Holocaust Literature for Children and Adolescents

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Words of appreciation

I have spent much time reading books and writing texts. Not only could I depend on various books and articles, there were also people who supported me throughout all these months. First of all, I would like to thank my promotor Dr. Philippe Codde for his time and valuable counsels. Furthermore, I would like to thank Mrs. Katrien Vloeberghs for helping me out by means of good advice and information and my parents for supporting me throughout my years at the University of Ghent.
Introduction

As I came closer towards the completion of my studies at the University of Ghent, I was supposed to write a Master thesis. This is quite a large work that a student has to work on during one entire year. Because of its dimension, it is important to make a right choice concerning the topic. I have always been interested in reading books about the Holocaust. This academic year I even added a course about trauma studies to my curriculum. It was a very interesting course and I have learned a lot.

The Holocaust is still omnipresent in our contemporary society; there are various Holocaust museums, there are Holocaust memorials, .. As a student of literature, it was an obvious choice to do some research on a specific subject within literature. Since literature is an extensive domain, I wanted to focus on something more specific. Thus I have decided to write my Master dissertation on the relationship between the Holocaust and literature for children and adolescents.

When I started my research, I wondered if this type of literature was constructed on certain principles. Nowadays, some books or movies about the Holocaust can still have a profound effect on me. So I wondered how authors reached out for a younger audience; is a child capable of knowing more? Or should they only learn more about the Holocaust when they are a bit older? Many questions popped up and I decided to search for answers.

Since this type of literature is concerned with the Holocaust, I needed to focus on the Holocaust as well. Where does it come from? What are the problems related to the writing about it? Does Holocaust literature have some kind of unique status? All these questions are dealt with in the first part of my dissertation.

After focussing on the Holocaust and Holocaust literature in general, I have paid attention to the literature for children and adolescents. I made this choice because of the fact that children’s literature is always be perceived to be an “independent” genre. In the beginning of my research, I read many books and articles that provided me with a theoretical background. After the reading, I wanted to see for myself how authors try to present a Holocaust story to children and adolescents. Thus the main
part is concerned with Holocaust literature for young audiences. Furthermore, I decided to try to enrich the theory with a personal analysis of some books.

I have read several books, English as well as Dutch ones, and I have made an analysis of three books; *The Devil’s Arithmetic* (Jane Yolen) - *Briar Rose* (Jane Yolen) and *If I Should Die Before I Wake* (Han Nolan). I preferred to analyse these books after comparing several reading lists. These were not randomly chosen lists but lists of books that are recommended by official instances as for example the Yad Vashem Center and the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington. My choice of books is also based on the fact that these books are often used in classrooms as well. Official instances consider these books to be useful material when schools want to engage in Holocaust education. This means that these books are often read and thus it can be argued that they are representable for the children’s literature about the Holocaust.

In my analysis I have tried to look for recurrent patterns and if these patterns coincide with what critics and theorists have remarked earlier on. Do patterns keep returning or is there still room for innovation?

During the past months, many questions have popped up. I did my best to provide the answers to these questions and I can only hope that I have obtained my goal.
1. Introduction to the Holocaust and Holocaust literature

1.1 Meaning

According to the Oxford English Dictionary the term *Holocaust* signifies “complete consumption by fire, or that which is so consumed; complete destruction esp. of a large number of persons; a great slaughter or massacre”. (Garber and Zuckerman 198) Nowadays people use this term to refer to the “systematic destruction of European Jewry at the hands of the Nazi’s during World War II”. (www1.yadvashem.org)

The contemporary term “Holocaust” originates from the Greek word “*Holokauston*”. This is a compound composed of *Holos* and *kaustos*. The first stands for “whole” and the latter stands for “burnt”. Therefore it can be translated as “something wholly burnt up” or “totally consumed by fire”. (Garber and Zuckerman 198) According to the Shoah Resource Center of Yad Vashem “*holokauston*” can be considered a translation of the Hebrew word *olah*. An *olah* was a specific type of ritual sacrifice that was entirely burnt by fire. (www1.yadvashem.org) Berel Lang believes that the meaning of the term holocaust changed from a religious offer to a metaphor for sacrifice in general. Nevertheless he also states that the term continued to have an association with fire. (Kokkola 3)

In general, people often use a capital when writing about the *Holocaust*. Lydia Kokkola has suggested that this has two main reasons: people want to express respect for the enormity of the event and they want to separate it from other usages of the term. (Kokkola 4)

Elie Wiesel has played a major role in the spreading of the term *Holocaust*. Some even argue that he was the first to coin the term to typify the Jewish genocide. Wiesel himself recalls using it for the first time in a review of *The Terezin Requiem* written by Josef Bor. It was written in the *New York Times Book Review* of October 27, 1963. (Garber and Zuckerman 202) The popularization of the expression took place in the 1960’s and 1970’s. Although having been a key-figure, Wiesel regrets his use of the term. For example, he notes that once he read an article in which the reporter described a defeat of a sports team as a holocaust. In this case we can clearly talk about a case of trivialization.
“I cannot use [the word Holocaust] anymore. First, because there are no words, and also because it has become so trivialized that I cannot use it anymore. Whatever mishap occurs now, they call it "holocaust." I have seen it myself in television in the country in which I live. A commentator describing the defeat of a sports team, somewhere, called it a "holocaust." I have read in a very prestigious newspaper published in California, a description of the murder of six people, and the author called it a holocaust. So, I have no words anymore.”

(Gerstenfeld)

Another alternative is the Hebrew word sho’ah, which stands for destruction. It appeared for the first time in a booklet that was titled Sho'at Yehudei Polin (The Holocaust of the Jews of Poland). In 1942, a historian called Ben-Zion Dinur referred to the elimination of the European Jews when he talked about sho’ah. Shortly afterwards, other people began to use the term to describe the annihilation of the European Jewish society. (www1.yadvashem.org)

In general, Yiddish-speaking Jews prefer the term churban, which also has the connotation of destruction. Historically the term refers to the destruction of the Holy Temples in Jerusalem in 586 BC and 70 CE. (www1.yadvashem.org)

Sometimes people prefer the use of “genocide”. Berel Lang thinks that this is more accurate because it refers to the conscious extermination of a population on the basis of their partisanship in that group. In this case people often add the modifier Nazi to genocide to delineate the frame. (Kokkola 5)

Finally, it can also be referred to as the Final Solution. But according to Peter Haidu this denomination implies that Jews were considered to be a social, political and ethical problem. (Haidu 279) A problem that has been resolved by the Nazis. Furthermore, we should always take into account that the naming of an event is intertwined with implications of various kinds; theological, historical, political, philosophical, narratological,…
1.2 Difference between Holocaust and other tragedies

Nowadays people often use the term Holocaust to refer specifically to the mass execution of Jewish people that took place in World War II. But have there been no other holocausts in this world? If so, why does the Nazi Holocaust seem to be “unique”? Should we consider the Holocaust to be a singular tragedy, never before seen in human history, or was it only one of the many genocides that took (and still take) place? Let us have a look at some of the prevalent opinions.

Within the domain of historiography every historical event is perceived to be different from another one. Thus it is “concluded” that each event can be classified as a unique occurrence. This concept of uniqueness should be seen as determined by a sum of different characteristics. Nonetheless, these same characteristics cannot be recognized if they have not yet been compared to other historical events. (Haidu 295)
For example the number of victims is often compared to the death rate that resulted from another event. This comparison does not aim at classifying events as similar but it leads to the acknowledgment of the uniqueness of an event.

In Representing the Holocaust: Reflections on the Historian’s Debate Dominique LaCapra mentions a double nature of the event. He argues that Nazi crimes can be considered to be unique as well as comparable. (LaCapra, Representing 111) The uniqueness can be deduced from the extremeness of the event which “forced” some people towards silence. Despite its unclassifiable nature in terms of extremeness it should also be remarked that it has a distinctive effect on those who lived through the experience. On the other hand, the Holocaust can be compared to other genocides because people tend to compare genocides in order to understand the entirety of the event.

Others are in favour of the unique status of the Holocaust. Yehuda Bauer is one of them. He claimed that the Nazi Holocaust should have a unique status because ideology played a central role. (www.annefrank.org) What exactly was their ideology then? The Nazis wanted to create a new kind of society in which the so-called Ubermensch stands on top of the hierarchy. To achieve this goal, this utopian dream, eventually six millions Jews would have to die. Bauer distinguishes three main motivations, from the point of view of the Nazis, for the mass execution of
Jewish people. (Bauer 44-50) Firstly, Jews were considered to be incarnations of pure evil who wanted to dominate the entire world. Secondly, they were perceived as a problem of hygiene. In this case Jewish people were disregarded and perceived as parasites. Finally, Nazis believed that by killing the Jews they would be able to build a new utopian society. From these motivations we can derive that the Nazis perceived the Jewish people as some sort of vermin and they wanted to liberate the world from this vermin. Is this view only plausible within the context of the Holocaust or can it also be applied on other situations of extreme horror in the past? Let us have a closer look at some other examples of genocide.

A comparison that might be made sometimes is the one between the Holocaust and the genocide of the Roma gypsies. This is a “special case” because of the fact that together with the Jews, they were both part of the annihilation programme that was instituted by the Nazis. A distinction was made between wandering and sedentary Roma. (www.annefrank.org) The wandering Roma needed to be eliminated because they would not fit in a new political order dominated by the Germans.

Yehuda Bauer also distinguishes a second feature that can be linked to the so-called ‘uniqueness’ of the event; namely its global character. (www.annefrank.org) Most genocides were limited in place. During the reign of the Nazis the persecution of the Jewish people started in Germany but soon the geographical borders would be crossed. Nazi’s would also persecute and eliminate Jews in countries such as Germany, Russia, Austria,… All these countries would eventually be brought together under the label German Reich. I can be argued that the German Reich is one country and therefore some kind of exceptionalism in comparison with other genocides cannot be claimed. Nevertheless it should be taken into account that the Holocaust covered a large geographical surface that will probably be much larger than in for example the genocide in Armenia or Cambodia.

Finally, Bauer claims that the totality of the entire event can be considered to be another characteristic of uniqueness. This feature is also recognized by Eberhard Jäckel;
“The Nazi extermination of the Jews was unique because never before had a state, under the responsible authority of its leader, decided and announced that a specific group of human beings, including the old, the women, the children, and the infants, would be killed to the very last one, and implemented this decision with all the means at its disposal.”

( qtd. in LaCapra, Representing 112)

The Nazis wanted to destroy all Jews; they did not tolerate any Jews in their ideal society. The Nazi policy even implied the execution of any person who had three or four grandparents of Jewish descent. In other genocides children and women were sometimes spared to be used or abused by the perpetrators.

Of course all victims of any genocide suffered immensely but Bauer personally thinks that there are no gradations in suffering. It is the sum of the three main characteristics that contributes to the extreme nature of the Holocaust. From this perspective, the Holocaust can be considered a ‘unique’ event in history.

Over time some historians have pointed out that in the past a state had never tried to eliminate in such a systematic way all persons of a certain ethnic or religious minority. Therefore once again people state that the Holocaust should be considered unique. Nevertheless some people have other opinions concerning this matter; Jaap Tanja wrote that any other genocide should be considered a unique event as well. (www.annefrank.org) All genocides have certain things in common but nonetheless there are also many differences noticeable. In this case one must also take into account that people who perceive the Holocaust as a unique event actually think that victims and survivors have suffered much more than victims of other genocides. It would seem, then, as though there existed some kind of hierarchy in tragedies and the suffering associated with the tragedy. Jaap Tanja therefore considers it wrong to perceive the Holocaust or Shoah as unique.

In their article The Uniqueness of the Holocaust, Avishai Margalit and Gabriel Motzkin stress the fact that the notion of uniqueness can assume different meanings. For example it can be associated with incomparability or with the fact that the event is unprecedented. (Margalit and Motzkin 65) Incomparability would mean that the Holocaust cannot be related to any other event in the past or in the future and
therefore, in this perspective, the Holocaust will always be unique. In general, three main conclusions can be drawn from their article: the Germans can be unique as well as the Jews and the process itself. The writers claim for example that the Holocaust should be perceived as unique because of the fact that it is a “fusion of collective humiliation and mass destruction.” (Margalit and Motzkin 66) Additionally, Margalit and Motzkin also mention the fact that the uniqueness of the Holocaust can depend on the reaction towards it. They stress that interest in the topic has increased over the last fifty years. According to Bradley F. Smith it was only during the Nuremberg Trial “that the enormity of the Holocaust fitfully began to penetrate the consciousness of those gathered in the courtroom”. (Margalit and Motzkin 67)

As mentioned before, the Holocaust should be perceived as unique because of the fact that six million Jews were systematically humiliated and killed. Although Nazi race theory was never really clear, Margalit and Motzkin state that there were two kinds of race theory. According to the first kind “certain races are inferior to other varieties of the same species but still all varieties belong to the same species”. (Margalit and Motzkin 70) The second theory claims that there are different races and it denies the idea that all races belong to the same species. Gradually, the ideology of the Nazi’s developed from the first kind into the second one. Their way of humiliating their victims mainly consisted of symbolic gestures such as the obligation to wear a Star of David or shaving their heads. This highlighted the fact that Jews were to be seen as an excluded part of society.

The uniqueness of the Jews can be deduced from the fact that they were “the chosen ones”. The Nazi’s also persecuted other groups of people such as homosexuals and gypsies; nevertheless none of these groups were persecuted as thoroughly as the Jews.

