbit* is told from the perspective of Anna, the young heroine who, soon after her departure from Berlin, learns that the Nazis have confiscated her family home and all its contents. She imagines Hitler playing with her favourite toy, Pink Rabbit, which she had left behind and is now irretrievable. 'For a moment she was terribly sad about Pink Rabbit' and although she laughed at the thought of Hitler cuddling her cherished toy, 'some tears had come into her eyes and were running down her cheeks all at the same time'.[11] This irrevocable loss of Pink Rabbit symbolises the loss of her carefree childhood but also, it later transpires, the loss of her German citizenship/identity. In the second book, *The other way round* (1975), we follow the fortunes of Anna's family in war-time London, after their experiences in Switzerland and France as described in the first book. In the second volume, it is not their parents, but rather an adolescent Anna and her older and much admired brother Max (modelled closely on Kerr's older brother Michael), who increasingly gain independence in this new, if at times precarious, environment. The children are now capable of providing their parents with a much-needed sense of security. This reflects both Anna's and Max's growing maturity and independence, moving from childhood into young adulthood, '[n]ow I suppose it's the other way round […] the only times *they* don't feel like refugees is when they're with us'.[12] It implies, for their parents at least, that 'home' has been reduced to their family circle since their move to England and, with it, their increased reliance on their children. In the final book, entitled *A small person far away* (1978), Anna, now a young married woman living in post-war London, returns rather reluctantly to Berlin to nurse her widowed mother. In Berlin, she is confronted by her suppressed past identity and lingering memories of her childhood re-surface. The small person, speaking in German, seems so far removed from whom she has become, 'Somewhere very far away, a small person in boots was running up some steps, shouting, "Ist Mami da?"'.[13]

Questions of identity are central to this work from a variety of perspectives: how the four main characters change; the permutations of their familial roles; and the changes to their social and financial status as they move from one linguistic and cultural space to another. With each crossing and re-crossing of a national boundary, Anna's sense of self-identity evolves. So too do her images of the other, which initially tend to be influenced by stereotypical impressions, before she becomes better acquainted with the new country and culture to which she moves. Language acquisition also plays a crucial role in the process of successful integration into and understanding of another culture. Since Kerr experienced the challenges and frustrations of learning more than one new language in her childhood, her descriptions of Anna's attempts to grapple with French, and her ultimate success, in tandem with her adaptation to French culture, are very realistic and, at times, humorous. Lathey reflects on Kerr's 'insights into the functional, everyday inconveniences of learning a new language', reminding us that 'learning a language is an adaptation of mind and linguistic sensibility, and not just the acquisition of vocabulary and functional phrases'.[14] This adaptation of a cultural and linguistic sensibility by Anna's family will form the main focus of this essay, drawing chiefly on the first volume of the trilogy. It provides the richest source for analysis of questions of identity and diverse cultural encounters. Commentary on the subsequent volumes will be included to a lesser extent.

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[10] Lathey, *The impossible legacy*, p. 73. Lathey also refers to Kerr's description of her childhood during a lecture in Berlin on 7 October 1990 as 'frozen in time, inaccessible and without connection to her present self'.

[11] Kerr, *When Hitler stole Pink Rabbit*, p. 65.

[12] Kerr, *The other way round*, p. 577.

[13] Kerr, *A small person far away*, p. 810.

At the beginning of *When Hitler stole Pink Rabbit*, Anna is leading a happy untroubled childhood in an affluent suburb of Berlin where her main preoccupations concern schoolwork and friends. Although it is soon evident that the novel opens in 1933, on the eve of Hitler's accession to power, Anna, as a typical 9-year-old, is not much concerned about politics and the rise of the Nazi party. Her parents are wealthy and respected members of the Berlin intelligentsia, leading a cultivated and seemingly carefree existence. We learn that Anna's father is a famous writer, her mother an accomplished musician and they live in a big house attended upon by servants, unencumbered by financial worries or domestic duties. As Anna later recalls, '[e]very day while Papa wrote in his study, Mama had played and even composed'.[15]

