

Introduction

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But what, then, is a naturalistic writer for children to do? Can he present the child with evil and an insoluble problem . . . To give a child a picture of . . . gas chambers . . . or famines or the cruelties of a psychotic patient, and say, “Well, baby, this is how it is, what are you going to make of it?”—that is surely unethical. If you suggest that there is a “solution” to these monstrous facts, you are lying to the child. If you insist that there isn’t, you are overwhelming him with a load he is not strong enough yet to carry.

—Ursula Le Guin, *The Language of the Night*, 1992¹

[A]ll of the best children’s literature, if anyone has been paying attention, hinges on betrayal, the heartlessness of nature, and death.

—Laura van den Berg, “The Pitch” 2019²

This volume concerns literary and other media that describe and mediate children’s experience and knowledge of atrocity. It is, we hope, not redundant to note here that many children do experience (per the OED) “savage enormity [and] horrible or heinous wickedness” both on a global scale, as victims of mass catastrophic events, and within the often-hidden space of the domestic sphere. In many cases, as with the United States’ program of separating migrant children from their parents, atrocity is often orchestrated on a global scale, but its effects, particularly for those who lack the

knowledge to place their suffering in context, are private and specific. As author Gavriel Savit argues, “human beings encounter the same problems throughout all phases of life”—trauma does not discriminate by age.³ As the quote from Ursula Le Guin above suggests, however, managing the confluence of childhood in and atrocity in fiction is a difficult, if not impossible, task; parsing the experience of catastrophe through a child protagonist and/or in a format that a child can understand is an undertaking fraught with pitfalls.

Many critics have argued that literature is an eminently suitable site to play out the childhood experience of atrocity. Bruno Bettelheim asserts that fairy stories for children should include evil acts for children to understand and process—that working through fictional traumas is a means to rehearse the working-through of real traumas.⁴ His argument centers on works created for child readers but is equally applicable to works created for adult readers who may still be coming to terms with childhood trauma.⁵ The literature of childhood, as Kenneth B. Kidd similarly observes, is not insulated from violence:

Fairy tales are considered potentially traumatizing because of their sometimes severe scenes and themes (violence, infanticide, child abandonment) even as they are also positioned as therapeutic or cathartic. Picturebooks, including those of Maurice Sendak, are increasingly focused on the child’s experience of and responses to loss and trauma. The adolescent novel [. . .] trends toward traumatic subjects in more ways than one. Even Golden Age aftertexts move toward as much as away from certain kinds of trauma writing, especially sexual-abuse narratives.⁶

The literature of childhood, then, has not historically served to insulate potential child readers, but to present potential sources of trauma in a controlled context. A child who has learned about death through literature has some context for understanding the death of a grandparent or pet, whereas a child who has never been introduced to death through fiction must make sense of it as they cope with grief when it springs unexpected and uninvited into their own life. An adult, similarly, may turn to a work of literature, and in particular literature that centers on a child’s experience, to provide order to their own grief.

Many, echoing Le Guin, add a note of caution; as Lydia Kokkola, among others, argues, if literature of atrocity is not presented in an appropriate context, child readers may fail to disentangle the truth of its setting

from the fictionality of its specifics. Children, as Hester Burton argues, are not less intelligent than adults but possess less knowledge.⁷ This lack of experience can lead to a failure to distinguish between works that seek to describe a historical object and those that are pure invention; children often mistake fact for fiction and fiction for fact. This is even more fraught when a work moves between the two, offering fictional characters operating in an environment that is sketched from true events.

Fiction, we may then reasonably conclude, is an effective supplement to historical studies. This assertion is not limited to children's literature but can extend to works for adults that include child protagonists. Whether we imagine the experiences of Florence Horner through Nabokov's *Lolita* (1955) or the experience of the children indoctrinated with Nazi ideology in *Jojo Rabbit* (2019), narrative can make history personal: rather than simply stating what occurred, literature can imbue the historical object with a sense of felt experience. Indeed, child focalizers are, as many of the chapters in this volume suggest, a convenient way to introduce readers to a historical event because the child, like the reader or viewer, lacks the knowledge required to put the events being described into context.

Literature presents us with the moral conundrums and impossible decisions experienced by historical subjects and, as such, can be a vehicle for the exploration of atrocity. We can read the facts of the Holocaust, but these facts are made all the more vivid by Primo Levi's pained recollection of secretly sharing a water supply with an Italian compatriot; Elie Wiesel's horror upon seeing Akiba Drumer abandoned by his son to die in the snow in the death march from Auschwitz, only later to find himself resenting his own father's plaintive, dying, cries; the contrived and cruel Nazi methods of placing some Jewish prisoners in positions of power over others, crafting a hierarchy that pits victim against victim for so-called privileges. As Paula T. Connolly argues, similarly, "fiction often becomes a way not simply to 'story' a scene of slavery but to allow authors to imagine the lives that could not be fully expressed in antebellum slave narratives, particularly the lives of those who did not escape or survive slavery."⁸ Fiction can bring the historical object to life, as it were—and it can provide a controlled space to explore what otherwise might be emotionally damaging.