Now what exactly is the function of this concept of uniqueness? Should literature about the Holocaust be perceived as more important than literature about for example the genocide in Armenia? Do Jews have more rights to be commemorated than other thousands of people who have died? Clearly, different persons have different opinions; to some the Holocaust deserves emphasis while others will claim that all human suffering should be treated in the same way. The most important thing to see is the fact that because of its dimensions, the Holocaust deserves to be dealt
with in literature. Nevertheless this should not imply that other genocides are not worth writing about. Genocides are often the same, though always different as well.

1.3 **Controversy in writing about Holocaust**

At a conference in 1987 Raul Wallenberg quoted the following line: “8000 Jews were executed by the Security Service”. This message was written in a military report that was found in Ukraine and originated from October 29, 1941. (Kokkola 1) Raul Wallenberg was a Holocaust hero, his will-power saved around 100 000 people, especially the Hungarian Jews, from being executed by the Nazis. He gave everything he could to spare a human life. This single line immediately indicates the problems concerning writing about the Holocaust. The death of 8000 individuals is dealt with in this single line. If people are going to represent the Holocaust through writing, they should actually write 8000 different accounts of what happened to these 8000 individuals. In fact, writers should also consider the story of the perpetrators to give an account as truthful as possible.

1.3.1 **To speak or not to speak?**

One of the main problems when people want to write about the Holocaust is the horrifying nature of the event. The extremeness of the Holocaust is considered to be unrepresentable. Despite this unrepresentability much of our knowledge about the Holocaust has reached us through several media; movies, theatre, documentaries,... One of these media is literature.

In 1982, Theodor Adorno spoke the famous words “Nach Auschwitz ein Gedicht zu schreiben ist barbarisch” (writing a poem after Auschwitz is barbaric). (Kokkola 18) He claims that using the Holocaust to create an aesthetic representation can be seen as a form of victim abuse. Poetry and literature create “works of art” and this pleasurable principle contrasts strongly with the horrific nature of the event itself: people take pleasure in reading poems or books and this adds injustice to all those millions of Jews who have been murdered. But we should consider the paradoxical nature of his statement. In his essay on *Commitment* Adorno mentions the fact that
the suffering of all Holocaust victims needs to be remembered but “that suffering also demands the continued existence of the very art it forbids”. (Adorno 88)

Foremost, we must also consider that a written account of someone’s experiences can never convey the harsh reality of the original experience. Authors try to represent what has happened but as a reader you will never really know or feel how a Holocaust victim has felt during this period. Berel Lang talks about “representation-as” (Lang 300), hereby he wants to make clear that all representations can be perceived as subjective. Someone who survived the Holocaust will claim that it should be considered as living hell, while from a German point of view it can be claimed that the Holocaust could be perceived as a career opportunity. (Richardson 2) If there are several possible representations and none can convey the suffering of the lived experience, should people try to represent the facts?

Of course there are many different opinions on whether or not the Holocaust should be dealt with via literature. One reason that seems to reappear regularly is the fact that the events are simply too horrifying in nature. Robert Leventhal said “The atrocities committed by the Nazi regime...transcend any words we could use to characterize them. Their barbarity goes beyond the referential and representational capacity of language”. (Leventhal)

A part of the Holocaust survivors wants to write about the event in order to find some sort of closure for themselves. In his work Dominick LaCapra talks about “acting out” and “working through”. (LaCapra, Trauma) In order to integrate the past in their lives, survivors want to testify and/or write down their experiences. Primo Levi divides the group of Holocaust survivors into two categories; “those who remain silent and those who speak”. (qtd. In Richardson 3) Because of the traumatizing nature of the event, people have often preferred to repress their memories. Nevertheless, their silenced memory did not fade overtime. Within this view Charlotte Delbo talks about “deep memory”. (Hartman 154) Writing down the experiences of the past can be perceived as a part of a therapeutic process. The act itself of testifying should be perceived as a key element within the process of working through the traumatic past. Detachment from the cruel facts is considered to be a very difficult task but closure is necessary because of the fact that many Holocaust survivors still seem to live in the past. Although they function in a modern society, the past seems to haunt them all the
time. It must also be remarked that the so-called first generations were not the only ones who felt an urge to talk about the past. Next to the “deep memory” we can also talk about collective memory. Current generations have to deal with a moral and psychological burden. They were no historical participants but most of the times their parents or grandparents were. Subsequently, the members of the second generation and the third generation search for new ways to deal with the Holocaust in modern society.

Furthermore, it must also be said that Holocaust literature has often been attacked by Holocaust deniers. Literature aims at providing knowledge about the Holocaust, authors want to make sure that people know about the events of the past. It does not serve as a tool to undermine the Holocaust. Therefore authors have a great responsibility in representing the Holocaust.

1.3.2 Holocaust literature: what forms?

Within the domain of literature people can distinguish a multitude of different genres; autobiographies, fiction, non-fiction, poetry, .. What should be considered a “good” genre to talk about the Holocaust? One could argue that testimonies should be suitable because they consist of a story of a person who has been there and who has lived through the experience. Nevertheless Primo Levi thinks that this genre is insufficient because of the fact that a testimony can never express the full experience.

“We, the survivors, are not true witnesses [...] we are those who by their prevarications or abilities or good luck did not touch the bottom. Those who did so, those who saw the Gorgon, have not returned to tell about it.”

(Levi 63)

In this quote we can see that Levi feels that testimonies are incomplete because they do not deal with for example the experience in the gas chambers. Therefore he argues that fiction can help to present a complete account of the Holocaust experience. This is in contrast with the opinion of Imre Kertész who says that “the survivors watch helplessly as their only real possessions are done away with: authentic experiences”. (Kertész 269) Nonetheless, we should consider that fiction
can be considered to be a useful medium which is widely available and which draws attention to the topic of the Holocaust. Berel Lang argued that all kinds of representation concerned with the Holocaust, even the “bad ones” carry some value because of the fact that they draw attention to the Holocaust itself. (Lang, Art 50)

**1.4 Limits of representability**

Various scholars and critics worldwide have formulated their opinions on the concept of literature. One of the functions of literature is the fact that it is able to affect readers. However, how far should literature go in affecting the reader? Should limitations be imposed? Should there be some kind of standard declaring what may and may not be represented in literature? More specifically, in the context of the Holocaust, are the readers capable of knowing it all or should authors limit their amount of information? These are all questions that have been discussed several times in the past decennia.

What if we consider this function of literature within the context of World War II and even more specifically, the Holocaust itself? We have already seen that there are controversial opinions about whether or not people are allowed to write about this topic. Scholars as Theodor Adorno prefer silence; others prefer to write about it so that current generations are able to learn more about the past and the atrocities that took place in it.

When people decide to write narratives about the Holocaust, we must remark the fact that a whole new range of questions and discussions pop up. This resulted in a technical as well as a philosophical debate that is concerned with “the limits of representability/representation”. (Joosen and Vloeberghs 174) It is a debate that originates from the 1980s and exists up till now. At first people considered if it was possible that literature could represent the atrocities in a realistic way. Is it possible for a reader to know how it was like during the Holocaust, through a lecture of a narrative? As decades passed, scholars focussed more on the limits themselves. Should people know the entire truth as cruel as it can be sometimes? Or is it better to silence some facts?
One man is often considered to be a main authority in the debate of the limits of representation; Geoffrey Hartman. He is German-born American literary theorist who works as a philosopher at Yale University in the United States of America. He is also the cofounder of the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale University. In his book *The Longest Shadow: in the Aftermath of the Holocaust* Hartman already made clear that “to take forms of representation seriously means to acknowledge their power to move, influence, offend and wound”. (Hartman 151)

He also emphasizes the fact that nowadays the question of the limits of representation is raised with regard to children. (Hartman 151-152) Adults are exposed to sights of deaths in the media on a daily basis and therefore they tend to produce feelings of indifference. Hartman is worried about this routinization and wonders if this could mean that our capacity for sympathy may be finite.

If writers decide to refuse to take into account certain limits of representation, will this have consequences for the truth? Hartman argues that this refusal may lead to an “unreality effect”. (Hartman 157) If narratives are too stylized or when they seem too cruel to the reader, the reader will become desensitized. Therefore the original purpose of depicting reality will be undermined. To affect their readers in a profound way, some authors might opt to present a realistic story; nevertheless they must not exaggerate by providing the reader with too much horrible information. Furthermore it should be remarked that most Holocaust literature is fiction and authors are not obliged to write purely realistic books.
2. Holocaust literature for children

2.1 Introduction

Writing children’s and youth literature about the Holocaust is considered to be more difficult. In this regard, Boel Westin talks about ‘the fear of fiction’. (Kokkola 2) Adults fear that their children might not understand the fictionality of certain books and consider what they have read to be truthful.

This can be seen as a rather controversial point of view if we try to relate it to the general aim of Holocaust literature. Previously, it has been mentioned that this kind of literature often involves historical accurateness. Nevertheless, parents often fear that an overdose of facts will overwhelm their children and that they might be too young to cope with that information. On the other hand there are also people who are concerned with the fact that children may not recognise the factuality of what they read. Therefore many authors insert paratexts at the end of their books. Their function is to inform the readers and tell them what exactly is based upon evidence or research and what is based upon the writer’s imagination.

In A New Algorithm in Evil: Children’s Literature in a Post-Holocaust World Elizabeth R. Baer sums up the main functions of literature for children:

“The creation of a literature of atrocity for children, and the presentation of that literature, calls upon us to recognize and convey the evil that is new in the post-Holocaust world. It calls upon us to make judicious choices in sharing the horrors of the Shoah with young readers. It calls for a consciousness on our part of the crucial need to confront the evil, to contextualize it, to warn children, and to provide them with a framework for consciousness, for making moral choices and for taking responsibility. Finally, it calls upon us to recognize the seeming paradox of the Holocaust being at once ‘unspeakable’ and yet something that must be spoken about, not necessarily to make it meaningful but to make its reality imaginatively possible so that the next generation is vigilant about the hatred inside all of us”.

(Baer 391)
When we analyze her quote we can see that she touches upon the fact that children should know about the Holocaust; questions as “what”, “how” and “when” should be dealt with. Furthermore they should be able to integrate it in their lives. It is important to teach children more about the Holocaust so that they can develop a moral framework and they can see that the future should be free from atrocities as the Holocaust. The past has already proved that, in contrast with what we normally would think, human beings are capable of participating in such horrible events. Although it might be preferred to silence this with the intention that children should not get emotionally overwhelmed, it is also argued that they should learn more about the Holocaust so that current generations can learn from the mistakes of the past.

2.2 Holocaust in children’s literature

In 1996, the Israeli authority in youth literature, Zohar Shavit, stated that in general, children’s and youth literature is a kind of literature which does not touch upon the dark pages in history. (Joosen and Vloeberghs 171)

Nevertheless, if we take a closer look at modern literature, the Holocaust topic is strongly represented. This specific historical period is present in our contemporary society, in our collective memory and in the city scene. Some of our grandparents may have lived through it and in various cities all over Europe we become aware of several monuments commemorating the events which took place during World War II. As people grow older, the generation of Holocaust survivors is diminishing more and more these days. To prevent their stories from getting lost, people feel the urge to write their stories down so that current generations know about the past and so that the stories of the survivors can become a part of our memory.

Before the 1970s the Holocaust topic was hardly touched upon in children’s literature, it was conceived as a taboo topic. But bit-by-bit authors began to make an end to the silence and there was a clear expansion of books covering the Holocaust topic. This expansion had its main peaks in the second half of the 1980s and around 1995. In general, war literature encloses a multitude of literary genres as for example diaries, autobiographies, memoirs or testimonies of the people belonging to the so called second or third generation (this means respectively written by the children or
grandchildren of Holocaust survivors). It is important to remark that children’s literature should be conceived as an individual genre within the broader literary genre of Holocaust literature. Within this specific category books are written according to certain principles which are different from for example the principles used by authors who write books for an audience of adult people.

In “Educating without overwhelming: authorial strategies in children’s Holocaust Literature” Sarah D. Jordan claims that one of the main concerns in writing about the Holocaust is the fact that children should not be disturbed by information which is too graphic and which can have a serious influence on their emotional status. (Jordan 199) As mentioned in the title, literature should aim at educating without overwhelming children. The author tries to present the information in a less threatening way and wants to give a balanced image of what has happened. Establishing a balanced image should of course also involve the evil as well as the good events. Adrienne Kertzer says that “the mark of a successful work of children’s literature in this genre (historical fiction of the Holocaust) is that by the end of the story, the child knows more, and what she knows, because it works within the representational limits of children’s books, still allows her to hope”. (Jordan 200)

As mentioned before, writing about the Holocaust is supposed to be a very difficult or sometimes even an impossible task. Literature can be perceived to be a form of art and art is supposed to create something beautiful. How could we ever create a work of beauty out of this historical reality then? Nevertheless, lots of people see it as a necessity to write about it despite the fact that the Holocaust has affected and traumatized millions of people, families and population groups.

In Uitgelezen Jeugdliteratuur: Ontmoetingen Tussen Traditie en Vernieuwing Katrien Vloeberghs and Vanessa Joosen state that there are three main inconsistencies between youth literature in general and the Holocaust topic. These inconsistencies take place at three different levels: an epistemological level, a psychological level and an ethical one.

The epistemological level or the level of “knowing” includes a strong commitment to pass on knowledge from one generation to another. (Joosen and Vloeberghs 176) Therefore lots of authors might include charts, graphics or timelines in their work;
they want to make clear to their readers how they can situate the past occurrences in time and space. In most children’s books authors also explicitly mention in how far the events which are described in the book may belong to a historical reality. Most of the time this information is given at the back of the book, this is often referred to as paratext. Despite the presence of historical evidence a book should not be conceived as a history book. Consequently, authors pay a lot of attention to the narrative aspect of literature. Most books tell the story of a single individual or some children and their family. Much attention is paid to the psychology of the characters, their mutual relationships and the emotional impact of the events.