Anna's identity as a child growing up and going to school in Berlin is at first unambiguously German. However, on the way home from school one afternoon, she casually mentions to her friend Elsbeth that she is also Jewish. It is evident from her friend's surprised reaction that this Jewish aspect of Anna's identity was until then unknown to Elsbeth. Quite innocently they agree that she doesn't 'look Jewish', drawing on a familiar negative stereotype of the Jewish hooked nose as grounds for believing that Anna may not be correct in claiming her Jewish identity after all. Their familiarity, as children, with this image of the Jew, promoted extensively through Nazi propaganda, indicates not just the prevalence but also the unquestioning acceptance of such a stereotype.[16]Anna hardly seems to know what being a Jew signifies, due to her family's lack of religious observations or practices. She surmises that it has to do with family background, '[I]t's because my mother and father are Jews',[17] and concedes that until her father had mentioned it only the previous week, she had never given it much thought. It would appear that in the face of growing anti-Semitic sentiment, Anna's father, as a staunch opponent of Nazism, now wishes his family to become aware of and affirm this aspect of their identity so that they no longer regard themselves simply as German but as German Jews. 'My father said […[we were Jews and no matter what happened my brother and I must never forget it'.[18] The 'imagined community'[19] of Germans as a unified *Volk* is thus fractured. Anna and her family, like many other excluded groups, are repudiated by the Nazi regime (for spurious ideological reasons) because they no longer conform to the prevailing discourse and image of what constituted wholesome German identity. Anna's sense of identity already begins to be shaped by an awareness of being somehow perceived as a stranger within, in line with the Kristevan formulation: 'Who is the stranger? He, who is not part of the group, he who "*is not*", the *Other*'.[20]

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[14] Gillian Lathey, 'Where Britain meets "the continent": language and cultural exchange in fiction', *Children's Literature in Education,* 32: 4 (2001), 300.

[15] Kerr, *A small person far away*, p. 662.

[16] The stereotype of the Jewish hooked nose has been documented as far back as the 13th century in Europe. Klaus Hoedl, 'Physical Characteristics of the Jews', *Jewish Studies at the Central European University: Public Lectures, 1996-1999,* (Budapest, 2000), 59-70. Although appearing five years after 1933 (the opening date in *When Hitler stole Pink Rabbit*), a widely-read, children's picturebook *Der Giftpilz* (literal translation: The poisonous mushroom), published by Julius Streicher in Nuremberg in 1938, is a good example of such anti-Semitic propaganda. Its illustrated description of a school child being taught to draw the Jewish hooked nose like the number 6 on a black board, highlights the systematic way in which children were indoctrinated with negative stereotypical images of the Jews in Nazi Germany.

[17] Kerr, *When Hitler stole Pink Rabbit*, p. 9.

[18] Ibid., p. 8.

[19] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined communities: reflections on the origins and spread of nationalism* (London, 1991), p. 4.

This 'otherness' or Jewish aspect of the family's identity becomes increasingly foregrounded once they leave their home in Germany and move to Switzerland. On the eve of their departure to what is to be their first destination of exile, Anna is excited rather than anxious about the prospect of what she perceives to be the start of a thrilling adventure. Similar to her mother and their close family friend, affectionately known as Onkel Julius, she believes that it will be a short stay of no more than six months, a holiday rather than a flight from imminent danger. From her imaginings of life in Switzerland, it is apparent that she has but a sketchy knowledge of this country and its inhabitants, apart from some vague, stereotypical notions about mountains and a rural way of life ('a house in the mountains […] goats […] or was it cows?').[21] Emer O'Sullivan identifies such topographical cultural stereotypes as an important feature of imagology, citing the Alps as one of the most common associations with Switzerland in children's literature.[22] Although Anna and her family have crossed a national border from Germany into neutral Switzerland, they are still living in a German-speaking land. This, to an important extent, facilitates initial adaptation to their life as political refugees. At the outset, Anna seems to view her new identity as a refugee in a positive light, rather than being troubled by it: 'It seemed rather fine and adventurous to be a refugee, to have no home and not to know where one was going to live.'[23] Life in exile and departure from Germany does appear at first to be more akin to a holiday, as the family stays in a luxurious hotel in Zurich and enjoys idyllic lake outings. Anna's father is also, at this point, still optimistic that he can continue to earn a lucrative living as a writer and critic. A few weeks later, when these hopes are dashed, due to a ban in Nazi Germany on printing anything he writes, the family's finances become a source of concern. Eventually, Anna's parents deem it wiser to move from cosmopolitan Zurich and their expensive hotel to a more modest guesthouse run by the friendly Zwirn family, located further down the lake in the heart of the Swiss countryside.

