“Sugar in the Arsenic”:

Humorous Depictions of the Holocaust and Humorous Depictions in the Holocaust on Stage and Screen

By

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CHAPTER 1

Laughing at the Devil:

Humor, Performance and the Holocaust

The Holocaust marks a permanent and violent tectonic shift in the manner in which humanity regards its history, its art, and itself.[1] Modernity's ultimate perversion, the Holocaust generated amongst artists and other thinkers a realization of the inevitability or at least of the high probability of human corruption, a disillusionment with spirituality, an awareness that industry and science were as committed to destruction as to progress, and a rupture in the intellectual acceptance of universal truths as well as a rejection of the tropes with which artists had previously explored them. From 1933 to 1945, Adolph Hitler and the engineers of the Third Reich harnessed and warped the forces of philosophy, sociology, and technology to systematically dehumanize and murder some nine to twelve million people, approximately six million of whom were Jews. So many writers and philosophers have seen in the Holocaust and other twentieth century genocides the "failure of humanism" that it is nearly impossible to trace this thought to its source.[2] Others, particularly Robert Eaglestone, locate the birth of

[1]For the purpose of this dissertation, I use the term "Holocaust" specifically in regard to the German state-sponsored murder of over two-thirds of Europe's Jews with the intention of destroying them all as an end in itself rather than as a means to acquire land or state control and lasting from approximately 1933-1945. The Nazi targeting and murders of the Roma, homosexuals, disabled, and other specific groups of people as well as the literature concerning their persecution are outside the scope of this limited study.

[2] A Google search for this theory lists several hundred people who have said it in various contexts, making it difficult if not impossible to trace the idea to its source. Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi, Professor Emerita of Comparative Literature at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and author of *By Words Alone:The Holocaust in Literature*, writes that "the great illumination that the Enlightenment cast on the image of man faded and flickered during the dark years of this (twentieth) century…" (1)

postmodernism in the Holocaust, where God flew out the chimneys of Auschwitz and where the center, once and for all, did not hold.

Artists have explored the catastrophe of the Holocaust through a variety of media and with a variety of methods. Memoirs of life in the ghettos, work camps, and death camps began to appear shortly after World War II, some from survivors and some as the final testaments – hidden in ghettos and camp sites – of those who had perished at the hands of their oppressors. These memoirs would serve as templates and inspiration for fictional explorations of the Holocaust in novels, short stories, films, and plays. Most of these works approach the Holocaust theme with naught but solemnity; the genocide of millions under such brutal and unimaginable conditions can under no conditions be thought of as funny. Can we, though, examine the Holocaust through a frame that allows humor in its consideration of this dark subject? Can we establish a site of interrogation that allows comedy to provide us with an outlook on the Holocaust that we might not otherwise consider when there seems to be a critical assumption among many that the language of comedy simply cannot bear the tragic burden of the Holocaust?

"Comedy" and "humor" are notoriously difficult words to pin down, and later in this introduction, I will look at some historical definitions and descriptions of them. Generally, for this study, I define comedy as any work intended to produce laughter or as a specific element within a work intended to produce laughter. The playwright may intend the laughter to occur in the audience or among the characters onstage. I use the terms "comic" and "humorous" interchangeably.

The dissertation examines the use of comedy in the Holocaust plays *Cabaret* by Joe Masterhoff with music by John Kander and lyrics by Fred Ebb, Peter Barnes's one-act "Auschwitz," *The Producers* by Mel Brooks and Thomas Meehan with music and lyrics by Mel

Brooks, *Ghetto* by Joshua Sobol, *The Model Apartment* by Donald Margulies, and *Sammy's Follies* by Eugene Lion. I also consider the film versions of *The Producers* and *Cabaret*. Though not all these plays and films are comedies *per se*, they all use comedy in various ways to explore the Holocaust theme. Generally, though, the comedy in each of them serves a few common functions: it always provides us with an unexpected ingress into an examination of the Holocaust; it delays recognition for the audience, preventing the sense of telegraphing the ending from the beginning; and it frequently serves as illustrative of a character trait. Often, it is the character, whether victim or oppressor, who is generating a joke that he intends as such and that the audience recognizes as an intentional joke on that character's part. The audience may not find this joke funny, and the playwright may not intend that it does, but the manner of the joke reveals something essential about the character in this situation. The audience recognizes the joke but does not find itself inside it.