In various books we can also see a contradiction between the knowledge of the reader and the ignorance of the characters; we know what has happened while characters often do not know what may happen to them. In most books, characters will see how their world is gradually narrowed down by Nazi laws and commands. The characters will often show some kind of naivety while the reader already knows that the misery of the characters will not end in for example the ghetto. The modern readers know about the last stop at the concentration camps and how many people have died there. In the stories we can clearly observe that the protagonists do not share the same knowledge. Characters still hope/think that everything will end if they stick to the rules, nonetheless the reader knows that their situation will probably only get worse as the story continues.

The psychological level or the level of “feeling” is mainly concerned with the description of all events, as horrible as they may be. (Joosen and Vloeberghs 178) Authors should also take into account the emotional vulnerability of children and adolescents. The Israeli educationist Chaim Schatzker stated that people should try to represent reality without traumatizing. (Joosen and Vloeberghs 178) Generally, adult “testimony literature” wants to show every radical and traumatizing experience in a detailed way. This leads to a shocking, ineradicable reading experience. Hence the reader becomes an indirect witness to the horror, and collective memory becomes a part of one’s self. This is absolutely not done in children’s literature. Therefore nowadays people often talk about a special Holocaust discourse for children. Within this discourse certain strategies are established: for example specific settings and frequently used plots. Once again we can see that youth literature differs from adult literature in form and content.
Finally, the ethical level deals with taking up responsibility. (Joosen and Vloeberghs 185) This level is concerned with the message that authors want to convey to their audience. A message about human nature, the way people interact and which factors may lead to certain behaviours,… Primo Levi himself already had his doubts about the progression of civilization and the triumph of humanism. In this perspective people can talk about “Zivilisationsbruch Auschwitz”. (Joosen and Vloeberghs 168) This means that the Holocaust might be a trauma which cannot ever be restored, a gap which cannot be bridged. Down to the present day this remains an important topic for discussion. Philosopher Jürgen Habermas thinks that the impossible did take place in Auschwitz and that this has changed the basis of the continuity of the human condition in history. (Joosen and Vloeberghs 168) Within the quest for the human condition, youth literature prefers to serve as a guide in a complex reality. It is not its purpose to discourage the readers. Since its origins, youth literature has been concerned with providing optimism and faith in humanistic values. Hence youth literature tries to make sure that children and adolescents still have faith in future generations.

2.2.1 The dialogic narrative

Adrienne Kertzer already wrote about the general aim of Holocaust literature for young readers in her book In My Mother’s Voice: Children, Literature and the Holocaust. She talked about the need to establish a dialogic narrative which “simultaneously respects our need for hope and happy endings even as it teaches us a different lesson about history”. (Kertzer 75) Furthermore she also stresses the importance of the educational function that is attached to the Holocaust narrative. According to Kertzer literature should stimulate discussions about topics as genocide and mass murder.

One of the main characteristics of contemporary Holocaust literature is the “happy ending”. Walter Pape stated that its origins can be traced back to the Romantic period. (Martin 316) In her book Sparing the Child: Grief and the Unspeakable in Youth Literature about Nazism and the Holocaust Hamida Bosmaijan reaffirms the presence of the “happy ending”.
While many stories for adolescents leave no doubt as to the ultimate fate of European Jews, that fate is limited to Jews in general and occurs “off stage”, so to speak; it does not happen to the main character of the story who usually emerges at the end with an “I have come through” attitude. Along with the implicit assumption that a comprehensive narrative about the Shoah is impossible, the endings confirm that stories for young readers must have an affirmative, if not a happy end, at least in North America.

(qtd. In Martin 316)

Despite of the appearance of a happy ending, it should also be taken into account that the Holocaust is not a life affirming event. Readers need to understand the entire context in which a story is situated; the protagonist of the story may survive but millions of others did not. In this view, Kertzer as well as Bosmajian have the opinion that there should be a textual coexistence between elements as hope and despair, faith and uncertainty,..

How should this dialogic narrative be constructed then? Which sort of language should be used? Linda Hutcheon thinks that the dialogic narrative should be constructed within the approach of postmodernism. In A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory and Fiction she gives a definition of what is meant with postmodernism.

Postmodernism is a contradictory phenomenon, one that uses and abuses, installs and then subverts the very concepts it challenges.

(qtd. In Martin 318)

Within her work Hutcheon is interested specifically in the so-called historiographic metafiction. This particular genre is said to be self-reflexive but it also puts a stress on historical events and characters. Some critics may argue that the use of historiographic metafiction could be abused by Holocaust deniers. Hutcheon claims that this particular genre wants to introduce historical events and characters but it does not want to be a reproduction of historical narratives. (Martin 318) The postmodern novel should encourage readers to ask themselves new questions.
Historiographic metafictions appear to privilege two modes of narration, both of which problematize the entire notion of the subjectivity; multiple points of view or an overtly controlling narrator. In neither, however, do we find a subject confident of his/her ability to know the past with any certainty.

(qtd. In Martin 318)

Michael J. Martin stresses the fact that the postmodern narrative wants to make clear to its readers that they should take into account that both the historical aspect as well as the fact that it is a work of fiction should be seen as discourses. (Martin 319) This means that we cannot understand an event only via facts but we have to learn to contextualize it via fiction. So that historical knowledge should evolve into some kind of historical understanding.

### 2.3 Characteristics

#### 2.3.1 Recurrent patterns

When a reader gets more familiar with Holocaust books for children, it can be observed that recurrent patterns can be distinguished.

First of all there is some sort of repetition in the used setting; many books deal with for example the impact of the Nürnberger laws, the emigration, the conditions of life in the ghetto or even the deportation towards the concentration camps. (Joosen and Vloeberghs 179) Obviously the emphasis lies on the victims rather than the perpetrators. Most frequently a book deals with the story of a Jewish family and in most cases this story is told by a young child or adolescent belonging to that family. The reader gradually becomes aware of the fact that the world of the Jewish people is more and more controlled by superior forces and that the anti-Semitic measures lead to humiliation and disdain.

More specifically, the Holocaust topic is sometimes conceived as a structure with two concentric circles in which the outer circle stands for the periphery. Most youth books are concerned with topics originating from the periphery; life in the ghetto, emigration,... The inner circle refers to the horror that takes place inside the camps with their gas chambers and their crematorium. As most people would suspect, the
area of the inner circle is much less present in modern literature for children because it is too ardent for the readers.

Nevertheless, since the second half of the 1990s a rising trend towards pushing the boundaries of the extremeness can be perceived. (Joosen and Vloeberghs 181) For example in Carol Matas’ story *In My Enemy’s House* there is a specific scene in which a mother pushes her youngest child through a little window of the train which is deporting them to a camp. It is an ultimate act of despair of a mother who hopes that she might save her child’s life. To young children, even to adolescents and adults, this is a horrifying image. Authors sometimes apply the movie metaphor in order to establish a more dissociated relationship between the reader and the narrative; characters appear to perceive the facts as if they are watching a movie, as if none of it happens to them. (Joosen and Vloeberghs 184) As a consequence of this metaphor the reader has the same experience; he or she witnesses what has been written from a distance and therefore the reader will have a stronger feeling of being safe.

Another pattern that seems to occur frequently is the presence of a child protagonist. A child protagonist makes it easier for a younger reader to sympathize with. (Joosen and Vloeberghs 180) It must also be remarked that although most books deal with a protagonist from the side of the condemned people there are other books as well which deal with for example children of Nazis or collaborators. These children too are able to receive empathy from the author and the readers. In many of these cases we can notice that the ‘other’ children were capable of organizing riots. This proves that
even the children are capable of rational and critical thinking; this contrasts with their parents who sometimes appear to have been brainwashed by superior forces. To enlarge the distancing effect authors can make use of a gentile protagonist; this means that the protagonist is a non-Jew. (Jordan 209) Non-Jews can talk about the events more objectively because they did not experience it personally. They have witnessed the suffering but they were never really the direct victim of the suffering. But they also share a sense of sympathy towards the Jewish victims.

The use of a child protagonist is often related to the presence of a child narrator. Sarah D. Jordan mentions the fact that the presence of a child narrator gives a child the insight that he or she can connect with other children who lived fifty years earlier. (Jordan 201) Readers are aware that they could have been the protagonists and therefore there is an increase in the reliability of the story. Children are more willing to believe the events that took place in the past. A child narrator also protects the readers from details about the gruesome facts of the war. Back then children were not always aware of the fact that millions of people were persecuted and executed, this ignorance is sometimes reflected in their story. A young reader will learn more about an event as World War II but the child also adopts this ignorance from the child protagonist. Many children will not find out about the specific tortures, the medical experiments.

To illustrate her statement, Jordan included a short analysis of Gudrun Pausewang’s *The Final Journey* in which the main character Alice is accompanied by her grandfather on their forced trip from the cattle car to the showers of Auschwitz. To protect Alice from the cruel reality her grandfather presents the facts as a part of an adventurous story. In this view the story shows correspondence with Roberto Benigni’s movie *La Vita è Bella* in which a father tells his little son that the concentration camp is full of people who are voluntarily taking part in a contest to win a tank. Nevertheless, Alice gradually starts finding out more about the real situation and blames her grandfather for not telling her the truth.
So now she was sitting in one of those trains that she had sometimes heard Grandmother and Grandfather talking about very quietly, when they thought she was asleep. One of those trains in which so many good friends and acquaintances of her parents and grandparents had gone away. And Lilli, Sarah and Lotte from her own class. And Aunt Irene and Uncle Ludwig too. All of them had gone away, no one had ever come back. How strange.

(qtd. In Jordan 202)

This ‘awakening’ reflects the way in which modern children should learn more about the Holocaust. Bit by bit they come to understand what has happened so that they probably will be able to prevent history from happening again. Nevertheless child readers need to be spared and therefore they will never know the complete story. In the book of Gudrun Pausewang Alice will arrive at Auschwitz, aware that her life depends on other superior forces but she does not realise that the shower will kill her. This is a token of the childish naivety that remains present. The naivety protects children from a shocking, traumatizing overload of information.

To soften the heavy burden of Holocaust literature for young people the protagonist and his or her family will almost always survive the war. (Joosen and Vloeberghs 189) Nevertheless, one should always take into account that this tendency is not always present. Jane Yolen, for example, “allowed” her protagonist to die in the concentration camp in The Devil’s Arithmetic. The survival is often already implied by the narrative structure of a book; various authors apply a retrospective point of view in their writing. Consequently, the readers are implicitly reassured since the beginning of the book. Many authors agree that it would be too harsh for their readers if the characters, who they sympathized with, would die or be murdered at the end. One of the critiques concerning this characteristic deals with the remarkable amount of coincidence involved in the stories. Although the war meant chaos and the fate of thousands of people indeed depended on pure coincidence it is often regarded that it is also a strategy to make a story more exciting and to give a story a good ending.

Despite the fact that the historical accuracy or the credibility of the story is questioned, authors often prefer to stress the element of hope; hope for a better future. (Joosen and Vloeberghs 190) In some books the reader can find an epilogue at the end of the book which gives an overview of what has happened in that future.
Most of the times there is a main stress on the survival and post-war life. Survivors try to integrate the Holocaust in their lives; it is a well known trend that they named their sons and daughters after dead relatives. But even if the protagonists have died, a message of hope can still be present. Hope that their death was not useless; hope that through their individual stories they will go on to live forever. Because literature has the ability to give a voice to the victims who did not survive.

By now, we have seen some recurrent patterns within Holocaust literature for children that are mainly concerned with the content. Authors may also write a book according to a specific structure. More specifically the allegory and the time-slip fantasy seem to be frequently used structures.

The story is often transformed into an allegory when the author wants to address the youngest readers. A story is told via a well-known tale that children can understand and which does not challenge them emotionally. The reader is distanced from the historical reality but manages to learn some basic concepts. (Jordan 205) One of the most famous examples in this case is Eve Bunting’s *Terrible Things: An Allegory of the Holocaust*. Although the fact that Bunting explained some of the historical background in her introduction, children can think of the story as a nice fable. In the story there is a harmonious relationship between all the animals until the ‘terrible things’ decide to take away the feathered animals without any reason. Time after time other categories of animals are taken away and the remaining ones do not question anything. Only Little Rabbit thinks about it and eventually he will be the only survivor. Consequently he will go search other animals and warn them for the ‘terrible things’.

“*Those birds were always too noisy,*” Old Porcupine said. “*Good riddance, I say.*”

“*There’s more room in the trees now,*” the squirrels said

“*Why did the Terrible Things want the birds?*” Little Rabbit asked. “*What’s wrong with feathers?*”

“We mustn’t ask,” Big Rabbit said. “*The Terrible Things don’t need a reason. Just be glad it wasn’t us they wanted.*”

(qtd. In Jordan 205)
In this story the emphasis lies on the remaining animals instead of the ones that are taken away. In a way the story is also a comment on all the people who watched the Nazi’s persecute the Jews and did not react. It shows that if people would start questioning what happened, it would have been possible to prevent further decay.

Another possibility could be the appliance of a time-slip fantasy; a child living in modern times is transported back into the past. In this case readers can easily identify with the protagonist and in the meanwhile it is still prevented that the entire experience becomes too harsh to handle. By transporting the protagonist back to the past he or she has a chance to experience life during World War II. Through this experience they will learn more about the importance of remembering. After recovering this insight the protagonist is sent back to the recent times but he or she has learnt an important lesson. Within this strategy the author regularly focuses on the situation in the concentration camps. Therefore the topic is emotionally provocative to the reader. Nevertheless Kertzer noted that the fantasy element makes sure that when protagonists enter a camp they will also exit it at the end. (Jordan 213) They are able to escape from the reality of the concentration camps and this enlightens the story.