It is only at this stage, once the 'holiday' period is over, that Anna appears to encounter in earnest, the otherness of Switzerland and its inhabitants, most notably through her initial difficulty in understanding the local Swiss German dialect, which she soon masters. Everyday life must continue, even in exile and Anna begins to attend the village school. There she observes that, unlike her teachers in Berlin, the Swiss schoolmaster Herr Graupe 'was not a very good teacher of the more conventional subjects … [but] was a remarkable yodeller',[24] an allusion to the stereotypical image of the yodelling Swiss. She finds the behaviour of her new schoolmates alienating, notably their preference to go barefoot to school and their inscrutable and unspoken rules regarding interactions between boys and girls. When Anna both inadvertently and intentionally breaks these rules she is snubbed by the girls in the class while the boys chase her and throw stones at her. Such behaviour suggests that she is rejected for being different, a misunderstood outsider. However, when she is given to understand that Swiss country boys demonstrate their admiration by throwing things at the object of their affections, she feels more reassured.

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[20] Julia Kristeva, *Étrangers à nous-mêmes* (Paris, 1988), p. 139. Emphasis is in original. Translation is my own.

[21] Kerr, *When Hitler stole Pink Rabbit*, p. 23.

[22] Emer O'Sullivan, 'Imagology meets children's literature', *International Research in Children's Literature*, 4:1 (2011), 8. In this article O'Sullivan advocates analysis of children's literature (both text and image) through an imagological lens. See also footnote 7.

[23] Kerr, *When Hitler stole Pink Rabbit* , p. 93.

[24] Ibid., p. 76.

Thus, even if Anna's otherness as an outsider, an exile in a foreign land, is underlined here by her failure to understand and decipher these Swiss codes of behaviour, nevertheless, she, along with her family, appear to be accepted locally and they generally enjoy living in this 'pleasant atmosphere'.[25]

This convivial atmosphere is soured by the arrival of another German family from Munich, with two children of a similar age to Max and Anna, who book in as holidaymakers to the same guesthouse. At first Gudrun and Siegfried happily play with Max and Anna, as well as with the guesthouse owners' the Zwirns' own children, Vreneli and Franz. It is not long, however, before the new arrivals are forbidden by their parents to play or even speak with Max and Anna because of their Jewish identity. Subsequently Vreneli's and Franz's hesitation in choosing which group of German children they would prefer to play with, prompts Anna's father to exclaim: '"I think Vreneli and Franz will have to decide who their friends are […] Swiss neutrality is all very well but it can be taken too far".'[26] With the parents' involvement, either by forbidding the children to play together or by commenting on their allegiances, it is evident that even play and choice of playmates can be politicized and polarized in this particular historical context. Although Anna's father refers to Gudrun and Siegfried as Nazis, Anna instead refers to them as the Germans, suggesting that they are of a different nationality to her and indicating a distancing from her original identity. This growing disconnection from Germany and her German identity is further reinforced by a conversation Anna overhears, in horror, between her mother and grandmother concerning the tragic fate of a Jewish professor in a concentration camp. Her instinctive response is to suppress the memory of this conversation and she consciously decides that '[i]n future she would try never to think about Germany at all'.[27] This reference to the treatment of Jews in Germany and Anna's horrified reaction are a reminder that, however agreeable life in exile may appear to be on the surface, disturbing news of the political situation in Germany and Nazi atrocities, although not directly experienced, hover in the background.

As time progresses there is a growing realisation that a return to Germany is an impossibility for Anna and her family. Six months later, as Anna celebrates her tenth birthday on a steamer boat on Lake Zurich, her father informs her they will soon leave Switzerland for France where he hopes to find more opportunities for journalistic work. From the moment that they alight on the platform in a train station in Paris, Anna finds her first encounter with France and the French overwhelmingly alien:

> All around her there were people shouting, greeting each other, talking, laughing. Their lips moved quickly, their mobile faces kept pace with them. They shrugged, embraced each other and waved their hands to emphasise what they were saying – and she could not understand a word. For a moment […] she felt quite lost.[28]