Fiction, then, can manage a reader's experience and suggest means of interpretation, and so an effective literature of atrocity can, as Kokkola argues, "provide a new focus" for the reader's "grief."⁹ It is perhaps these qualities that led to the outpouring of Holocaust literature for children from the 1980s onward, prompting Kidd to comment that "there seems to

be consensus now that children's literature is the most rather than the least appropriate form for trauma work."¹⁰

And yet narrative can also distort our understanding of a historical object. Connolly observes, for example, that children's stories that concern slavery often avoid direct representations of violence. In some instances, such as *The Child's Story of the Negro* (1938) by Jane Dabney Shackelford, Connolly argues, such editing threatens to contribute to the erasure of enslavement from American cultural consciousness. As Kokkola asserts (and Connolly would no doubt concur), attempts to fictionalize atrocity bear a "greater moral obligation to be historically accurate."¹¹ To omit the worst parts of the transatlantic slave trade, the Holocaust, the Rwandan genocide, or similar acts of widescale violence is to misrepresent those events and to present a sanitized version that is simply untrue.

Conversely, to include the horrors of atrocity in full may also be detrimental. In the case of children's literature, violent material will be upsetting for some young readers, but this, of course, is not the only possible outcome; when Ursula Le Guin writes in the quote that opens this introduction of "a load [that the child reader] is not strong enough yet to carry," we might imagine a range of possible ways in which a child might signal their failure to bear such a burden. The danger is not only of children being upset by violent content, but also of them reacting with merriment or playful reenactment; children, as J. M. Barrie elegantly asserts, are "gay and innocent and heartless."¹² One is reminded of the famous incident, for example, from 1994 of students from Castlemont High School, Oakland, being ejected from a screening of *Schindler's List* (1993) for laughing during the film. This may be a case of students responding negatively to the tone of the work with which they are engaged. As David L. Russell argues, "Children's books about the Holocaust are unabashedly didactic—they have an overt moral purpose and because of that they are delivered with the same fervor as those Puritan tales of James Janeway or Benjamin Keath that many modern readers find so startling."¹³ Geoffrey Short reports that when they are first introduced to the Holocaust, children often either blame victims or suggest that the perpetrators may have been justified in their actions.¹⁴ The danger, in other words, is not simply of child readers being upset, but of them reacting in a manner, or of receiving a message, other than that which the creator intended.

There is evidence to suggest that, while our fears about exposing children to the worst of our history may not be unfounded, they may be exaggerated. Jeffrey L. Derevensky and Ursula F. Sherman, for example, both

describe classrooms in which children aged ten and older successfully engaged with Holocaust literature.¹⁵ Both report that the children they worked with, counter to Short's arguments, grasped the key events and facts of what occurred. Their work suggests that our concern with potentially negative outcomes may obscure the far more significant benefits of teaching atrocity through children's literature

Kokkola asserts that children should be exposed to atrocity through literature but that the process should be mediated by an adult to avoid undesirable responses. She further acknowledges that withholding information can lead to confusion but sees potential for literature that omits certain information and relies on the presence of an adult to elaborate on what is implied or otherwise mediate the child reader's experience. Connolly echoes this assertion, noting instances where the psychological and physical violence of enslavement is implied in certain texts without being depicted directly, communicating the brutality of enslavement while, to use a favorite term from the discipline, "sparing the child." Both Kokkola and Connolly advocate for a kind of fiction that leaves productive gaps (what Perry Nodelman calls a "shadow text") to which the work alludes but does not make explicit.¹⁶ Kokkola argues that "The events of the Holocaust are simply too large to be intelligently condensed into a single narrative. Expecting adults to mediate a child reader's comprehension only becomes irresponsible when the resulting text is incomprehensible without such intervention."¹⁷ She advocates for texts that are complete narratives but call attention to their omissions, prompting the child reader to approach an adult for answers. Such a strategy is useful for engaging a child's curiosity but, perhaps dangerously, assumes the presence of an adult who is capable of providing the words that the text omits.

The tension between these two positions—the need to inform and the need to protect—lies at the heart of many discussions of atrocity and the literature of childhood. As Kidd argues: "On the one hand, we continue to believe that children should be protected from trauma, but increasingly we also seem to expect that trauma must be experienced in order to be understood, so that books about trauma can only be effective if they frighten and even endanger the child."¹⁸ The question, to return once again to Le Guin's quote above, seems impossible to resolve; to suggest a solution is to lie, yet to refuse to offer a solution is cruel. In *Sparing the Child*, Hamida Bosmajian offers a taxonomy of sorts for strategies to mitigate the experience of trauma through fiction such as the reader proxy who witnesses but is not subject to violence, or the "trading places" scenario in which the protagonist experiences only temporary danger before a return to normal. Such strategies

can be effective, yet by mitigating the trauma they risk, as with the reliance on an adult who can “fill the gaps,” misrepresenting their subject.¹⁹

One might argue, of course, that interventions are important, even at the risk of cruelty, because there is a significant danger of adults deliberately misinforming children. As Connolly persuasively argues, children’s literature has historically served as a political tool and a battleground over the ways in which young people understand the world. The 1838 publication *A Slave’s Friend*, for example, encourages readers to become politically active by petitioning their congressman, arranging fundraisers, and forming antislavery societies for young people. Literature, however, is a weapon anyone can wield:

for slavery proponents, children’s literature offered potentially limitless possibilities both to protect their racialised view of nationhood and to justify their position [. . .] Despite the obvious disagreements between antebellum slavery opponents and supporters, they both believed that to win the child was to win the future of the nation.²⁰

The consequences of misrepresentation can be severe; one might think, for example, of the 2018 controversy over the worksheet titled “The Life of Slaves: A Balanced View” distributed to students in the eighth grade at Great Hearts Monte Vista in San Antonio that included a space for the respondent to list “positive” aspects of enslavement. As the texts described in Donnarae McCann’s *White Supremacy in Children’s Literature* or Hamida Bosmajian’s *Sparing the Child*, children’s literature can be a powerful tool in enabling and perpetuating atrocity.²¹ As Edward L. Sullivan argues:

Neo-Nazi and other white supremacist organisations prey upon alienated, angry, impressionable youth. They tap into the anger and ignorance of these young people and teach them how to hate. They fill the voids in their lives with it; hate gives their lives a sense of direction and purpose.²²

It is entirely prescient given that at present many adults, including 41 percent of millennials, do not know the basic facts of the Holocaust.²³ In a world where we encounter various shades of Holocaust denial or the kind of willful misrepresentation of enslavement found in, for example, Disney’s *Song of the South*, as Jeffreys discusses in detail, many of my students argue that we have a duty to tell children the truth, even the worst parts of the truth, before someone else tells them lies.