As we may conclude from these two sources; children’s literature has various techniques to ensure that the young readers will not be overwhelmed too much by the Holocaust topic. Most stories will try to give an accurate presentation of life during World War II but most of the time the cruellest facts will be left out. The authors want to teach children and adolescents what has happened in the past but they prefer to end their stories with a message of hope and an emphasis on the importance of remembering.

2.3.2 Attraction-repulsion

Marina Warner remarked that the element of fear is frequently present in literature. (Kokkola 130) This is not a new tendency; it is a widespread feature that can be traced back to classic mythology.
“People need to create monsters…It helps us to believe that the real world is not quite as scary”

(qtd. In Kokkola 130-131)

It is suggested that the presence of a fantasy monster enables the readers to deal with their repressed fear. This was explained by Perry Nodelman:

“From a psychoanalytical point of view, horror represents a return of the repressed. The imagery of horror is repulsive but entertaining because it manifests forbidden or repressed wishes.”

(Nodelman)

An important fact that is intertwined with the presence of horror or fear is the fact that this always ends with a return to normalcy.

“Horror scares us, and the relief following the realization that the horror is not real brings pleasure

(qtd. In Kokkola 131)

This same return to normalcy is preferable when authors write for an audience of children and adolescents. Overall, authors use the element of fear to make sure that the readers are motivated to read the book. Nevertheless, they should try to make sure that there is some kind of psychological closure at the end of the book.

According to Lydia Kokkola, Marina Warner claims that “the Bogeyman” should be considered to be a stereotypical figure that reappears in many literary works. (Kokkola 131) Previously, this stereotype was often linked to racial features and diabolical practices. The connection with racial features has diminished overtime. Within the genre of Holocaust literature the Nazi is established as the new bogeyman; he is a typical violent person, who is not afraid to kill someone and who is capable of stealing children. One of the ways in which this bogeyman-figure is often presented is via his military uniform.
For example: (qtd. In Kokkola 134)

“Day and night Jacob heard cries and shouts, but the worst sound was the rhythmic click click of the Nazi soldiers’ boots as they passed under his window” (Jacob’s Rescue)

“German soldiers are parading through the Dutch streets. They have helmets on their heads and they are wearing black boots. They are marching and singing songs that have words I do not understand” (Hide and Seek)

In these examples we can see that attention is paid to the appearance of the soldiers, especially on their clothes and their equipment; their boots, their helmets,… In this way there is no emphasis on the individuals themselves. In a way they are presented as dehumanized monsters. Even if authors pay attention to the individuals, it is clear that no human emotions are attached to the perpetrator. Because of that children will not be encouraged to look at the past from the point of view of a German soldier. The figure of the Bogeyman claims an outsider-position. This position offers a sharp contrast with the family life in which people support each other all the way through.

What if children would be able to read the personal accounts of the perpetrators? It is a general belief that “tout comprendre, c’est tout pardonner” (all that is understood is forgiven). Within this view Primo Levi declared that “to understand is almost to justify”. (www.merriam-webster.com) This means that when children would read the accounts from another point of view, they might end up understanding or having sympathy for the perpetrator. Many people think it is intolerable to have sympathy for the Nazis. Christopher Browning conducted some research on the figure of the perpetrator in Ordinary men. One of his conclusions stated that many perpetrators were ordinary men. (Browning 238) This is in contrast with the Nazi as a Bogeyman, someone who stimulates the feelings of fear. Browning argues that people should understand the motivation of these ordinary men because this is a part of history too. It is a general tendency that the people who refuse to understand the point of view of the perpetrator, are often Holocaust survivors or Jewish people born afterwards. If we randomly look at some reading list concerning the Holocaust, it is immediately clear that the majority of the books are written from the perspective of Jewish people instead of that of the German soldiers. So although historians as Browning suggest
that authors should also pay attention to the portraying of the ordinary perpetrators, there is still a tendency towards the use of the Nazi as a Bogeyman.

Can reading lead to understanding? And can understanding then lead to justification? If we are able to “believe” a literary character, we will probably also understand his or her motives. Furthermore, literature sometimes offers his readers a look inside the mind of a character. Of course, this is something that is not possible in real life. People often think that this extra information can lead to the process of identification. Especially when it concerns literature for children and adolescents, it is assumed that they will take everything for granted. Adult readers are able to rely on their personal knowledge of how people interact in the real world and have developed a critical awareness. This means that they can understand characters but this does not mean that they will identify with them or sympathize with them. Children and adolescents often lack this knowledge and therefore they might think that what they are reading is the truth. Lydia Kokkola talks about “naïve reading”.(Kokkola 143) This means that children read a book without much critical awareness.

2.3.2.1 Reactions to the Bogeyman

In some cases authors try to subvert the horror of the Holocaust, one of the possible ways in which this can be done is by the use of humour. At first, the combination of the Holocaust topic and the use of humour, appears to be a strange and inappropriate combination. Concepts as genocide and humour are generally considered to be incompatible. Nonetheless humour can be used to look at the facts from another point of view. The Russian scholar and critic Mikhail Bakhtin developed the notion of “carnivalesque” in his work *Rabelais and his World*. Hereby he means that carnival humour can be used to attack the present rules and regulations. A new order is created and this order reproduces en abuses the established order. The old world is clearly recognizable but specific elements are parodied. The main characteristic of the carnivalesque is the fact that it is subversive; it allows readers to escape from the world for a while and it encourages self-examination. In his book *We Are All in the Dumps with Jack and Guy* Maurice Sendak wrote two illustrated nursery rhymes (Sendak)
We are all in the dumps
For diamond and trumps
The kittens are gone to St. Paul's!
The baby is bit
The moon's in a fit
And the houses are built
Without walls

Jack and Guy
Went out in the rye
And they found a little boy
With one black eye
Come says Jack Let's knock him on the head
No says Guy
Let's buy him some bread
You buy one loaf and I'll buy two
And we'll bring him up
As other folks do

The work has multiple layers; the general aim was to write a story about the Holocaust. Nevertheless, readers can observe references to for example the homeless people in modern America and the Bible.

In this illustration we can see people dressed in newspapers. The woman on the right is dressed in a newspaper which talks about homeless shelters. Later on in the book we can see homeless people and in the background a view of the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco. This image can also be linked to the coming of the Messiah.
Despite the interpictorial references, there are clear references to the Holocaust as well.

This illustration refers to the deportation of the Jews, the transport that will bring them to Auschwitz.

Sendak uses humour in various ways. First of all it should be remarked that the topic is touched upon by means of a nursery rhyme. This extraordinary choice provides the reader with a new way to look at the Holocaust. Humour is also observed in the animal imagery which is used in the book. The kittens represent the Jews while the rats correspond to the Nazis. Lydia Williams mentions that “the cat and mouse iconography appears to bring down the events of the Holocaust to an oversimplified level”. (Williams 131) This should be seen within the light of Bakhtin’s theory of the carnivalesque. This iconography forms part of the parodying effect. Williams states that “Carnival requires the deliberate suspension of actual order in favour of an imagined order”. (Williams 131) Furthermore, it was certainly not the first time that animal imagery was used in literary work of the Holocaust. Art Spiegelman can probably be considered to be the most famous author who inscribed animal imagery in his well-known work Maus.

The presence of the carnivalesque prevents readers from identifying with the protagonists. Because of this, the author has the possibility to get closer to the horror. Sendak allowed his characters to enter the death camp. It has already been discussed before that one of the main concerns in Holocaust literature for children is
the fact that the child should be spared. Therefore settings like gas chambers or crematoria are hardly touched upon. The use of humour provides the reader with some kind of alienating effect and makes it possible to enter the camps.

In the second nursery rhyme Jack and Guy have entered Auschwitz and they encounter a poor kid. They become parental figures. This can be interpreted as a celebration of community spirit in a ghetto. (Williams 134) The community can also be linked to the theory of Mikhail Bakhtin. The strong ties of human community are celebrated and linked with the search for food. Food can be interpreted as a symbol of love. Thus, in providing the kid of bread, Jack and Guy display their love for the socially “undesirable” elements within their community. (Williams 134)

In general, via the appliance of the carnivalesque authors are able to depict places like death camps and crematoria without overwhelming their child readers. The carnivalesque makes it possible to take the world less seriously; this enables readers to step outside and critically evaluate what is happening. (Stephens)

2.3.3 All’s well that ends well

Within the area of children’s literature about the Holocaust, there is a tendency towards ending the book with a positive message. Because of the fact that authors have to deal with an audience of young children and adolescents, it is preferable that the book ends with a return to normalcy. In general a children’s book is based on a home-away-home pattern. Do all books follow the same pattern or are there differences concerning the closure?

Lydia Kokkola distinguishes two types of closure; structural closure and psychological closure. (Kokkola 154) When the story ends with a satisfactory conclusion, we may classify this as an example of structural closure. Structural closure is often linked with a “happy ending”. This form of closure seems to be the most popular one. Psychological closure takes place when the personal conflicts of the protagonist are brought into balance. (Kokkola 155) It must be remarked that this type of closure can only be partial. If the psychological closure would be complete, it would mean that people have accepted the death of millions of Jews. This is probably one of the
reasons why most authors insert structural closure in their books. When neither one of
them takes place aperture might take place. If a book ends with aperture, it may be
interpreted in several ways. Furthermore it implies the possibility that another event
may occur in the future. In her article *Beyond the Grammar of the Story, Or How Can
Children’s Literature Criticism Benefit from Narrative Theory* Nikolajeva states that
“aperture precludes a sequel, because depending on the interpretation chosen by the
reader, the course of further events would be radically different”. (Nikolajeva 7)
Additionally Nikolajeva is in favour of a new kind of distinction. When the structure of
the plot is being reviewed, people should make a distinction between an open ending
and a closed one. When people want to denote the psychological finishing point of
the protagonist, it is better to use terms as closure and aperture.

Authors can also prefer to write a book that consists of multiple endings. This often
leads to a feeling of uncertainty. The reader is not sure what really happened. This
type of ending is used to reflect the feelings of the survivors and their uncertainty
concerning the impact of the event. They did not know what happened to their family
members, their friends, their neighbours...

Next to multiple endings, we may also encounter the presence of multiple plots.
Although it must be remarked that this specific type of structure is quite extraordinary.
Kenneth Roseman’s novel entitled *Escape From The Holocaust*, consists of several
plots. In general, there are sixty-seven possible outcomes. Generally most outcomes
will deal with the Diaspora. Nevertheless three of the sixty-seven possible outcomes
result in the death of the protagonist.

On the introductory pages the author explains how the book should be read;

>You are about to read a very different kind of book. With most books you start on
page 1 and continue straight through until the end. In *Escape From The Holocaust*
you’ll proceed differently. Read the first five pages. At the bottom of page 5, you will
find instructions telling you to make a choice before going ahead. Each choice leads
you to different pages and to different experience

(Roseman 1)
Furthermore Roseman immediately makes clear to his reader that his book has a didactic function and that it should not be considered a pure amusement.

*Even though this book may help you learn about a terrible time in human history in an enjoyable way, never think of the Holocaust as a game.*

(Roseman 2)

*To know and to remember—that is what this book is about.*

(Roseman 2)

The reader is invited to play the role of a Polish Jew, who wants to become a doctor. The story takes place in Berlin during the 1930s. After a general introduction, the reader needs to make certain choices. These choices will eventually decide the outcome. Will the reader/protagonist survive? Will he enter a camp? Is he able to escape? The first choice to be made is the following one:

*If you believe the outbreak of Anti-Semitism is only temporary, and you decide to stay in Germany to complete your studies, turn to page 6.*

*If you decide to sacrifice a medical education for your own safety and return to Cracow, turn to page 7.*

(Roseman 5)

We can immediately realize that the first choice will include more radical consequences than the second choice.

At first sight, this book seems like a useful tool because of the fact that the reader is personally involved. Furthermore, the book can be read several times and different choices will lead to a different outcome. Because of the diversity of the book, Lydia Kokkola thinks that it has “the potential for reaching an audience that might otherwise not engage in reading about the Holocaust”. (Kokkola 157)
Nevertheless the book was criticized for its lack of detailed description. For example:

*When you arrive in Ravensbrück, you are nearly dead from the horrid conditions in the cattle cars. Many others have, in fact, died.*

(Roseman 113)

In this example, Rosemann could have decided to give more details about the specific horrid conditions; What were the circumstances? How was it perceived by people who were in those cattle cars? Etc.

Despite critiques Roseman mentioned in his opening pages that “all the events are true; they all occurred in the lives of Jews who lived in Europe during the 1930s and 1940s”. (Roseman 1) He also remarked that the plots were based upon the lives of several Jews instead of one individual. The overall purpose of his work was to enable children to learn more about the Holocaust and to introduce them to names of persons who have played an important role throughout history.

We can conclude that authors can apply a multitude of strategies that are concerned with the ending of their story. Despite this diversity, most books end with a structural closure. This type of closure coincides with the home-away-home pattern, which is considered to be preferable in the case of children’s literature. It is especially preferable within the context of the Holocaust because of the fact that the child reader should still be spared. The overall purpose, namely the fact that the child should not be emotionally overwhelmed, remains the same and is respected by the authors.