Here again, Anna's initial impressions allude to stereotypical images, this time of French volubility and excitable Latin temperaments.[29] Her sense of alienation, of being an exile in a foreign land is accentuated by the fact that Anna has not just crossed a national boundary but a linguistic one, where not only the culture but also the language is unfamiliar to her. With the passage of time, Anna soon views the unfamiliarity of her new surroundings in a more positive light. Many of these favourable observations of Parisian life are derived from her sensory impressions of this new culture. She comments for example on the ‘peculiar smell’ in the metro, which was ‘a mixture of garlic and French cigarettes’, adding that she ‘rather liked it’. If the sights, smells and bustling energy appeal to her senses, she is a little more circumspect about the ‘prospect of going to a school where no one spoke anything but French’ and she finds the idea ‘rather daunting’.[30] Her brother Max finds the language barrier even more of a trial, possibly because he is older than Anna and is more self-conscious. Anna notices that he tries to fit in by changing his dress and hairstyle to look more like his French schoolmates. Once they master the French language, which they find frustrating and difficult at first, they both excel in school and feel less like outsiders. The moment of Anna’s linguistic and psychological shift, when she no longer speaks French like a foreigner but quite effortlessly, is an important milestone: ‘[O]ne day her whole world changed […] The words just seemed to arrive from nowhere in perfect French, without her having to think at all […] It was as though she had suddenly found out she could fly’.[31] This underscores Lathey’s point that, ‘awareness that language is the key to the adoption of a new identity in the country of exile is a central theme’[32] in Kerr’s trilogy.

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[25] Ibid., p. 68.

[26] Ibid., p. 101.

[27] Ibid., p. 114.

[28] Ibid., p. 133.

[29] Leerssen, for example, documents how the word 'garrulous' was used to describe the French from the early Enlightenment period in Germany. M. Beller & J. Leerssen (ed.), *Imagology*, p. 156.

Once they attain fluency in French, Max and Anna adapt so well to their new life in Paris that on their return to France after summer holidays spent at the invitation of the Zwirn family in Switzerland, they feel like they are coming home. This further emphasizes their continuing estrangement from their homeland and German identity. Sporadic news from an increasingly despondent Onkel Julius, back in Berlin, who eventually kills himself due to his unbearable existence in Nazi Germany, coupled with the ever-growing number of exiles arriving from Germany to Paris with tales of Nazi atrocities, ensure that the sinister development of political events in Germany continues to cast a long shadow. Anna’s father, in particular, is affected by this and in their new, more cramped living arrangements, Anna is only too aware of the frequency of his nightmares. Life for Anna’s parents is more taxing in different ways, despite the fact that they both speak French and make new friends. Apart from the enormous changes in their physical surroundings – a new country, a new city and a tiny apartment rather than the large house with servants that they were used to in Berlin, or the comfortable guesthouse by Lake Zurich – they must also adapt to severely straitened financial circumstances. For the first time, Anna’s mother must cook for her family and mend their clothes. Her father finds it difficult to get work, despite his prestigious reputation and he seems at a loss to know what to do to earn a living, apart from writing. Anna notes how her mother worries constantly about money. Her parents simply cannot adjust as well as their children to their new life, perhaps partly due to their older age but also to the fact that they are regarded as ‘the two most impractical people in the world’.[33] The change in social and financial status, added to their increased identification as part of an ever-growing community of Jewish refugees, stripped of German nationality, underlines the extent to which their identity has changed: from wealthy and respected German intellectuals to impoverished Jewish refugees. That they are also perceived as the latter by others in their immediate circle, is highlighted in an unpleasant confrontation with their landlady about non-payment of rent, when she exclaims that Hitler was right to get rid of ‘people like them’.[34]

After two years in exile in Paris, Anna’s family is given the opportunity to improve their financial situation by moving to London to begin afresh. Feelings of upheaval and alienation are experienced once again by Anna, who remarks how ‘[i]t seemed strange to be leaving for yet another country'.[35] Like Max, she is saddened at the prospect of having to leave their adopted home in France. On her arrival in England (described at the very end of *When Hitler stole Pink Rabbit*), her first impressions of her future home and its inhabitants are not particularly positive, reflecting her reluctance to move and start a new life in a foreign country all over again. Anna finds the English to be a 'very quiet people' and 'the landscape is anonymous and dark', 'it was cold' and their cousin Otto who meets them off the train in London solemnly advises them to 'always wear woollen underclothes'. Anna notes that it is damp and 'her nostrils are filled with the smell of rubber from the mackintoshes which nearly all the English people were wearing'.[36] She remarks too on the polite behaviour of the English at the train station, who do not push or shove like the Germans and the French. As the volume concludes, and as Anna and her family are being whisked off in a taxi to begin a new life as political refugees in England, she reflects on her childhood – moving from Germany to Switzerland and then to France – and surmises that '[s]ome things had been difficult, but it had always been interesting and often funny […]. As long as they were together she could never have a difficult childhood'.[37] This brief summary of two and a half years spent in exile would seem to minimize the very real trauma of losing her home and language, in addition to the disruption of her hitherto secure childhood. Perhaps it stems from the sense of guilt, commonly experienced by Holocaust survivors, that Kerr underplays this aspect so as to counter the few descriptions of self-pity to be found in this volume, such as Anna's dismay at losing Pink Rabbit.[38]

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[30] Kerr, *When Hitler stole Pink Rabbit,* p. 142, p. 152.