Even if we are resolved to tell the truth, the path still remains difficult. Accounts based on true events may still be too myopic to present a complete picture. As Connolly argues, stories that end with a formerly enslaved person escaping to the North “risk suggesting that escape from slavery was always successful, potentially implying that if slaves had only enough determination they would have freed themselves”²⁴ Such accounts are not inaccurate—many did escape their enslavement—but collectively they suggest that such escape was the norm. Kokkola similarly warns against texts that may be “historically accurate” but present unusual cases such that “the pattern which emerges from the corpus is not.”²⁵ If we teach children that the truly brave escaped enslavement and the death camps, what, then, are we teaching them of those who did not escape or survive?

An additional fold, of course, in the ethics of representing atrocity is in the question of whether such representation is even possible. As Hayden White, among others, warns, any attempt to describe a historical object unavoidably imbues that object with qualities and meanings not inherent in the object itself. As soon as we attempt to render an event in language, photography, visual art, or any other medium, we transform it, organizing it within the conventions of the medium we have chosen. While this is true of any reimagining of history, it can often be more acute and more contested when we consider atrocity. A key contention in the study of Holocaust literature is that fiction around the Holocaust can, at best, approximate its scale and violence. As Berel Lang asserts, “traditional forms—the developmental order of the novel, the predictability of prosody, the comforting representations of landscape or portrait in painting—are quite inadequate for the images of a subject with the moral dimensions and impersonal will of the Holocaust.”²⁶ The true dimensions of genocide ultimately lie beyond our understanding. Children’s literature and the literature of childhood must serve, as Adrienne Kertzer claims, “our need for hope and happy endings,” yet what happy ending can possibly be drawn from the torture, humiliation, and murder of millions of people?²⁷ One recalls the words of Tim O’Brien, writing about the Vietnam War:

A true war story is never moral. It does not instruct, nor encourage virtue, nor suggest models of proper human behavior, nor restrain men from doing the things men have always done. If a story seems moral, do not believe it. If at the end of a war story you feel uplifted, or if you feel that some small bit of rectitude has been salvaged from the larger waste, then you have been made the victim of a very old and terrible lie. There

is no rectitude whatsoever. There is no virtue. As a first rule of thumb, therefore, you can tell a true war story by its absolute and uncompromising allegiance to obscenity and evil.²⁸

Deborah R. Geis, similarly, argues that attempts to force atrocity to conform to traditional structures threaten to:

[S]anitize and codify the Shoah in Hollywood terms so that a kind of catharsis results from the closing reunion, where (as in *Jurassic Park*) the ultimate sense is that the audience members have vicariously been “saved” and can go home safely without having to worry about the threat, whether of Nazis or Velociraptors.²⁹

The question is not simply of presenting atrocity the “correct” way—free from a sense of catharsis, for example, or using a format that resists easy answers—but of recognizing the failure of language itself to adequately describe such a subject. Lawrence Langer argues that “language alone cannot give meaning to Auschwitz . . . The depth and uncontained scope of the Nazi ruthlessness poisoned both Jewish and Christian precedents and left millions of victims without metaphors to imagine, not to say justify, their fate.”³⁰

The impossibility of fully articulating atrocity is reflected in the ways in which we memorialize it for young people. Students visiting Auschwitz from UK schools and colleges in a government-sponsored initiative are presented with—by means of orientation around the sites of Auschwitz and Birkenau—examples of literature as diverse as Kitty Hart-Moxon’s typically unsentimental recollection of being tasked to the “*scheisse kommando*,” Elie Wiesel’s famous seven declarations that “never again” would he forget his first night in camp, and Leonard Cohen’s poem about the inconspicuous ordinariness of Adolf Eichmann. Moving from one site or artifact of atrocity to another, be it the glass cabinet of decaying hair shorn from women prisoners, the empty tins of Zyklon B, Kommandant Hoess’s family home overlooking the gas chamber of Auschwitz I, or the railway line within the Birkenau gatehouse, young visitors attempt to reconcile a vast and diverse history with fragments of literature, glimpses into the lives, memories, and identities of victims, survivors, even perpetrators. From this jigsaw they are asked to draw out the moral imperative to stand up to racism, intolerance, and persecution, and encourage their peers to do likewise.

Many of the chapters in this volume discuss the unrepresentable nature of atrocity, or the manner in which the authors, illustrators, and

filmmakers negotiate representing children's experience of atrocity. That this question recurs throughout the breadth of contexts here, demonstrates that it remains a live issue. Our concern, of course, is not simply of whether atrocity can be communicated through any form of art, but whether it can be communicated specifically through art for and about children.