### 2.4 Photography in children’s books

#### 2.4.1 Photography: introduction

Throughout her book *Regarding The Pain of Others*, Susan Sontag claims that photography has two main functions; first of all photos serve as objects that document the past and secondly, they should be considered as a visual form of art. When we look at pictures we all assume that what is shown is something real,
something that has taken place. Nevertheless, some photographs may be forged. In this case it is believed that the more staged a photograph is, the less plausible it is that we tend to believe it. Most people consider photography as the eye of history. This means that people believe that they present us an objective reality which provides us with evidence of what happened in history. Although we often want to believe that photographs are purely objective images we should always consider the fact that every single photograph is framed. The photographer may have tried to give an objective account of reality but what we see is a product that depends on various aspects like for example the focus of the photographer, the colour, the lens that was used,...etc.

Before the birth of photography, events or situations from the past were often documented by means of paintings. Like paintings, photographs help contemporary generations to construct an image of a distant past. Is photography the new medium or does it still coexists with paintings? In *Regarding the Pain of Others* Susan Sontag states that photography should be considered superior.

“because an image produced with a camera is, literally, a trace of something brought before the lens, photographs were superior to any painting as a memento of the vanished past and the dear departed.”

(Sontag, Regarding 21)

When photographs are used to document it should be remarked that they have a double function; they invite people to remember people as well as events. It is not a coincidence that lots of museums nowadays include photographic material in their collections. Especially with more recent atrocities like for example the Holocaust people want to have a ‘memory museum’ like the Yad Vashem institute in Jerusalem or the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington DC. In these museums, the sufferings of certain groups are exposed to others. The overall purpose is that contemporary generations as well as possible survivors keep remembering the past. In that way they also remember all the persons that died, therefore it could be argued that the dead people are able to “survive”. Their images have managed to make people aware of their existence.
“Among such archives of horror, the photographs of genocide have undergone the greatest institutional development. The point of creating public repositories for these and other relics is to ensure that the crimes they depict will continue to figure in people’s consciousness.”

(Sontag, Regarding 77)

Nevertheless the remembrance function includes the possibility that some people start remembering photos instead of facts. In this case photos become iconic images. For example when people think of the Holocaust they will probably remember the iconic photograph of the young boy in the Warsaw Ghetto.

In this picture we can see a young boy who is being transported to a death camp. Next to its function as a documentation of the past this picture also encloses a sense of affective appeal. And it can be clearly seen as a “memento mori”, a remembrance of mortality and death.

Can pictures lead their own life or should they be accompanied by some sort of narrative? In Regarding the Pain of Others Sontag claims that pictures can haunt us while narratives may help us to understand. Let us now have a closer look at the authenticity and the use of photographs in narratives for children and adolescents.
2.4.2 Photography: close to veracity or not?

When we were young we preferred to read books that included pictures or drawings in it; it looked pretty and it was easier to imagine things. As children grow older they familiarise with books that only include text. To convey the message to their young readers some authors decided to insert photographs. By introducing photographs in children’s books that deal with the Holocaust topic, the authors aim at a more realistic point of view. Despite of the inserted images people should always take into account that photographs always include framing. When we look at photographs we might think we know what has happened because photographs can serve as evidence. Nevertheless photographs are easily falsified; some things may be left out while other things may be inserted. The most famous example about the controversial nature of photography was without any doubt the picture in which Lenin gives a speech to the mass in May 1920. In the picture we can clearly see Lenin and Trotsky. During the period of Stalinism the picture reappeared but this time Trotsky was removed from it.

(http://www.tc.umn.edu/~hick0088/classes/csci_2101/false.html)

Of course these photographs have no relation with Holocaust pictures but this is probably one of the most famous examples of forging photographs. People in the 1920s were already capable of falsifying photographs, ever since photography has evolved and is even more vulnerable than it was before. When looking at a photograph people often think that what they see is real and by observing the image they think that they know what happened in history. But can this be seen as authentic knowledge?
2.4.3 Photographs in children’s literature

2.4.3.1 Characteristics

The inclusion of photographs in children’s literature on the Holocaust may serve as a means to show the “unimaginable” to the reader; the photograph should be seen as a piece of evidence which can only enforce the text itself. Nevertheless we should adopt a critical attitude towards the annexation of photographs in works of literature.

Susan Sontag talks about the nature of pictures in her essay *On Photography*.

> “Photographs, which cannot themselves explain anything, are inexhaustible invitations to deduction, speculation, and fantasy.”

*(Sontag, Photography 20)*

Despite the fact that photographs can be interpreted in various ways, the insertion of photographs in children’s books about the Holocaust should be primarily seen as a marker of a sort of documentary. If authors would use pictures instead of photographs, it would be easier for the readers to give in to their fantasy. Most of the stress is put on the image rather than the historical accurateness; photographs rarely include names, locations or dates. *(Kertzer 404)* In this case the photographs are not really framed but if these same images would occur in adult literature they would be clearly framed.

2.4.3.2 Function

But how do children react when they see photographs about the Holocaust? According to Susan Sontag photographs shock insofar as they show something novel. *(Sontag, photography 17)* But can photographs still have a shocking effect in a society where images of violence and cruelty are quite common? One of the aims of photographs is the fact that they should be able to shock us and in that way speak to us.
“Nothing I have seen— in photographs or in real life—ever cut me as sharply, deeply, instantaneously”

“...of an event I had scarcely heard of and could do nothing to affect, of suffering I could hardly imagine and could do nothing to relieve”

“Something went dead, something is still crying”

(Sontag, Photography 17-18)

In this case Sontag talks about her personal experience of seeing photographs of Bergen-Belsen and Dachau for the first time. She was accidentally introduced to these photographs. It was clearly a shock for her but she also emphasised that the experience itself was transformative just because of the fact that it came as a sudden shock. If the accompanying narrative explains a photograph, is it still possible then to experience the shock in the way Sontag did? Nevertheless contemporary authors still believe that they are able to shock their readers in a way that their readers can learn lessons from the past.

2.4.3.3 Photograph or illustration?

Including pictures in a book can be done in two main ways: either authors insert illustrations of photographs or they use photograph-inspired illustrations. At first sight there might not really be great differences between both sorts of illustrations but it should be remarked that when an illustration is based on a photograph the illustrator might take greater liberty. He or she might add or erase certain details. For example, in “A Picture Book of Anne Frank” there is an illustration of Anne and an adult woman standing at the bookcase which leads to their hiding place. Illustrator Karen Ritz decided to insert a drawing of the bookcase and labels it as ‘movable bookcase’. In this specific case the bookcase (without the label) was also based upon a photograph and we could say that the illustration combines two photographs into one image. Because of the fact that this image is an illustration instead of a photograph it is easier for the reader to accept it. If this same image would have been a photograph it would immediately look like a forged picture because of the extra illustration within the picture. It would provide an artificial impression. Nevertheless people could ask themselves questions about the veracity of these illustrations too. Actually, we must
probably recognize that photographs are considered to be closer to historical truth than illustrations. In this specific example the illustrator has based her drawing upon two actual pictures, we could say that she combined two photographs in order to reconstruct the setting.

(image in Kertzer, Saving 407)
3. Analysis

Many characteristics have been mentioned already but what about the “practice” instead of the theory? Do the same patterns keep reoccurring or are there new patterns that can be distinguished? Before I start with my analyses, I would like to start off with a few words on both authors:

Jane Yolen is an American writer who has written over three hundred children’s books and has been rewarded with several decorations and prices. Furthermore, Yolen involves herself into writing poetry, teaching literature courses and she is also a reviewer of children’s literature. It is even said that she is the “Hans Christian Andersen of America”.

Han Nolan is an American female writer who writes fiction stories for young adults. Her oeuvre is not as extensive as Jane Yolen’s one, though she is also a very successful writer. Her literary debut took place in 1994 with the publication of *If I Should Die Before I Wake*. Ever since, she has published six more novels which have received various prizes including the National Book Award.

3.1 Analysis: *If I Should Die Before I wake*

3.1.1 Story

Han Nolan adopts the perspective of a neo-Nazi girl named Hilary Burke. Her life is turned upside down after a motorcycle accident. Seriously injured, she stays at a Jewish hospital and while she is in a coma she is transported back in time. More specifically, she is transported back into the memories of a female Holocaust survivor who shares a hospital room with Hilary. She becomes Chana and she has to fight for her own life in harsh circumstances such as a ghetto and a concentration camp. Eventually she wakes up but this experience will change her life.
3.1.2 Structure

The book is based on a time-slip fantasy; thus, the reader can see how Hilary is transported back in time. Hilary will live the life of a Jewish girl during World War II. It will be a life-changing experience, causing her to adopt a whole new attitude. This kind of structure, added to the presence of an adolescent protagonist, facilitates the process of identification amongst younger readers; however, the dilemma present in adolescent’s literature concerning the emotional bonding between an adolescent and the protagonist is also present. The reader is encouraged to identify with the protagonist but this identification process must never overwhelm the reader emotionally. The extra layer resulting from the time-travelling structure should prevent the young reader from developing an excessively deep emotional bond with the protagonist. The fantasy feature makes it possible for the author to enter the death camps, whilst the time-travelling structure enables the protagonist to escape back to the present, providing a sense of relief.

The novel integrates two main plots. Firstly, the reader is confronted with Hilary’s life. Since the death of her father she has developed an anti-Semitic attitude. This attitude has evolved towards the extreme and as a result she has joined a neo-Nazi group which is called “The Warriors”. This group is responsible for several crimes: they destroyed graves at Jewish cemeteries, they tried to blow up a Jewish hospital and they kidnapped Simon Schulmann. Simon is a thirteen-year old Jewish boy who lives next door to Hilary. Members of “The Warriors” kidnapped him and locked him up in a closet at school. As the story develops, Simon’s disappearance leads to ever more commotion. Towards the end Hilary confesses what actually happened to Simon; subsequently, she is relieved to hear that the young boy has managed to survive. Besides her neo-Nazi attitude, Hilary’s life is also characterized by a bad relationship with her mother. However, Hillary’s mother stays by her side until Hilary opens her eyes again. It is clear that they still have much to talk about but the book ends on a positive note. In the beginning, Hilary’s actions can be perceived as those of an angry young woman; in the end, however, she evolves into a much kinder type of girl. Instead of ignoring her mother she will accept her advice; instead of harassing Jewish people she will ask for forgiveness.
The second plot in *If I Should Die Before I Wake* is the story of Chana, whose life and family is gradually being “narrowed down”. She not only loses her house and ends up in the Lodz Ghetto, but as time passes, she witnesses how her friends and family members “disappear” due to the Nazis. In the end, Chana is the only one of her family who survives the German atrocities.

### 3.1.3 Setting

The novel has three main settings: a Jewish hospital, the Lodz Ghetto and Auschwitz. Within the story of Chana we can clearly see a movement from the “outer circle” towards the “inner circle”. This means that there is a movement from the periphery towards the core that includes the concentration camp.

“There was just one room for all six of us. The walls were so smudged with dirt and soot it was hard to make out their true color. A table with the front legs shorter than the back stood in the center of the room with two green and two brown chairs pulled up to it. Looking beyond the dirt and litter that cluttered the rotting, sloping floor, I spotted two cots, both tipped over on their sides. The ceiling sloped down toward us but showed no evidence of imminent collapse.”

*(Nolan 71)*

By giving a detailed description of the room in the Lodz ghetto Nolan has clearly tried to make the setting as realistic as possible. Details make it easier for the reader to develop an image of what it must have been like. As commented earlier, most novels are said to confine themselves to the “outer circle”; the Lodz ghetto frequently figures in Holocaust literature but the concentration camps are hardly ever entered. Because of the use of the time-travel structure, Nolan decided to let Chana enter the world of Auschwitz and Birkenau.

“Halt! The guards shouted down the line as we approached a gate with letters strung across the top of it. “Arbeit Macht Frei,” Bubbe read. “Work Will Set You Free.” All around the gate was a high wall of electrified wire. We waited as people were pulled away from our lines and men were separated from the women and led through this gate. The rest of us were pushed on until at last we arrived at another gate, the entrance to a place they called Birkenau.”

*(Nolan 185)*
In this quote Nolan describes the arrival at Auschwitz-Birkenau. The high wall of electrified wire and the shouting guards already indicate that this is not a normal work camp. It must also be remarked that Nolan has opted to name the concentration camp, this makes the story and the setting more specific, more detailed.

Later in the story the author includes even more details concerning the entrance of the concentration camp. More specifically, she writes about the orchestra that has to “welcome” the newcomers. At first sight this might seem to originate from the author’s imagination and it might be seen as a tactic to disguise reality; nevertheless, official testimonies have confirmed the presence of an orchestra in certain concentration camps.

“The newcomers would arrive and hear the music, see us marching, and think they were arriving at a real work camp. They, too, would march along, convinced that they had finally come to a better place, only to be led to the showers, where they would be locked in, gassed, and then stuffed in the ovens.”

(Nolan 235)

This element is even more prominent as the story progresses, since Chana becomes part of the orchestra herself. In real life, the orchestra consisted of prisoners, too. No one chose to do this, as they did not wish to give people false hope; however, this was their way to survive.

In general, one can link the various settings to the gradual downfall of the Jews. As they are more and more dominated by the Nazis, their territory will be narrowed down. Eventually they enter the concentration camp where their life is dominated and determined by the Nazis. Furthermore Nolan has tried to present the different settings by means of well-known facts but also by means of detailed information. Although it must be taken into account that the book is a work of fiction, Nolan has tried to create a realistic setting which allows the readers to have a detailed image.
3.1.4 Point of view

As previously mentioned, the story consists of two plots, each containing a different point of view. On the one hand, that of a young neo-Nazi girl in a hospital, and on the other hand, the one of a young Jewish girl during World War II. At the beginning of each chapter, Han Nolan indicates whose “perspective” is being explored: Hilary-Hilary/Chana-Chana. It becomes very clear that Chana’s point of view is present throughout the greater part of the novel. When the author indicates Hilary/Chana, it is clear that Hilary has not entirely “become” Chana yet, and traces of modern times are still present. In the following excerpt, a mixture between what Hilary perceives to be real and what is not real is apparent. It is clear that Chana’s story has entered Hilary’s life; nevertheless, Hilary is struggling to focus on her own life.