[31] Ibid., pp. 218-219

[32] Lathey, *The impossible legacy*, pp. 96-97.

[33] Kerr, *When Hitler stole Pink Rabbit* , p. 232.

[34] Ibid., p. 252.

The next novel in the trilogy, *The other way round*, brings the story of Anna and her family forward by almost five years. Our protagonist is no longer a child but an adolescent growing up in war-time London. Max, and to a lesser extent, Anna, again find it easier than their parents to integrate into life in a new country. This can in part be attributed to their successful acquisition of the English language. We learn that the brother and sister converse in English rather than in German when alone. Anna is described as speaking like a native English speaker and '[a]fter four years of public school and nearly two terms at Cambridge, Max looked, sounded and felt English. It was maddening for him not to be legally English as well.'[39] The fact that Max is not legally English, although culturally and linguistically he appears to have wholeheartedly adopted this identity, has serious implications when he is interned for four months as an enemy alien while waiting to become a naturalized British citizen.[40] Thus, on an official level at least, he remains an outsider due to his German background and in the given political climate is treated with suspicion. Anna, despite sounding English, finds it more difficult to adapt to life in England than in France. She nostalgically recalls that in Paris'[s]he felt as though she belonged […] not like a refugee'.[41] This sense of alienation is compounded by the challenges of adolescence and all the problems and dilemmas that can accompany this phase, such as crippling shyness and a burning desire to conform, so that at times Anna is no longer sure where she belongs. When she develops a crush on her art teacher, she fervently wishes that she were English in order to understand the subtleties of his questions and not appear foolish. Thus, once again, issues of language and identity are shown in this volume, to be inextricably linked.

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[35] Ibid., p. 264.
[36] Ibid., p. 267, p. 269, p. 270.
[37] Ibid., p. 272.
[38] Lathey, *The impossible legacy*, p. 146.
[39] Kerr, *The other way round*, p. 292.
[40] For more information on British internment of aliens and political dissenters on the Isle of Man, known as the British army defence regulation18b, see Connery Chappell, *Island of barbed wire: the remarkable story of World War Two internment on the Isle of Man* (London, 2005).
[41] Kerr, *The other way round*, p. 301.

External factors linked to the political times also play a role in hindering Anna's smoother adaptation to English life. World War II has broken out and 'France, like Germany had become a black hole on the map, a place you could no longer think about'.[42] One of the consequences of the Nazi occupation of France was that many more refugees now flocked to England, one of the few remaining countries not under Hitler's sway, and it was difficult to be regarded as anything other than a stateless refugee. For Anna, this signifies further disconnection from her German identity. Her parents, along with the many other refugees fleeing war-torn Europe, live in relentless poverty in the run-down Hotel Continental in central London, in constant fear of German air raids. As Anna's father speaks little English and is no longer able to publish in either German or French, he is now 'a writer without a language'[43] and her mother bitterly resents having to constantly worry about family finances. Although assimilation is most difficult for the family in England, it is English citizenship they all adopt in the end. For Max and Anna, this new identity will be easier to accept as they are younger, more open to change and less isolated than their parents. As Max remarks to Anna, '[y]ou and I will be all right, but they'll never belong. Not here. Not anywhere I suppose'.[44] However, against the backdrop of the horrors of the Holocaust they so narrowly missed, Anna's father is philosophical rather than bitter about their changed identity and social situation; 'The four of us are together. After seven years of emigration, perhaps one shouldn't ask for more luck than that.'[45]