The question of audience can have dramatic implications for our understanding of the audience for texts that address atrocity not least because there are some children and adults who have experienced atrocity directly and for whom literature is not a preemptive measure but a source of retrospective understanding. Children whose lives have been affected by war or forced migration—children, in our contemporary moment, who are fleeing Syria, for example—may need literature even more urgently to help them make sense of their experience. Various writers, Arthur Frank among them, have argued that narrative can be an effective means to heal the damage of trauma.³¹ In *My Mother's Voice* Adrienne Kertzer describes learning about her own family history through literature and the value of narrative as a means to allow readers to come to an understanding of events that are otherwise unavailable to them.³² The body of literature in which children work through their own trauma, such as the collection of art and essays *The Day Our World Changed* that addresses the September 11 terrorist attacks, remains small and undertheorized.³³

This volume asks if atrocity can be represented in a way that is truthful and respectful of the victims and, if so, what should we include and what should we omit? How can a child's experiences of atrocity through literature be appropriately managed? What considerations should we make for readers who are victims of atrocity? And how do we ensure that children reach an appropriate and true understanding of atrocity? None of these questions have easy answers, nor should they. They are difficult because we (we as adults, we as a society), ourselves, have not yet come to terms with, or even developed an appropriate language to discuss, the atrocities that shape our history and our present.

A History

The fairy tales and folk tales that, for centuries, were transmitted orally for all audiences and have, from the eighteenth century onward come to make up the canon of children's literature, contain a great deal of violence including murder, sexual assault, and war; Perrault's retelling of Red Riding Hood

in *Histoires ou contes du temps passé* (1697), for example, concludes with an explicit warning to young girls that leaves little doubt as to the threat that “wolves” present. If we are to understand the origins of childhood, as we now understand it, as the eighteenth century, with John Newbery’s *A Little Pretty Pocket Book* (1744) among the first such works, then the literature of childhood took less than six decades to explicitly engage historical trauma.³⁴ *The Little Reader’s Assistant* (1790) by Noah Webster, includes two abolitionist essays. It was followed by works such as *The Slave’s Friend* (1836–1838) and *The Anti-Slavery Alphabet* (1846). While such works took an abolitionist stance, they ran a wide political spectrum, including from those who agreed with many pro-enslavement arguments and advocated for a gradual move away from enslavement. They also, Connolly argues, often communicate an implicit message of white superiority even as they advocate for black emancipation.³⁵

Early abolitionist texts for children also precede, in Jane Thraillkill’s terms, literature that addresses the trauma. Thraillkill argues that Mark Twain’s realist fiction opened a path from the literary suffering child to a modern theory of trauma.³⁶ As scholars such as Patricia Pace and Kenneth B. Kidd have argued, the exploration of trauma through the literature of childhood is dependent on literary explorations of interiority that only began in the late nineteenth century.³⁷ Kidd argues that it is no coincidence that children’s literature as a widespread genre emerged during the interwar years in concert with the most important work from the pioneers of psychotherapy for children Anna Freud and Melanie Klein. He thus conceives of a children’s literature of atrocity as an “ongoing collaborative project of psychoanalysis and literature.”³⁸

Identifying the first work to address the Holocaust through a child protagonist takes us into the problematic question of how we define children. Horst Rosenthal created a series of picture books within the Gurs camp; his heavy use of irony and the absence of a young audience suggests that his first readers were adults, yet Mickey’s innocent perspective, as well as his proportions, is unmistakably childlike.³⁹ Young poets in the Terezín camp, discussed in this volume by Mary Catherine Muller, also describe the Holocaust through a child’s perspective. Similarly, Anne Frank’s diary, which first appeared in English in 1952 as *The Diary of a Young Girl*, similarly describes a child’s experience of atrocity and is perhaps the first work of Holocaust literature to be read by children on a large scale. Ruth Franklin asserts “[a]s a child, I was obsessed with Anne Frank’s Diary. Like Anne, I wanted to grow up to be a writer; like her, I kept a diary (though less

faithfully), which for a time I addressed, following her model, as Kitty; like her, I agonized over how little my mother understood me and longed to swoon in a boy's arms."⁴⁰

While Anne Frank may be the most famous Jewish child in the history of literature for young people, Hamida Bosmajian questions whether the success of the *Diary* was that it was not necessarily a record of Jewish life in hiding so much as an adolescent in hiding. As Franklin recalls, Anne's ambitions, her character, her temperament, spoke to her young readers, and while her Jewish identity is present and never disguised, and although it is the precise reason the diary has been so widely adopted by educators, the religious and cultural aspects of the Franks' Jewish life are not central to the narrative. Anne's preoccupations in hiding spoke to a wider audience than other diaries of murdered Jewish youth found after the war.⁴¹ Lawrence Langer makes a similar argument in *Using and Abusing the Holocaust*, in which he argues that Anne Frank's diary has been used "to force us to construe the reality of an event before we have experienced it, to confirm an agenda in advance in order to discourage us from raising disturbing questions that might subvert the tranquility of our response."⁴² Anne Frank, he asserts, has been mobilized, improperly, as a figure of hope and used as part of a grand project that runs throughout American culture of refusing to confront the realities and implications of genocide.