Except for the film versions of *Cabaret* and *The Producers*, film and television are outside the scope of this dissertation. *Hogan's Heroes*, the popular American sitcom featuring Hogan and his fellow happy-go-lucky compatriots in a German POW that ran from 1965-1971 seems a likely candidate for consideration, as well as Great Britain's scandalous *Heil Honey I'm Home!* a sitcom focusing on Adolf Hitler and Eva Braun's inability to get along with their Jewish neighbors. Written and shot in a 1950s style similar to that of *I Love Lucy*, one episode of this misconceived 1990 series actually made it to television before being yanked. With only the pilot episode available on *YouTube*, this infamous but mostly unseen series is not only unavailable for analysis but also made little impact on any substantial viewership. *Seven Beauties, The Train of Hope, Life is Beautiful,* and *Inglourious Basterds* are all Holocaust film comedies that warrant further study. Perhaps the ultimate death camp allegory, the 2000 feature film *Chicken Run* is an

excellent look at inmates purposefully worked until dead or sent to death via a macabre assembly line.[3]

My own interest in Holocaust studies began as I worked on a Master of Arts degree in Liberal Studies at the University of Memphis. The program required all students to take a Liberal Arts Seminar; the seminar topic I chose was the Holocaust. Under the guidance of Dr. David Patterson, now the Hillel A. Feinberg Chair of Holocaust Studies at the University of Texas at Dallas, I explored the Holocaust via my own area of interest – theatre. Through Dr. Patterson, I met Dr. Robert Skloot, Holocaust theatre scholar and, at the time, a professor in Theatre and Drama at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where I would work on my PhD. By the end of my time with Dr. Patterson, I had realized that the Holocaust was the most dreadful and most significant event of the twentieth century. Germany's genocide of the Jews of Europe while the rest of the world effectively stood by is testament to the vigilance that we must keep to prevent the large-scale decimation of groups targeted by hegemonic forces for their ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, or any other marker of difference. Sadly, however, and despite well-intentioned but ultimately ineffective slogans like "Never again" regarding genocide since the Holocaust, humanity has allowed genocidal mass murders in Bangladesh, East Timor, Cambodia, Guatemala, Bosnia, Rwanda, and the Darfur region of Sudan since the end of World War II. Many people who have asked me about my work have assumed that I am Jewish; some have even asked "Why do you care?" when I have explained that I am not. I am marked by difference, however. I am a gay man with HIV. Obviously, the eradication of people because of their otherness is an issue that impacts me on a personal level. I would like to think, however, that even were I a full-fledged member of the hegemony, I would still have the compassion and

[3] There is an especially pertinent link to be made here to the Ford assembly line, which served as a model for the process of moving newly arrived prisoners at the death camps from the train to the ovens.

intelligence to care about the Holocaust and its impact on civilization. It is a historical moment that has implications for all people, and the way we think about it, talk about it, and use it is vitally important to humanity.

Holocaust Drama

Public knowledge of the Holocaust was slower to spread immediately after World War II than may seem apparent now. Survivors often faced unbelieving audiences when telling their horrific stories of suffering in Nazi camps, and many felt judged by their disbelieving listeners, as if they had done something to bring their treatment upon themselves ("The Road Ahead"). Other people simply did not want to hear about the torture and killings of Europe's Jews (Ngo & Roos). Because of this resistance, many survivors stopped speaking of their experiences until years later. Paralleling, perhaps, a general sense of apathy toward the Holocaust in Europe and the United States (Isser 21), Western artistic reaction to the Holocaust came in spurts until the 1960s, when its presence first in fiction and the visual arts and then in cinema became pronounced. The first great international stage success dealing with the Holocaust, Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett's *The Diary of Anne Frank* (1955) - also a 1959 Hollywood feature film – was an immense critical and financial triumph in its first incarnations, but it has drawn no small amount of criticism over the years for its heroine's oft-quoted exhortation that in spite of everything, "people are really good at heart."[4] Jewish American writer and critic Cynthia Ozick, who often turns her exacting gaze toward the Holocaust, argues that this sentiment is torn from a "bed of thorns" and reminds us that only two sentences later, Anne writes:

[4] Bruno Bettelheim et. al. felt that the emphasis on the life of the family in the attic along with the play's final line expressed a universal desire to forget about the concentration camps ("The Ignored Lesson of Anne Frank" 247).

> I see the world being slowly transformed into a wilderness, I hear the approaching thunder that, one day, will destroy us too, I feel the suffering of millions….In the meantime, I must hold onto my ideals. Perhaps the day will come when I will be able to realize them! (qtd. in "Who Owns Anne Frank?" 81)

Anne, of course, would not be able to realize her ideals, facing capture only three weeks after the date of this entry in her diary and eventually dying of typhus two days after her sister Margot in Bergen-Belsen. It seems unlikely that Anne would have believed in an intrinsic decency at the core of people after her time in Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen, and this dramatic, inspirational moment undermines the actual horror of the real fate of Anne and her sister and mother along with their attic roommates and the millions of other Holocaust victims. Despite these negative assessments, however, and despite its Americanization and the glossing-over of its heroine's Jewishness, *The Diary of Anne Frank* remains for many a classic of American theatre and of Holocaust drama, with popular productions in the United States, Asia, and Europe, including in Germany and in Israel, from the mid-1950s onward (Graver 126-138), and the popularity of the diary itself has perhaps done more than any other single work of art to raise Holocaust awareness. Anne Frank attached a face to the Holocaust in the mid-1950s, and she remains the most easily identifiable victim, representing – however inaccurately – the entire Holocaust experience for many. The staging of Anne's diary stands at the beginning of a tradition of plays designed to address the Holocaust in serious and theatrical terms. Though a handful of plays criticizing the Reich and its treatment of Jews dates from the 1930s, *The Diary of Anne Frank* is the landmark drama most strongly identified with the beginnings of Holocaust theatre.