“My father died. They hung him in a tree and shot him. I mean I dream my father died. I mean, this other father died, not my father. Not my real father. My real father died when I was five. Roy Burke was his name. Just so you know.”

(Nolan 20)

This quote clearly reflects confusion. Confusion is an omnipresent element. It is part of Hilary’s life, it affects the Jewish people during World War II and it influences the reader. In the concentration camp there is confusion when people’s hair is shaved off, confusion about what happened to relatives and overall confusion about the entire situation. The confusion in Hilary’s life results in a new and positive attitude. What about the reader? Because of the fact that the reader gets confused too, Nolan has probably also tried to establish a change in attitude. Modern readers might be confused and they might not see the relevance of the Holocaust anymore. Through their reading they might understand that it is a serious crime of the past and that they too can still help to prevent the past from reoccurring in the future.

Hilary’s hatred towards Jews is mainly expressed by means of stereotypes. Jewish people have been stereotyped throughout the centuries and this has reached a climax during World War II. Jews were frequently stereotyped as greedy and linked to jobs in the financing sphere:
“Only dumb Simon Schulmann would be at the library till closing time on a Saturday night. He'd been there the past three Saturdays so it was practically guaranteed he'd be there again this time and taking the shortcut home through the woods of course. Lazy Jew. See what being lazy gets you?”

(Nolan 3)

“So they stuffed him in one of the big orange lockers they got in the boy’s locker room at school. He’s pint-sized anyway, just like all Jews. Tiny little monkeys, what they are. Tiny little crooks.”

(Nolan 4)


(Nolan 5)

Already in the beginning we are confronted with Hilary’s anger, which makes it hard to sympathise with the protagonist right away. Even when it becomes known why Hilary supports anti-Semitic feelings, readers may still feel distanced because of Hilary’s aggressivity towards others, including her own mother.

Through the vicarious experience of Chana’s life, Hilary is able to change her own perspective. She turns away from the neo-Nazi group she belonged to and she will try to make sure that Chana and so many others did not die in vain. In the following example, we may perceive hints of the change in attitude that gradually takes place throughout the novel:

“You want to know who I am? I'm the worst possible thing that could happen to someone like you. And if I weren't trapped or strapped or wrapped or whatever the hell I am, I'd show you. See, 'cause I know you. I know who you are. I can tell a mile away. Jew lady! Yeah, I know you.”

(Nolan 2)
“I pray for courage. I pray that when the time comes for me to speak, for me to tell the story, I’ll know what to say. I want to go home, I’m ready. I want to speak to Simon. He’s already home. I want to tell him I understand and ask him to understand me. I’m afraid of what he will say, of what’s going to happen to me. I’m afraid of what I have to do.”

(Nolan 289)

As Hilary evolves into an empathic young girl, the reader is encouraged to empathize with Hilary too. Towards the end we can see a vulnerable person who does not know what the future will bring, but someone who is determined to make the best of life. She shows true repentance for what she did and she will use her voice for good causes. She has made it her personal goal to help remembering what happened to Chana and the other Holocaust victims.

3.1.5 Nazi as a Bogeyman

Marina Warner mentions the fact that Nazis are often the Bogeymen of Holocaust literature. (Kokkola 131) She claims that attention is paid to the appearance of the soldiers, but the stress hardly ever lies on the individuals. This “trend” is also visible in Nolan’s book:

“They were the heartless beasts, in their fine woollen coats and leather boots made by our hands.”

(Nolan 129)

“I go out into the streets and see the guards on the other side of the fence mocking us, laughing at us with their warm coats and overfed bodies but I laugh at them. I pity them, those beasts.”

(Nolan 135)

Throughout the novel the Nazis are called “monsters” or “beasts” These previous examples can also be seen as indications of the fact that the Nazi soldiers are depicted as dehumanized.
3.1.6 Fact/Fiction

Holocaust literature for children often tries to give a realistic account of what has happened during World War II. Realism is often used to enable the process of identification. Though it must be argued that a time-slip fantasy cannot be perceived as real, it could be said that Nolan has tried to insert “authenticity” in her novel.

Authenticity derives from the fact that Nolan inserts some “terms” that are typically linked to the Holocaust. One of the “easiest” ways in which she added authenticity was by referring to the inscription on the gate at the entrance of Auschwitz “Arbeit Macht Frei”, which is probably one of most iconic phrases of the Holocaust. In addition, she also tries to teach her young readers something more when she mentions for example the “Muselmänner”:

“Muselmänner? That means Muslims. I don’t understand.
It is the name given to those who have given up all hope. They have lost it in here.
[...] There is nothing up there anymore and the body, it follows the mind. They will be dead today, tomorrow at latest.”

(Nolan 205-206)

Nolan could have opted to refer to the “living dead”. Instead she inserts the original German term. It is a term that was commonly used in the camps. It might be argued that it is a logical decision to insert this term since it is linked to the concentration camps. Nevertheless the author still has the authority to decide what she will and will not insert in her book.

Authenticity is also established in another way via the use of original Yiddisch and German words. Maybe it can be argued that some things become “real” when someone gives them a name. For example people can talk about a German soldier with a certain function, but when someone names this same soldier the “Lagerführer” it becomes more specific and therefore in a way more “real”. Nolan could have opted to use for example English translations for certain “sections” within the concentration camp: nevertheless she decided to insert the German denominations.
“Bubbe. She has been on this Aussenarbeit too long. It is killing her. She has to carry these big rocks to the other side of the camp and deliver them to me. I have to watch her struggle across. I see her fall, I see her return each time more cut up, more…”

(Nolan 241)

“Our work in the Weberei unit was tedious but not backbreaking. We sat at long tables piled high with rags and paper as stiff as wood. We tore them into strips with our hands and braided them, often tearing the skin off our hands as well. Every day we had to complete a rope of twenty meters, and it had to be strong enough so that when the SS came around and tried to pull it apart, it held tight.”

(Nolan 252)

Through the use of authentic German words the reader clearly sees that the protagonist is in a place where the Nazis are in control. These German words contrast strongly with the Yiddish ones. Yiddish words can be interpreted as a reference to the “normal” world, a world before the arrival of the Nazis. It could be said that these words also reflect the sense of community, some kind of protected environment.

“I prayed for long periods of time, stringing together bits of prayer I could remember. “Look upon us in our suffering and fight our struggles” I prayed, recalling the seventh blessing of the Shemoneh Esrei.”

(Nolan 167)

The use of Yiddish is also clearly present with names concerning family ties, for example “zayde” instead of grandfather, “bubbe” instead of grandmother. It can be concluded that the use of Yiddish and German words add to the creation of an “us versus them” atmosphere where “us” means the community of Jews and “them” are the Nazis who are portrayed as dehumanized monsters. The reader can clearly distinguish a so called “good guy/bad guy” pattern. As I have mentioned earlier, Nolan makes use of certain authorial strategies to enforce this pattern. Thus the Nazi is described as an emotionless monster and most attention is paid to his appearance instead of emotions. Furthermore the use of Yiddish and German words emphasizes the fact that there is not only a language barrier between both groups but that they are two different communities as well.
3.1.7 Hope and survival

Previously I have mentioned that Vanessa Joosen and Katrien Vloebergs have stressed the presence of survival; in most cases the protagonist and his or her family survive the horrible events. (Joosen and Vloeberghs 189) Most authors think that it is cruel towards the readers to let the protagonist die. Actually it is a “positive” event to be able to overcome death. It is a hopeful message to survive World War II. Together with the struggle to survive the reader can notice a strong presence of “hope”: hope for things to get better, hope that God will save them,…

Within Nolan’s book it is clear that hope is omni-present. Even though many friends and family members die, Chana manages to survive and there is hope that she will be able to tell others about what happened to her family. Hope that by telling her story, the victims will never be forgotten. When Hilary finally wakes up from her coma she realises that she has experienced the life of the old woman whom she shared a hospital room with. At the end of the book the reader will therefore be confronted with a message of hope; hope for a better life. More specifically the reader is able to see that Hilary wants to change her life in a positive way. Her transformation is clearly visible when she decides to rescue her Jewish neighbour Simon.

“No. No, Hilary. He’s all right. He’s here. Down on the second floor. It’s okay. The kid did okay. He’s alive. He found a water bottle in that locker, three-quarters full, and some orange peels. He’s okay. He’ll be okay.”

“He’s really…”

“I promise.”

“And you. You stayed with me.”

“Yes, baby. I’m here. Things are going to be better. I promise, things will be better.”

(Nolan, 288)
3.2 Analysis The Devil’s Arithmetic

3.2.1 Story

On a Jewish holiday called Passover Seder, Hannah Stern has to open the door for the prophet Elijah. By opening the door, this modern-day Jewish girl is transported back in time, more specifically to the time of World War II, and she becomes Chaya Abramowicz. The Nazis show up at her uncle's wedding and transport Hannah and her family to a concentration camp. Within the camp, she manages to stay alive with the help of a girl named Rivka. When the Nazis decide to kill Rivka, Chaya takes the brave decision to switch places and thus save Rivka’s life. After Chaya has died, Hannah is transported back to her familiar world. There she discovers that she has experienced what has happened to her aunt Eva. Her aunt was Rivka and Chaya was the girl who saved her life.

3.2.2 Structure

Similar to Han Nolan’s If I Should Die Before I Wake, Jane Yolen has established her book upon a time-slip structure. As we have seen before, this specific type of structure is often used to present the tough world of the concentration camp. Furthermore, it coincides with the contradiction inherent in Holocaust literature for children: children are encouraged to undergo a process of identification with the protagonist; nevertheless they should never be emotionally overwhelmed by it. It is a contradiction that authors should always have in mind when they decide to write children’s literature about the Holocaust. A time-slip structure does not prevent children from identifying with Hannah/Chaya but there is an extra layer here which makes it possible for the reader to escape back to the present. Although the story of Chaya ends with her death, the story ends on a positive note. Rivka/Aunt Eva and her brother Wolfe/Grandpa Will have survived and they have been able to build a new life. The memories and pain still remain but they have friends and family who love them. From this perspective, they are “happy” now.

Since Yolen preferred to transport her protagonist back in time by a time-travelling structure, the story also consists of two plots. The plot concerned with Hannah Stern mainly figures at the beginning and at the end of the book. In the beginning she is a typical teenager who does not like to attend family meetings and who does not want
to be confronted with the past of some of her family members. She prefers to live in the present. According to the Passover Seder ritual she only has to open the door for the prophet Elijah: instead she is projected back in time.

At her uncle Shmuel’s wedding day, Chaya and her family are forced by the Nazis to relocate. This means that they will have to go live in the ghetto, but the Nazi soldiers transport them directly to a death camp. The reader is a witness to the entire relocation process and to the circumstances in the camp itself.

While in If I Should Die Before I Wake, one could clearly distinguish two different plots, it must be remarked that in The Devil’s Arithmetic two plots seem to intertwine. It seems as if Hannah’s plot is not as elaborate as for example Hilary’s one in If I Should Die Before I Wake. But it must be observed that Hannah and Chaya’s lives are melted into one story, though Hannah will never really become Chaya. This is different from Nolan’s book where Hilary actually becomes Chana.

3.2.3 Setting

Hannah Stern’s life is set in New Rochelle, America. More specifically, Yolen has focussed on the setting of a holiday gathering between family members. Via the novel, one can learn more about the rituals at the Jewish holiday called Passover Seder. Afterwards Yolen does mention the fact that this Passover Seder might not be entirely traditional: nevertheless it is an existing Jewish holiday.

“When the Seder began again, she would get another glass of watered wine. For the first time, she was being allowed to drink along with the grown-ups. “Let Hannahleh join in the toasts for real,” Grandpa Will had said before the Seder had begun.”

(Yolen 15)

“Time? For a moment she thought he meant time for the next toast, and then she realized he meant time to steal the afikoman, the matzoh wrapped in blue embroidered cloth.”

(Yolen 16)

These quotes are some of the instances where Yolen tries to provide her readers a realistic framework. The reader gets acquainted with typical objects that are used
during the ritual. By mentioning afterwards that the Passover Seder ritual is not entirely traditional Yolen stresses the fact that though she creates a realistic frame, one must still take into account that the book is a fictional story. The fact that Yolen chooses a Jewish holiday as a setting may also be seen as a way of establishing contrast: contrast between the normal world in a Jewish family and the world during the reign of the Nazis. In this way the author establishes a contrast between light and dark, between us versus them.

Within the plot that is concerned with the life of Chaya, the reader is able to witness a gradual relocation which starts in the shtetl and ends in a concentration camp. At first there is a view of a Polish shtetl in a rural area where life may be hard but peaceful. In honour of Schmuel’s wedding the wedding party travels towards Viosk, the hometown of his bride Fayge, in order to perform the wedding ceremony. In Viosk they are confronted with Nazi soldiers who want to resettle them:

“They say all Jews are being resettled. It is government policy.” “I heard that too, Yitchak added. “Government policy. They have been settling villages closer to the big cities. I thought out here they would leave us alone.”