Anne Frank's *Diary of a Young Girl* represents another trait common to literature of the Holocaust that concerns young people, in that it was written "at the periphery of the disaster."⁴³ As Bosmajian asserts, it is the fate of Jewish victims that literature of the Holocaust fixates on, yet that fate is played out "off-stage" and rarely to the central protagonist.⁴⁴ The peripheral role of the child emerges as a motif that Sue Vice, in *Children Writing the Holocaust*, notes is accompanied by several characterizations: "defamiliarization; errors of fact and perception; attention to detail at the expense of context" among them, and—particularly evident in Anne Frank's *Diary of a Young Girl*—"age-specific concerns with the nature of writing and memory."⁴⁵ As Vice recognizes with particular reference to Benjamin Wilkomirski's *Fragments*, these motifs problematize a critical understanding of the text when they become transplanted into fraudulent testimonies, and the reader, accustomed to the characteristics of a naive and traumatized child writer—the reliance more on "acts of personal cruelty than on the institutional attrition"—accepts the validity of the text.⁴⁶

Other early media consumed by children to address the Holocaust were horror comics. "Corpse of the Jury," published in *Voodoo #5* in 1953,

and Bernard Krigstein's "Master Race," which was published in *Impact* in 1955, were both set, in part, in death camps.⁴⁷ Whether these should be considered childhood adjacent, however, remains open to debate. Creator Al Feldstein asserts that horror comic creators "were writing for teenagers and young adults; we were writing it for the guys in the army."⁴⁸ Many of his contemporaries, the highly influential psychologist Dr. Frederick Wertham among them, argued that horror comics were reaching the hands of children, and readership data from the period bear out such a claim.⁴⁹ Perhaps the first work of Holocaust fiction that was accessible to (although not explicitly written for) young readers is Herman H. Field's *Angry Harvest* (1958), another text at the periphery of disaster, which concerns a girl hiding from the Nazis on a farm in occupied Poland.⁵⁰

While Anne Frank's diary was a best seller in Britain, the Holocaust did not truly enter into public discourse until the trial of Adolf Eichmann in 1961. A steady stream of Holocaust histories, (auto)biographies, fiction, drama, and documentary followed. By 1987, more than three hundred books had been published in the United States that addressed the Holocaust and World War II.⁵¹ The Six Day War in 1967 was a formative moment in shaping a new, empowered postwar Jewish identity, both in Israel and the diaspora, particularly in the United States. In this period, some of the earliest works to depict and be read by children were published, including *Miriam* by Aimee Sommerfelt, first published in English in 1963; *The Long Escape* by Irving Werstein (1964); and Martha Bennet Stiles's *Darkness Over Land* (1966). The field of Holocaust literature was transformed by second-generation Holocaust survivor Art Spiegelman's comic book autobiography of his father *Maus* (serialized 1980–91)—a book that successfully grapples with both the emotional weight of trauma and the impossibility of re-creating Auschwitz on the page. As famous, although not as critically celebrated, is John Boyne's *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, a text that has been heavily criticized for its inaccurate depiction of life in the death camps and yet has, inarguably, had a tremendous impact on readers both in book form and in the film that followed.⁵²

The outpouring of children's literature to engage with the Holocaust has informed responses to other atrocities. Yoo Kyung Sung, notes, for example, that Korean picture books that describe the experience of "comfort women"—those held in sexual slavery by the Japanese military—tend to follow similar themes to children's literature of the Holocaust.⁵³ We might look, too, to depictions of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in children's literature, including, most famously, Toshi Maruki's *Hiroshima No*

Pika (1982). The relationship between different literatures of atrocity has not always flowed in one direction only—Keiji Nakazawa’s manga *Barefoot Gen* (1972–87), while not a direct inspiration, preceded Art Spiegelman’s *Maus* by almost a decade.

Children’s literature has grown to encompass atrocities beyond the Holocaust, the transatlantic slave trade, and the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Forchuk Skrypuch’s *The Hunger* (1999), for example, addresses the Armenian genocide, and Jean-Philippe Stassen’s *Deo gratias* (2006), discussed in this volume, centers on the Rwandan genocide. The September 11 terrorist attacks prompted a large number of children’s novels and novels concerning childhood, among them Jonathan Safran Foer’s *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* (2005), *Fireboat: The Heroic Adventures of the John J. Harvey* by Maira Kalman (2002), and *On That Day* by Andrea Patel (2002). Kidd characterizes the works to immediately follow the attacks, enmeshed as they were in the politics of their time, as “the worst sort of literary-psychological merger, and in the service of reactionary politics.”⁵⁴ It took some time for works to emerge that escaped what many, Kidd among them, saw as the oversentimentalized nationalism of the early 2000s. Marvel’s *Mz Marvel* (2014–present) is one such example, imagining as it does the life of an American-Pakistani Muslim teenager who develops superpowers. *Mz Marvel* explores the traumas of Islamophobia and racism and uses superherodom as a way to explore these themes.⁵⁵

Representing Childhood and Atrocity

As Marah Gubar asserts, children’s literature represents a “richly heterogeneous group of texts” that cannot be identified by a set of necessary and sufficient conditions, but by a group of family resemblances.⁵⁶ This volume encompasses representations of atrocity in media by children, media for children, and media with child protagonists. These are forms with overlapping but distinct audiences and goals. Many of the works discussed are intended for an audience of young readers and viewers, but not all. *Deo gratias: A Tale of Rwanda*, *Angels Wear White*, and *Einstein and Einstein* prominently feature the experiences of young people, but their depiction of atrocity suggests the expectation of a (perhaps young) adult audience. If we are to accept Perry Nodelman’s description of children’s literature as providing child readers with an adult’s account of childhood experience (or rather childhood as conceived by an adult), then children’s poetry from the Terezín camp,

discussed by Mary Catherine Mueller, and the drawings by child survivors from Darfur/Farchana, discussed by Chigbo Arthur Anyaduba, also would not be considered children's literature.⁵⁷ What unites these texts is that they present childhood experiences of atrocity. While we acknowledge that including a wide range of works forces us to straddle the often-disparate fields of childhood studies and children's literature, we feel that the dialogue that emerges from placing these studies in the same volume is worthwhile.