In *A small person far away* the last book in the trilogy, Anna and Max have married into English families in the post-war period and to all intents and purposes appear to be thoroughly English themselves. Yet, when Anna is obliged to return to her native Berlin for an extended stay to look after her widowed mother who has ended up in hospital after a suicide attempt, she is catapulted back to her earliest memories and identity as a German child. This re-crossing of a cultural and linguistic border is the catalyst for deeply embedded and forgotten childhood experiences and memories to resurface: 'She did not remember the streets, only the feel of them';[46] '[t]he conversation slid from English into German and back again in a way that she found curiously soothing'.[47] Time and again, in the descriptions of Anna's stay in Berlin, we witness how visceral these memories are, despite her initial feelings of reluctance and unease with re-engaging with German language and culture. Since her childhood in exile, Anna had attempted to suppress this aspect of her identity along with the stories of horror from Nazi Germany. Now, as an adult, she finally comes to terms with her buried past on a last symbolic visit to her old family home as a 'young Englishwoman in a thin tweed coat'[48] before her return to her adopted home in England to start a new family of her own. This may appear a neat and satisfactory ending to a story of a life full of change and upheaval, of disconnection and alienation and to some extent it is. Nevertheless, even if the trilogy is in some regards 'too neatly Freudian in its resolution [with] the recovery of the childhood self during a visit to the childhood home',[49] Anna remains resolutely English and has no regrets about returning to her adopted homeland. Likewise, she is determined that she will not teach her unborn child her own mother tongue, as 'it wouldn't be the same'.[50]

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[42] Ibid., p. 351.
[43] Ibid., p. 300.
[44] Ibid., p. 576.
[45] Ibid., p. 290.
[46] Kerr, *A small person far away*, p. 637.
[47] Ibid., p. 639.
[48] Ibid., p. 772.
[49] Lathey, *The impossible legacy*, p. 87.
[50] Kerr, *A small person far away*, p. 808.

As a migration narrative in both directions: Germany to England and back again via Switzerland and France, *Out of the Hitler time* describes encounters with different nations and their inhabitants against the backdrop of Nazi Germany, the Holocaust, World War II and the plight of Jewish exiles. Political exile affects Anna, her brother Max and her parents in different ways and they are challenged, not just by upheaval and poverty, but also in their negotiation of cultural and linguistic boundaries. The prime importance of the family as a safe haven from these challenges is reiterated throughout the trilogy. As Anna reminds her family at one point, '[i]f you haven't got a home, you've got to be with your people'.[51] This is a fate, reminiscent of that of the Wandering Jew, a figure to which Anna compares herself at one point in *The other way round*.[52] The family bond is indeed strengthened by their shared trials, adventures and experiences. Ultimately, the message in *Out of the Hitler time* is a positive one. Kerr's trilogy not only sheds light on a Jewish child's experiences of exile in a particular historical epoch for readers who grew up after World War II but also encourages empathy in contemporary readers for the plight of refugees in other contexts.[53]

Drawing so closely on her own experiences infuses Kerr's trilogy with authenticity so that she genuinely achieves what she describes as her aim in writing this story based on her memories, 'I wanted 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 […] grow up.'[54] In *Out of the Hitler time,* she re-establishes a connection with the past experiences of a childhood in exile. Her writings portray how the crossing of linguistic and physical boundaries, encounters with other cultures and disconnection from one's country, language and culture of origin can have a lasting and profound effect.[55] In light of Kerr's experiences, Sylvester's assertion in her article, referred to at the beginning of this essay, that 'Kerr's picturebooks for young children cannot be separated from her other writing'[56] is convincing. We are challenged to reconsider Kerr's life's work as a way, both consciously and subconsciously, of dealing with the trauma of exile, an experience re-echoed in seemingly innocuous images of tea-drinking tigers and cuddly pink rabbits.

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[51] Kerr, *When Hitler stole Pink Rabbit*, p. 255.

[52] Kerr, *The other way round*, p. 317. The Wandering Jew, according to medieval legend, was a Jew who mocked Jesus on the way to his Crucifixion and, as a result, was cursed to wander the earth until the Day of Judgement.

[53] As part of an exhibition on Kerr's life and work, entitled, 'Tiger, Mog and Pink Rabbit: a Judith Kerr retrospective', organised by Seven Stories National Centre for Children's Books in Newcastle upon Tyne, England (2010), a group of children from nearby Christchurch primary school were filmed as they discussed issues of war and displacement with Kerr and their continuing relevance today. Some of the children filmed also came to England as refugees. The two-part film, entitled *When Judith found pink rabbit*, can be viewed at: http://exhibitions.sevenstories.org.uk/18/film.

[54] Kerr, *Out of the Hitler time*, author's note.

[55] Kerr's continuing preoccupation with her past has been most recently highlighted in her latest autobiographical book, *Judith Kerr's creatures* (London, 2013), published to celebrate her 90th birthday in June 2013. It is a beautifully illustrated retrospective of her life, with a particular focus on her adult life and work as a children's author and illustrator.

[56] Sylvester, 'A knock at the door', 28.