(Yolen 66)

“We wanted for nothing except to be left alone here in Viosk” said a voice. “Nevertheless,” the colonel continued, smiling, “in this matter we will make the ruling. When you get to your new homes, anyone who wants to work will be treated humanely. The tailor will sew, the shoemaker will have his last. And you will be happy among your own people, just as we will be happy you have followed government’s orders.”

(Yolen 69)

At first, as we can see above, the villagers have a peaceful meeting with the Nazis. They get the impression that despite their relocation they will be able to have a normal life. After this confrontation with the Nazis, the downfall of the Jews begins; they are pushed into cattle cars in which they are incarcerated for several days, without water or food, standing in their own excrements. When the transport ends after four days and four nights, they enter the world of the concentration camp; men and women are separated, clothes and possessions are taken away, their hair is shaved off and their arms are tattooed.
She looked up and couldn’t recognize anyone in the room. Without their hair, all the women looked the same. “Gitl,” she cried out, speaking the one name she recalled. “Gitl, where are you?” Her voice almost cracked and without meaning to, she began to sob almost soundlessly.

(Yolen 95)

“You are Chaya no longer, child. Now you are J197241. Remember it;” “I can’t remember anything” Hannah said, puzzled. “This you must remember, for if you forget it, life is gone indeed.”

(Yolen 100)

The last quote already emphasizes the fact that in this camp, Jewish people are no longer seen as human beings; they are simply reduced to numbers. Because of the fact that their hair is gone the resemblance between people is enforced too. Chaya has troubles to recognize Gitl. There is no difference anymore between blondes and brunettes, every woman looks the same now. In the eyes of the Nazis they have stopped to be women, they have become numbers who need to work for them.

3.2.4 Point of view

Already in the beginning of the book, the reader can recognize a stereotypical adolescent trying to undermine parental authority by inventing “excuses”;

“You know it is Passover,” her mother said, sighing, in a voice deliberately low. She kept smiling so that no one at Rosemary’s house would know they were arguing.
“I didn’t know.”
“Of course you knew.”
“Then I forgot.” Hannah could hear her voice beginning to rise into a whine she couldn’t control.
“How could you forget, Hannah.. Especially this year, when Passover falls on the same day as Easter? We’ve talked and talked about it. First we’ve got to go home and change. Then we’re going to Grandpa Will and Grandma Belle for the first night’s Seder;”
“I’m not hungry. I ate a big dinner at Rosemary’s…….”

(Yolen, 1)
Everyone probably recognizes this situation from his or her own life. Therefore the adolescent reader will immediately sympathize with Hannah. Hannah Stern is a young girl who only wants to live her life and is not interested in the stories of her family members. She refuses to listen to the story of her Aunt Eva and feels uncomfortable around her Grandpa Will, who seems to show signs of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder:

“Mama,” Hannah said when the TV was turned off and calm restored at last to the room, “why does he bother with it? It’s all in the past. There aren’t any concentration camps now. Why bring it up? It’s embarrassing. I don’t want any of my friends to meet him. What if he shouts at them or does something else crazy?”

(Yolen 9-10)

Towards the end of the book Hannah feels strongly connected with her aunt ever since she experienced the life of the girl who sacrificed her life so that Rivka/ Aunt Eva could stay alive. Whereas in the beginning Hannah was tired of remembering, she recognizes the importance of it towards the end:

“In my village, in the camp...in the past,” Eva said, “I was called Rivka.” Hannah nodded and took her aunt’s fingers from her lips. She said, in a voice much louder than she had intended, so loud that the entire table hushed at its sound, “I remember. Oh I remember.”

(Yolen 164)

On the other hand the perspective of Hannah gradually slips into the perspective of Chaya. As we can see below elements of Hannah’s life do interrupt the story of Chaya; nevertheless Chaya’s life plays a much more prominent role:

“Stories seemed to tumble out of Hannah’s mouth, reruns of all the movies and books she could think of. She told the girls about Yentl and then about Conan the Barbarian with equal vigor; about Star Wars, which confused them; and Fiddler on the Roof, which did not.”

(Yolen 50)
In this example the author still writes about Hannah while in the story she has already become Chaya Abramowicz. Hannah still feels like she is stuck in some kind of dream. As the story proceeds, fewer and fewer details or references to Hannah’s life will be present. At the end her metaphorical blindness towards the past will finally be gone.

Although Hannah has become Chaya in the story, Jane Yolen continues to tell the story from the perspective of Hannah. Therefore we can actually conclude that there is no real unification between Hannah and Chaya. By doing this, the author has tried to keep the reader at a distance so the child or adolescent should not be overwhelmed too much. The reader empathizes with Hannah, rather than with Chaya, and hence, when Chaya dies but Hannah survives, this is less of a shock. Earlier on I have mentioned that the majority of the book is concerned with Chaya’s story, thus the reader should actually feel more connected to Chaya instead of Hannah. Nonetheless Hannah is constantly present throughout the story since she experiences Chaya’s life through her own eyes.

“Chaya, it is now,” Gitl’s voice whispered in her ear. “Nod if you understand.” […] “Am I part of the plan?” “Of course, child. Did you think we would leave you in this hell?” They crept to the door and Hannah could feel her heart thudding madly.

(Yolen 147)

3.2.5 Nazi as a Bogeyman

As in If I Should Die Before I Wake, we can clearly see a depiction of the Nazis as monstrous creatures and attention is paid to physical appearance:

*His voice was ragged, as if it had been used too much recently. He had a dark blond mustache and bad teeth.*

(Yolen 74)

“Now,” the officer said, smiling down at them and showing his rotten teeth, “now, Jews, you are ready for resettlement.”

(Yolen 76)
Nevertheless, it must be remarked that there is one reference that is quite positive: emphasis still lies on the physical appearance but instead of negative features such as rotting teeth, this soldier is described as a handsome man. This is quite extraordinary because of the fact that monsters aren’t usually associated with beauty.

The commandant was a small, handsome man, so clean-shaven his face seemed burnished. His cheekbones had a sharp edge and there was a cleft in his chin. He stopped for a moment in front of Hannah, Rivka and Shifre. Hannah felt sweat run down her sides. The commandant smiled, pinched Rivka’s cheek, then went on.

(Yolen 127)

At first sight this quotation seems to present an image of an enemy who is handsome and friendly. This completely contrasts with the tendency to depict Nazis as dehumanized monsters. As the story continues, however, it becomes clear that this friendliness is only a façade and the person who seems to be the “more humane” one is in fact one of the worst Nazis in the camp. Commandant Breuer is responsible for the “choosings” and the “processing”, thus responsible for many people’s deaths. Subsequently he is called the “Angel of Death”. By presenting him as a friendly figure, the shock is even bigger when the reader finds out about his practices. This enforces the fact that Nazi is a very bad person. He may hide himself after a mask of friendliness but behind the mask there is pure evil.

The pattern of the Nazi as the Bogeyman is also established by means of the clear distinction of “we/us versus them/they”. For example:

“Monsters!” Hannah said suddenly. “Gitl is right. We are all monsters.” “We are the victims,” Rivka said. “They are the monsters.”

(Yolen 141)

Through the character’s way of speaking, it becomes clear that we/us stands for the victims and they/them for the victimizers. “They” represent all that is bad and cruel and they are clearly perceived as the enemy.
3.2.6 Fact/fiction

Jane Yolen has tried to present to her readers a realistic account of the events that took place during World War II. At the end of her book she mentions that all facts which are described (cattle cars, separation of families, tattooing of numbers,..) are true to life. Only the characters are made up; nevertheless it should be taken into account that the characters are based on stories of Holocaust survivors. Despite the fact that *The Devil's Arithmetic* is based on testimonies of Holocaust survivors and official documentation, Yolen makes an important remark:

*There is no way that fiction can come close to touching how truly inhuman, alien, even satanic, was the efficient machinery of death at the camps*

(Yolen 169)

She prefers to see fiction as a medium to establish some kind of memory, since it can never replace the real experience.

Similar to Han Nolan, Yolen has mentioned some names and concepts that are intertwined with the Holocaust and that belong to the memory of many people. One of the most notorious names related to the Holocaust was without a doubt Dr. Mengele or the so called “Angel of Auschwitz”. Although Mengele himself is not present in Chaya’s story, Hannah suddenly remembers his name from in her history lessons and links him to Commandant Breuer. Though Yolen mentions Dr. Mengele in her book, it is never really explained who he was. The only link that can be made by the reader is that both Breuer and Mengele are responsible for the selection of people and their “processing”. In Breuer’s case this meant that people were sent to the gas chambers, in Mengele’s case this meant for example that people were used for his medical experiments. Yolen probably assumed that her adolescent readers have learnt about Dr. Mengele at school. Younger readers who are not familiar with this person are spared the details but they can conclude that Dr. Mengele too was not a “good” person.
Just as in *If I Should Die Before I Wake*, the reader is familiarized with the notion of the “musselmen”.

“Leave her,” said Rivka. “Leave her. Sometimes people get like that. They stop listening. They stop seeing. It is as if they decide that life is not worth fighting for. We call them musselmen. It is sad. Very sad. I will be sorry if your friend chooses that, but if she does, I will let her. And you must let her as well.

(Yolen 114)

Previously we remarked that Han Nolan tried to insert “authenticity” in her novel. She achieved this by introducing “typical” concepts that were related to the Holocaust and by means of original Yiddish and German words. *The Devil’s Arithmetic* is similar to *If I Should Die Before I Wake* since both books contain several traces of Yiddish and German words. The presence of these words and expressions once again contributes to the creation of a sharp distinction between two “communities”. Whereas German words are often commands, Yiddish words are frequently seen in prayers. Thus the reader can distinguish the world of the Nazis, angry people who command the Jews, and the world of the Jews, religious people who stick together but who are clearly dominated by the Germans:


(Yolen 85-86)

### 3.2.7 Hope and survival

“Nevertheless,” Hannah said, “I remember. And you- you must remember too, so that whoever of us survives this place will carry the message into the future.”

“What message?” Rivka asked, her voice breathy and low.

“That we will survive. The Jews. That what happens here must never happen again,” Hannah said.

(Yolen 157)
This quote illustrates the importance of hope and remembrance. The protagonist and other characters never give up, they keep struggling in order to survive. They want to survive in order to make sure that the Holocaust should never take place again. They want to survive so they can tell others their stories and the stories of their friends and family members who did not survive.

According to Vanessa Joosen and Katrien Vloeberghs, most books involve the survival of the protagonist. Jane Yolen, however, did allow the death of Hannah/Chaya to take place in *The Devil’s Arithmetic*. The dying itself is not narrated, though the reader knows what will happen.

*Then all three of them took deep, ragged breaths and walked in through the door into endless night.*

(Yolen 160)

This single sentence describes how the girls entered the gas chamber. It becomes immediately clear to the reader that the girls will not return from it. Despite the death of Chaya, Yolen does allow Hannah to return to her normal life. She has learned an important lesson and so the book will end with a message of hope. Hope that people will remember and hope that they will help others to remember. Consequently, the deaths of many people will never be forgotten.

### 3.3 Analysis *Briar Rose*

#### 3.3.1 Story

In her book *Briar Rose*, Jane Yolen has decided to rely on the fairy tale of Sleeping Beauty in order to tell a story about the Holocaust. The story of Briar Rose is told by Gemma, an aged woman who uses the fairy tale as a bedtime story for her three granddaughters. As time passes, Becca, the youngest one of the granddaughters, starts to “investigate” the fairytale: is it only a fairytale or is it so much more? Becca decides to start her own quest for the history of her grandmother. Step by step, she discovers that the fairytale actually depicted Gemma’s life and that Gemma was a Holocaust survivor.
3.3.2 Structure

Whereas Yolen opted for the time-slip fantasy in *The Devil’s Arithmetic*, *Briar Rose* is based on an allegory. Yolen relies on a well-known fairy tale, namely the story of Sleeping Beauty, and she uses it as a framework for telling a story about the Holocaust. Becca comes to realise that the story of Briar Rose, as it was told by her grandmother, was based upon Gemma’s life. In fact, we could say that the fairy tale is an allegory of Gemma’s experiences during the Holocaust. The cruel reality is represented in a “safer” and more positive way. Let us look at some examples;

“She came, that angel of death. She came to the party and said ‘I curse you, Briar Rose. I curse you and your father the king and your mother the queen and all your uncles and cousins and aunts. And all the people in your village. And all the people who bear your name.’ “

(Yolen 22)

In this example the Nazis are represented as the bad fairy who curses Briar Rose and her family. In real life, the Nazis condemned the Jews to death. The enormity of the event is also portrayed; the father, the mother, family members and offspring...every Jew is supposed to be eliminated. Within the Holocaust context “All the people who bear your name” must be read as “all people who have the same religion”.

“When princess Briar Rose was seventeen, one day and without further warning, a mist covered the entire kingdom.”….“A mist. A great mist. It covered the entire kingdom. And everyone in it- the good people and the not-so good, the young people and the not-so young, and even Briar’s Rose mother and father fell asleep.”

(Yolen 42)

The mist that put the people to sleep can be seen as a metaphor for the poison gas that was used to kill the Jews in the gas chambers. Once again Yolen emphasises the totality of the event.
Most fairytales contain the same ingredients; enchantment, spells and curses, good versus bad, happy endings, love stories,... The stereotypical fairy tale beginning “once upon a time” can be found on the first page. Although Gemma’s personal love story and marriage was ended abruptly, it might even be said that eventually there was a happily ever after present. Since Gemma had the chance to build up a new life and enjoy this life with her family.