The types of atrocity found within these pages are also different; every chapter describes a system of violence that operates on a societal or international scale. Within this broad definition, however, there are significant differences. The concepts of *dongshi* and *guai*, as You argues, are used to justify the emotional and physical abuse of Chinese girls; this violence is different in kind from the massacre of Tutsi in Rwanda in 1994. The Holocaust, as has often been argued, resists all comparison.⁵⁸ At the level of the individual's internality—the space in which literature and other media often operates—an atrocity does not produce a single experience, but a variety of specific and personal experiences. This is particularly true of the experiences of children, who often lack the ability to understand their suffering in context. In this sense, then, these chapters do not, and should not, seek to present a totalizing account of atrocity. They are united in that they all address media that describes children suffering.

We did not set out with a structure for this volume in mind, but as we worked with our authors four broad categories presented themselves. The first section of this book concerns texts addressing late twentieth-century genocides and atrocities, those that have taken place as the world continued to insist “never again,” and when the canon of Holocaust literature was well established. The opening chapter of the volume specifically questions how effectively a contemporary genocide may be engaged with when viewed through the lens of Holocaust memorialization. The second section considers texts on the Holocaust—the genocide of Jews and massacres of other groups carried out by Germany and its allies and collaborators in the buildup to and during World War II. The dedication of a section of the volume solely to this genocide is not intended to present the Holocaust as the ur-atrocity, but rather to recognize that children's literature that concerns the Holocaust has a longer history and, at present, represents a larger corpus than that devoted to other genocides. It is further the case that much of the theoretical and literary groundwork in the field of atrocity studies more broadly emerged in response to the Holocaust. In retrospect, a critical mass of works on this subject was inevitable: so many books and

films concern children's experiences of the Holocaust that it has defined the genre of a literature of atrocity and exerts a gravitational pull on all that has followed. Naturally, Holocaust memory's presence in the global public domain remains a live issue, but it is also one that can offer a platform to articulate other histories. Michael Rothberg terms this "multi-directional memory" and draws on both Holocaust and postcolonial studies in exploring how various histories may be remembered via Holocaust memory rather than being subsumed by it.⁵⁹ In the UK at present, decolonizing the curricula is high on the agenda in schools, colleges, and universities, a legacy of the Black Lives Matter movement that has entered the global public domain with significant momentum and rightfully demands serious and sustained focus on the transatlantic slave trade and its global impact. There is, to borrow from Michael Rothberg's more recent text *The Implicated Subject: Beyond Victims and Perpetrators*, a growing recognition that worldwide we are all "implicated subjects" in various contexts and histories.⁶⁰ This volume, while inevitably and invaluable informed by the wealth of scholarship on the Holocaust, richly benefits from the knowledge, experience, and expertise of its contributors across a global context.

The third section concerns other inter/national atrocities that occurred under dictatorial regimes, ranging from Spain under Franco to Soviet states. Here, children serve as witnesses to the violence of the regimes, and their disillusionment mirrors the ideological collapse of the regimes being described. The first section concerns childhood experiences of war, namely the Rwandan genocide, the Greek Cypriot War, and the genocide in Darfur. In these texts, young protagonists and witnesses document the working-through of violence they witnessed. The final section concerns social institutions and domestic structures; the racist, sexist, and colonialist systems that oppress, tyrannize, and kill marginalized groups. While the aftershocks and intergenerational trauma of the events described in earlier chapters remain palpable, it is these chapters, in many cases describing places where we and our contributors have lived and worked, where atrocity feels at its most immediate and urgent.

Chigbo Arthur Anyaduba opens the volume with a reading of a series of drawings produced by refugee children from Darfur/Farchana, held in the archives of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The drawings are firsthand accounts by young eyewitnesses to a very recent atrocity, and Anyaduba argues in "Children's Humanitarian Arts and the Genocide in Darfur: Drawing Loss and Atrocity" that providing traumatized children with the chance to testify with images rather than words offers the young artists

a way to capture a snapshot of their traumatic memories. Not only that, but the spectator to the artwork is challenged with confronting scenes of atrocity as they occurred to and in front of young eyes and deciphering the imagery that is presented without narrative or context and without editorial interference. Anyaduba also challenges the notion of multidirectionality posed by Rothberg, identifying the varying cultural capital of different atrocities, particularly when comparing the Holocaust with African genocides.

Remaining in Africa, J. P. Stassen's *Deo gratias: A Tale of Rwanda* is an important and much-celebrated work that explores the Rwandan genocide from the perspective of a perpetrator. In "Framing the Unframeable: *Deo gratias* and the Horror of Genocide," Kaitlyn Newman explores the text through the lens of unspeakability, demonstrating that Stassen uses metaphor and conspicuous omissions to suggest that which lies beyond representation.

Maria Chatzianastasi considers a collection of stories not widely recognized in literature outside its geographical context—that of the occupation of Cyprus and the division between Greek and Turkish Cypriots. In "Tracing Trauma: Childhood, Innocence, and Memory in Cypriot Children's Literature since 1974," Chatzianastasi interrogates and tackles themes of trauma, occupation, disenfranchisement, and fractured relationships in this as-yet untranslated Greek-language literature, with the authors of these books writing from experience and reliving these experiences through the lens of youth.

Barbara Krasner opens the following section with an overview of the contemporary landscape of Holocaust literature for young readers. "Beyond the Ovens: The Changing Nature of Holocaust Children's Literature" draws on Krasner's extensive work tracking recent publications in the field to present a wider context, identifying twelve subcontexts in which children's literature about the Holocaust set their scenes. Arguing against the critics who claim that the field of Holocaust literature for the young is oversaturated, Krasner identifies the spaces for further thoughtful interrogation on the Holocaust and other atrocities.

Considering Holocaust literature for young readers, Rosemary Horowitz's chapter "Gendered Behavior in Uri Orlev's and Kathy Kacer's Literature about the Holocaust for Children" considers the role of gender in a collection of texts by Orlev and Kacer. Identifying that gender is a critical factor in understanding the traumas and memories of adult survivors, Horowitz argues for the same recognition of how gendered identity is formed for children and how this shapes Holocaust narratives.

Child art and other juvenilia can reveal a great deal about children's internal lives free of the expectations and literary constructs imposed by

adults. Mary Catherine Mueller's "A Sonnet of Atrocity: A Consideration of a Poem Written by a Child at the Terezín Concentration Camp" seeks to understand children's experience of the Holocaust in their own terms. In a close analysis of one poem by a young poet identified only by first name and accommodation block, she identifies the recurring themes of absence: absence of home, absence of beauty in nature, and absence of names.

In "Communism for Children: Fiction Mediation and Representations of Past Wrongdoings," Simona Mitroiu examines two texts that examine childhoods in post-Communist countries, *Marzi: A Memoir* by Marzena Sowa and *Breaking Stalin's Nose* by Eugene Yelchin (both 2011). Both texts, she demonstrates, document the indoctrination of children and describe the author's disillusionment with a totalitarian regime.

Lora Looney's chapter, "The Uses of Allegory to Tell Youth Disappearance and Mortality Under Spain's Dictatorship in Ana María Matute's 1956 *Los niños tontos* (*The Foolish Children*)," examines the allegorical depiction of children and childhood in post-Civil War–era Spain. The text, she argues, attests to the suffering, disappearance, and death of children. They resist not only the erasure of these deaths but also the rhetoric of the Franco regime.

María Porras Sánchez considers the representation of Spanish history in Ximo Abadía's *Frank: La increíble historia de una dictadura olvidada* (2018). In her chapter, "Confronting Atrocity through Geometry: Franco's First Illustrated Biography," she argues that the book uses an abstract and geometric visual rhetoric to describe not only Franco's rise to power but also the atrocities, many of them still unknown in scope, committed by his regime. The text, she demonstrates, articulates the violence of Spanish history in a manner that is apprehensible for child readers.

The fourth section opens with "Picture Books and Parrhesia: The Role of Multi-modal Texts in Examining Canada's Colonial Violence." Caroline Bagelman writes from a Canadian perspective, exploring Canada's treatment of indigenous children in the residential school system. The Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission recognized the need to acknowledge Canada's past treatment of indigenous young people; however, Bagelman's chapter recalls the reluctance she encountered to tackle this through pedagogical initiatives, and her own educational model, using picture books to engage children in their country's history and diversity.

In "Hidden Atrocities in the Cinematic Representations of Chinese Girlhood," Chengcheng You considers the representation of Chinese girlhoods in the films *Angels Wear White* (2017) and *Einstein and Einstein* (2018). Both films, she argues, grapple with the problems of filial piety and socially

sanctioned abuse in many Chinese households. Each film, in different ways, depicts young Chinese women seeking to negotiate an identity within a toxic environment. You's chapter is the only one to consider film and refers to a notion of atrocity that, *prima facie*, is more muted than the historical contexts of war or dictatorial regimes discussed elsewhere. The fact that the abusive treatment and sexual violence encountered by the characters in the films You identifies appear to have become normalized is precisely what makes them atrocities.

In "Nursery Atrocities: The Australian Children's Classic *The Magic Pudding*," Jayson Althofer and Brian Musgrove identify the colonial attitudes and agendas at work in a widely read and popular children's book, *The Magic Pudding*. Althofer and Musgrove read in Norman Lindsay's 1918 fantasy story—one of anthropomorphized animals and talking food which was widely praised at its publication for its wholesome and entertaining appeal to Australian children—the sinister undertones of racism and veiled allusions to the "historic atrocity" against the Aboriginal population.

Finally, in "Freedom in Fiction: Trickster Tales and Enslavement in the United States," a chapter that tackles the transatlantic slave trade discussed here and the multiple purposes of narratives of slavery, Megan Jeffreys focuses on enslavement in the American South and a series of stories made famous for young audiences by Walt Disney and the *Song of the South* film. More than entertaining stories of anthropomorphic animals and their adventures, Joel Chandler Harris's trickster stories of Brer Rabbit and his ploys to overcome Brer Fox and Brer Wolf were stories of resistance, caution, and education for enslaved adults and children.

Notes

1. Ursula Le Guin, *The Language of the Night: Essays on Fantasy and Science Fiction* (New York: Ultramarine Publishing, 1979), 69–70.

2. Laura Van Den Beerg, "The Pitch," *McSweeney's* #55 (2019): 91.

3. The Guardian Children's Books Podcast "Gavriel Savit," March 16, 2019.

4. Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (New York: Vintage, 2010). C. S. Lewis offers a similar argument in his essay "On Three Ways of Writing for Children" found in, among other volumes, *Of Other Worlds* (Harcourt, 2002).