In general, three stories can be distinguished; the fairy tale of Briar Rose as it was told by Gemma, Josef Potocki’s story about the Holocaust, and Rebecca’s quest for knowledge. Josef Potocki is a Holocaust survivor who tells his personal story to Rebecca. By doing so, the fairytale finally becomes reality; Gemma was Briar Rose and Potocki was the ”prince” who kissed her alive. Vladimir Propp distinguished seven types of characters that should be present in a fairy tale in his book *Morphology of the Folk Tale*. One of these characters is the hero. (Pieters 122)

Normally the hero is the prince who marries the princess in the end. In the fairy tale the prince/hero is the one who kisses princess Briar Rose awake. In Gemma’s real life story Josef Potocki is the one who rescues her life. Though the hero is supposed to marry the princess, Gemma will not marry Josef. Instead she will marry the Avenger or Aron Mandlestein. Thus who should be the hero of the story then? Gemma’s lover? Or the person who saved her life? Generally, I think that Josef Potocki should be perceived to be the real hero of the story. Aron was the first to discover that Gemma was still alive nevertheless it was Josef who saved her life. When Aaron got killed in a Nazi attack Josef took care of Gemma and when he found out about her pregnancy he arranged for her and her baby to go to America. Because of Josef Potocki, Gemma has been able to give birth to a baby daughter and she has been allowed to build up a new life in a new continent. He was not her lover but he enabled her to be loved by her own family. Therefore it should be argued that Josef Potocki is the real hero in this story.

Next to the establishment of the fairy tale, there is also a quest-structure present throughout the book. Usually a quest involves a search for something that has been lost; in this case Becca is in search of Gemma’s past. According to the “traditional” quest pattern the protagonist is often confronted with obstacles; in *Briar Rose* Becca tries to make sense of some documents and pictures, which belonged to Gemma. During her quest she meets different people; some people want to help her but
cannot give useful information about her grandmother, others do not wish to talk about it. The mystery around Gemma is revealed towards the end of the book. After a meeting with father Stashu in Chelmno, the priest sets up a gathering between Becca and Josef Potocki. Potocki is the one who makes sense of the fairy tale of Briar Rose.

It must also be remarked that Becca is surrounded by people who want to help her with her search. More specifically she is supported by her boss Stan and by Magda, a Polish student who becomes her guide and translator when Becca visits Poland. Nevertheless, it should be remarked that the quest does not result in full closure. Though Becca learns that Gemma was the princess in her own fairy tale, there are still several things that are unknown. More specifically the missing information is concerned with Gemma’s life before she met Josef Potocki and her life in America. Anyway, the fairy tale itself receives the main focus throughout the story so it can be said that Becca has accomplished her mission. Below it can be seen that Becca has kept her promise; she has found the castle and she has retrieved Gemma’s past.

“Rebecca?” Gemma’s whispery voice seemed stronger. “Rebecca!”
“Here I am, Gemma”
The old woman opened her eyes. “I was the princess in the castle in the sleeping woods. And there came a great dark mist and we all fell asleep. But the prince kissed me awake. The prince kissed me.”
“Yes, Gemma”
“That castle is yours. It is all I have to leave you. You must find it. The castle in the sleeping woods. Promise me.” She tried again to sit up, despite her posie, her face now spotty with agitation.
“I promise, Gemma.”

(Yolen 19)

In a way this confession can be seen as Gemma’s heritage. It most certainly is a heavy burden but it is a burden that Gemma did not want to bear on her own. She wants her relatives to know about her past.
3.3.3 Setting

There are two main settings present in the book. First of all, a Jewish community in the United States of America and secondly the story involves some kind of road trip in Poland. It must be remarked that the main focus lies on Poland.

Becca’s family lives in a Jewish community in the USA, she lives a normal life and there is nothing really remarkable about this setting. After Gemma’s death Becca starts her quest for knowledge and this quest leads her to Poland. Thus it could be said that she leaves her own familiar world in order to discover a new world and its dark secrets of the past. At first it seems almost impossible to Becca that a place as Chelmno had been such a place of horror, it is only by hearing the stories of others that the past reveals itself.

“What do you think?”
“It is a very odd place.”
“Odd for a Polish village?”
“No. It is very Polish. But odd because to read the pamphlet, it was a place of such horror. Where would you put 300,000 people, even dead?”
Becca shuddered at her matter-of-fact tone.
“And it is so ordinary. So quiet. So undistinguished;”
Opening her door, Becca stepped out. She took a deep breath as if that might bring her some scent of an evil that was fifty years disguised. All she smelt was the horse pulling the cart as it came up even with the car and went past;

(Yolen 120)

This fragment is concerned with the arrival of Becca and her translator Magda at the site of Chelmno. After all these years there are hardly any traces left of the horror that took place in concentration camps. The landscape does not reveal the past, the testimonies of survivors do. It is not by making a trip to Poland that Becca will discover what happened at Chelmno, it is by listening to the story of Josef Potocki that she will be able to reconstruct her grandmother’s past.
Throughout the story, emphasis lies on the castle that figures in the fairy tale; Is it a metaphor? Was Gemma really a princess? Does this castle still exist? Although Gemma hasn’t been a real princess, the castle was not a fable. The Nazis brought their victims to a building that was called a “Schloss”. It should also be mentioned that this is not based on the author’s imagination; it is a historical truth. The castle that is referred to in the book was the “Schloss” in Chelmno. It is not a real castle where a princess can live a carefree life; instead it is a place of torture and death.

### 3.3.4 Point of view

Yolen has provided her audience with the points of view of Gemma, Becca and Josef Potocki. Gemma narrates the fairytale of Briar Rose. It is the story of a red haired baby girl called Briar Rose. Her party is interrupted by the arrival of the bad fairy. This fairy, who was disgruntled about the fact that she had not received an invitation, curses everybody who lives in the kingdom. Subsequently, a mist covers the entire kingdom and everybody falls asleep. One day a prince shows up and he manages to reach Briar Rose. He kisses her and she wakes up. At first sight this seems to be the story of Sleeping Beauty. Nevertheless it should be noticed that some aspects are missing. This is commented on in the story as well;

> “What about the spinning wheel? What about the needle?” Shirley whispered, her breath stirring Becca’s hair and blowing hotly against her neck. Becca elbowed into silence. “But on of the good faeries,” Gemma said, “had saved a wish. ‘Not everyone will die. A few will just sleep. You, princess, will be one.’” Shirley sat up in bed, furious. “That’s not how it goes. You’ve got it wrong!”

(Yolen 33)

Through the insertion of this passage, a young reader will observe that one should read between the lines and conclude that this will not be a fairytale with a happy ending for everyone. “Only a few will sleep” means that only a few people will be able to survive. The reader will discover the cruel undertone of the fairy tale.

Becca is a young woman who is determined to reconstruct her grandmother’s past. Although Gemma and her past receive mayor attention, Becca should be seen as the main protagonist of the story. She is the character who links everything together. She
is the one who starts this quest for knowledge and she will be the one to discover her grandmother’s past. If we compare Briar Rose to If I Should Die Before I Wake and The Devil’s Arithmetic, it must be said that the point of view of a child protagonist is not present here. Thus Yolen has “neglected” to write her book according to what is perceived to be the usual way of writing namely inscribing the point of view of a teenager or child. Nevertheless, it must be argued that many passages go back to Becca’s childhood. Therefore it may be possible to talk about a “semi-childish” point of view.

Finally there is Josef Potocki. Once again Yolen uses her authorial freedom and creativity to insert something “extra”. Whereas most Holocaust books deal with the persecution of the Jews, Yolen also acknowledges the persecution of the homosexuals. Josef Potocki, a homosexual man from aristocratic origin, gives his account of the events that happened in World War II. He talks about his own life and how he met Gemma. Gemma had been a prisoner at Chelmno where all prisoners were gassed and their bodies were dumped in the woods. Potocki formed part of a partisan group in the woods; during one of their observations they witnessed the unloading of the gas trucks. One of his companions found Gemma lying between corpses and discovered that she was still alive. Subsequently Potocki was the one to give CPR, thus saving Gemma’s life. Gemma joins the partisans and she marries the Avenger or Aron Mandlestein. When he dies in a Nazi attack, Josef and Gemma are the only ones to survive. Eventually Josef will arrange for Gemma to travel to America in order to have a new life there. 

3.3.5 Hope and survival

Unlike The Devil’s Arithmetic and If I Should Die Before I Wake, Briar Rose provides the readers with a positive message: the message that Gemma has survived. This was already hinted at in the fairy tale of Briar Rose. Nevertheless, it must be remarked that in the beginning of the book it is still unclear what has exactly happened and if Gemma could be the princess of the story. As time passes, Becca collects more clues and it becomes clear that Gemma is the princess. Furthermore the reader must acknowledge the fact that the fairy tale is actually a story of pain and loss. Despite the fact that Yolen has written a Holocaust story, the young reader can experience relief at the end of the book. Gemma has managed to escape to America,
she gave birth to a baby girl and she has had the opportunity to build up a new life there. It is clear that Gemma still carries the heavy burden of the past with her but she has lived a good life in America. Moreover, the reader is provided with another positive message namely that Josef Potocki too has survived the Holocaust. Thanks to his story, Becca has been able to find out what happened to Gemma in the past.

It should also be observed that within the story of the Holocaust, Josef and Gemma can be seen as the key figures. Other people are mentioned but no attention is paid to their individual situations. In Josef Potocki’s account many people die; nevertheless, it must be argued that the more people know someone, the more they will empathize with that person.
4. Conclusion

From these analyses some conclusions can be drawn. In general these three stories can be observed to be different yet similar. Each story seems to have recurrent patterns though it can be observed that Jane Yolen also tries to innovate the genre of children’s literature on the Holocaust.

First of all, it must be said that the three books show similarity in regard to the setting. The book starts in a Jewish setting: a hospital, a Jewish community or a Jewish holiday gathering. Afterwards the stories will mainly take place in the concentration camps. This provides a clear contrast between the familiar world, a protected environment, and the Nazi world, where Jews are not even considered to be human anymore. It is a pattern of “us” versus “them”. This pattern is introduced from the beginning and it figures throughout the book. Sometimes we can find passages where the distinction between “we” and “they” is literally mentioned. On other occasions it is clear in the description of Nazi soldier where attention is paid to their physical appearance. More specifically it must be mentioned that many descriptions are not neutral anymore, emphasis lies on negative features as for example rotten teeth instead of teeth. While Jews become numbers in the eyes of the Nazis, the Nazis are considered to be dehumanized monsters from a Jewish point of view. By inserting original Yiddish and German words, the contrast between both communities is emphasized once more.

The fact that the reader can distinguish a clear “us” versus “them” pattern can also lead to the fact that a reader starts to think in terms of good versus bad. It seems self-evident that victims are innocent and that they represent the good side while victimizers are clearly the bad guys in the story. Nevertheless it should also be remarked that this type of reflection is enforced by the author. In these books, Yolen and Nolan have emphasised negative characteristics of the Nazis but they never mentioned anything bad about the Jewish people. It is clear that the Jews are the main victims in the Holocaust, though some kind of glorification seems to be present in the stories. No matter if one is a Jew, a Nazi, a Muslim...it must be argued that we all are people who have bad habits or negative character traits. It is not because you are a Jew that you can not have rotten teeth too. But since these books are written for an audience of young children and adolescents the authors try to make sure that
it is clear that the Jews were the victims and that the Nazis were the victimizers. So that children would not get confused or think that it is a good case that a Jewish person was murdered because he has for example a bad character.

Despite the fact that it should always be taken into account that these books are works of fiction, it can be observed that there are many instances of realistic settings. This has to do with the fact that much of the author’s knowledge is based on official information and testimonies of Holocaust survivors. Since realism is too confronting for younger readers authors often apply structural techniques as the time-slip fantasy and the allegory in order to add distance between the reader and the protagonist. Fantasy and allegory enable the author to present a fictional story. Despite detailed information that might give a realistic impression; the story ends with a return to normalcy where the protagonist is capable of continuing her life. This home-away-home pattern makes sure that the reader feels relief at the end of the book. It was “just a story” and the protagonist is still alive. Nevertheless, it must be said that this story has taught the reader something more about the Holocaust without overwhelming the child.

Earlier on we have seen theoretical background concerning the characteristics of children’s literature about the Holocaust. After reading these three books it must be said that most characteristics seem to reoccur all the time. The main differences that can be distinguished are the presence of the concentration camp and the death of the protagonist in Yolen’s book *The Devil’s Arithmetic*. Because of their structure and the insertion of an extra layer, all books have been able to present an image of life inside the concentration camp. In general it can be argued that Yolen is the most “innovative” author or the least “traditional” one. She mentions the persecution of non-Jews and she uses an adult protagonist instead of a child protagonist. Despite the presence of an adult protagonist I personally do no feel like this has changed the story profoundly. It might be a means of creating a larger distance between the protagonist and the reader. Nonetheless the presence of the fairy tale makes it attractive to younger children too.
Personally I think that the innovation concerned with the persecution of the homosexuals should be encouraged. Authors should not be obliged to write about it but it is important that children and adolescents are aware of the fact that not only the Jews were victims of the Nazis. In general, the persecution of homosexuals, gypsies,.. is hardly mentioned in children’s literature about the Holocaust. So that children could have a “full” image about the Holocaust it would be useful that authors do not only pay attention to the Jewish people but also to the minority of other victims so that these people could be remembered too.

What can we conclude from all of this? Holocaust literature for children and adolescents focuses on the persecution of the Jews, preferably this is experienced through the eyes of a child protagonist. To make sure that readers understand the impact of the Holocaust, authors pay special attention to the creation of a contrast. This “us” versus “them” contrast makes sure that readers understand the difference between good and bad, right and wrong. When they have understood this message, they will acknowledge the message that a “bad thing” as the Holocaust should not be allowed to take place again.
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