5. There exists a rich literature on "bibliotherapy" as a treatment for PTSD in both children and adults. See Calla E. Y. Glavin and Paul Montgomery, "Creative Bibliotherapy for Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD): A Systematic Review," *Journal of Poetry Therapy* 30, vol. 2 (2017): 95–107.

6. Kenneth B. Kidd, *Freud in Oz* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 184.
7. Hester Burton, "The Writing of Historical Novels," *The Horn Book Magazine* (XLV) 3 (1969): 271–76, 276.
8. Paula T. Connolly, *Slavery in American Children's Literature 1790—2010* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2013), 201. We maintain the integrity of quoted material in this instance, but recognize throughout this volume that *enslavement* is now the preferred terminology to *slavery*.
9. Lydia Kokkola, *Representing the Holocaust* (New York and London: Routledge, 2009), 173.
10. Kidd, *Freud in Oz*, 181.
11. Kokkola, *Representing the Holocaust*, 3.
12. James Matthew Barrie, *Peter Pan* (New York: Signet Classics, 1987), 154.
13. David L. Russell, "Reading the Shards and Fragments," *The Lion and the Unicorn* 21, no. 2 (1997).
14. Geoffrey Short, "The Holocaust in the National Curriculum: A Survey of Teachers Practices and Attitudes," *Journal of Holocaust Education* 4, no. 2 (1995): 167–88.
15. Jeffrey L. Derevensky, "Introducing Children to Holocaust Literature: A Developmental Approach," *Judaica Librarianship* 4 (Fall 1987–Winter 1988): 53–54; Ursula F. Sherman, "Why Would a Child Want to Read about That: The Holocaust Period in Children's Literature," in *How Much Truth Should We Tell the Children? The Politics of Children's Literature*, ed. Betty Bacon (Minneapolis: MEP Publications, 1988).
16. Perry Nodelman, *The Hidden Adult: Defining Children's Literature* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008).
17. Kokkola, *Representing the Holocaust*, 39.
18. Kidd, *Freud in Oz*, 191.
19. Hamida Bosmajian, *Sparing the Child: Grief and the Unspeakable in Youth Literature about Nazism and the Holocaust* (London: Psychology Press, 2002).
20. Connolly, *Slavery in American Children's Literature*, 4–212.
21. Children's literature in Nazi Germany included Elvira Bauer's *Trau Keinem Fuchs auf grüner Heide und keinem Jud auf seinem Eid* (Trust No Fox on his Green Meadow and No Jew on his Oath) (1936). See Donnarae McCann, *White Supremacy in Children's Literature* (New York: Taylor and Francis, 2002); and Bosmajian, *Sparing the Child*.
22. Edward T. Sullivan, *The Holocaust in Literature for Youth* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, Inc, 1999), 2.
23. Maggie Astor, "Holocaust Is Fading from Memory, Survey Finds," *New York Times*, April 12, 2018.
24. Connolly, *Slavery in American Children's Literature*, 202.
25. Kokkola, *Representing the Holocaust*, 81.
26. Berel Lang, ed., *Holocaust Representation: Art within the Limits of History and Ethics* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2000), 10.

27. Adrienne Kertzer, *My Mother's Voice* (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2001), 75.

28. Tim O'Brien, *The Things They Carried* (New York: Mariner Books, 2009), 65–66.

29. Deborah R. Geis, "Introduction," in *Considering Maus: Approaches to Art Spiegelman's "Survivor's Tale" of the Holocaust*, ed. Deborah R. Geis (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2003), 4. Kidd, similarly, warns that the worst examples of children's literature to address trauma are "simplistic narratives of character empowerment adapted from self-help literature" (*Freud in Oz*, 185).

30. Lawrence Langer, *Versions of Survival: The Holocaust and the Human Spirit* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1988), 1.

31. Arthur Frank, *The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness and Ethics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

32. Kertzer, *My Mother's Voice*.

33. Robin F. Goodman and Andrea Henderson Fahnestock, *The Day Our World Changed* (New York: Goodman and Fahnestock, 2002) Kidd describes the book as "relentlessly pop-therapeutic" (*Freud in Oz*, 201).

34. The question of a "first" book of children's literature depends on the problematic question of how we define children's literature. If children's literature is understood purely as works written for child readers (as opposed to a mass medium with certain genre characteristics), then *Schoole of Virtue and Book of Good Nourture for Chyldren and Youth to Learn Theyr Duite By* (1557) precedes Newbery by almost two centuries.

35. Kidd, *Freud in Oz*, 184.

36. Jane F. Thrailkill, "Traumatic Realism and the Wounded Child," in *The American Child: A Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. Caroline F. Levander and Carol J. Singley (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 128–48.

37. Patricia Pace, "All Our Lost Children: Trauma and Testimony in the Per-formance of Childhood," *Text and Performance Quarterly* 18, no. 3 (July 1998): 233–47; Kidd, *Freud in Oz*.

38. Kidd, *Freud in Oz*, 185.

39. Philip Smith, "'Un livre pour enfants': *Mickey au Camp de Gurs* as Picture Book," *Children's Literature* 47 (2019): 104–19.

40. Ruth Franklyn, "How Should Children's Books Deal with the Holocaust?," *New Yorker*, July 23, 2018.

41. Bosmajian, *Sparing the Child*, 139.

42. Lawrence Langer, *Using and Abusing the Holocaust* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 21.

43. Bosmajian, *Sparing the Child*, 175.

44. Bosmajian, *Sparing the Child*, 133–34.

45. Sue Vice, *Children Writing the Holocaust* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 2.