Holocaust literature in general experienced a surge in interest in the early 1960s with the capture of Adolph Eichmann in 1960 by Israeli agents in Argentina and his subsequent trial in

Jerusalem. The concurrent publication of germinal works in the Holocaust literary genre by Elie Wiesel, Bruno Bettelheim, Primo Levi, Raul Hilberg, and Hannah Arendt fed this new international curiosity in the Holocaust (Isser 21). In the U.S., where the civil rights movement was taking the nation's center stage, this attention to the Holocaust accompanied a new sense of Jewish solidarity inspired by the movements of minority groups in general – but especially of African Americans – to assert their cohesion as a group and to demand equality and respect (Isser 21). New plays like Shimon Wincelberg's *Resort 76* (1962), Rolf Hochhuth's *The Deputy* (1963), and Arthur Miller's *Incident at Vichy* (1964) appeared, and Bertolt Brecht's 1941 Nazi allegory *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* played Broadway for the first time. The Six-Day War of 1967 and the 1973 Yom Kippur War evoked fears that Israel would be overrun and that another Holocaust would ensue (Solomon 224). According to Edward Isser, the heightened consciousness resulting from these dears would inspire a "second wave" of Holocaust plays in the late 60s, with Robert Shaw's *The Man in the Glass Booth*, George Tabori's *The Cannibals*, and several others debuting in 1968 (21-22).

The 1970s saw a slight downturn in the number of Holocaust plays, but the 1980s saw a massive upswing not only in Holocaust theatre but also in Holocaust interest in general. Holocaust drama scholar Edward Isser sees this as resulting from the realization amongst Holocaust researchers and artists that Holocaust studies were beginning a transition from a "contemporary to a historical concern" (22). As Holocaust survivors aged, a desire to chronicle and interpret their experiences while they were still accessible pushed artists and historians alike to produce more and more work not only about the Holocaust itself but also about its effect on history and its continued ramifications in the lives of survivors and their descendants. Christopher Hampton's *The Portage to San Cristobal of A.H.* (1982), C.P. Taylor's *Good* (1982),

and Barbara Lebow's *A Shayna Maidel* (1985) appeared amidst a host of other Holocaust plays during this time, while Donald Margulies's *The Model Apartment* (1988), Gilles Ségal's *The Puppetmaster of Lodz* (1989), and Jon Robin Baitz's *The Substance of Fire* (1989) led theatrical explorations of the Holocaust into the 1990s.

Just as Holocaust theatre took some time after the Holocaust to develop, so, too, did Holocaust theatre criticism, which did not begin receiving full-scale consideration as a distinct field of theatre studies until much later in the century. Robert D. Skloot published the first anthology of Holocaust plays and developed and taught one of the earliest college courses in Holocaust drama at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in the early 1980s.[5] Though Skloot's work and that of those who have followed him in the subject deal necessarily with the occasional comedy within the greater area of Holocaust theatre and film, there has been little critical inquiry into the topic of Holocaust comedy in and of itself. To be sure, the ratio of Holocaust comedies to serious drama is small. After over a decade of reading and researching hundreds of Holocaust plays, I initially identified less than fifteen that might be classified as comedies, and some of those might be more properly identified as plays that make use of comedy. However, these few comedies and humorous plays and films hold a vital place within the body of theatrical and cinematic work addressing Holocaust themes, raising questions about the nature and uses of humor in the service of an ostensibly tragic theme. Many of them have been critical and popular successes, and most have provoked some amount of critical outrage. Still, those to whom I have mentioned this topic are often perplexed at the idea that anyone would think to contrive a comic situation set within the confines of what is one of the most inhumane and horrific periods of

[5] Though it is easy to determine with Google and a card catalogue that Skloot published the first Holocaust play anthology, determining whether his was the first Holocaust theatre university course is a much more difficult matter. It was certainly one of the earliest if not the earliest, and every Holocaust theatre scholar mentioned in this dissertation cites Skloot as a pioneer in the field.

concentrated terror, violence, and subjugation in human history, obviously forgetting or perhaps being unaware of the acclaimed and enormously popular films *Life is Beautiful* (1997) and *Inglourious Basterds* (2009). Despite the critical and popular successes of these films and others like *Cabaret*, which is set before the Holocaust but has much to say about anti-Semitism and fascism in the Third Reich, many still feel an inherent repulsion to the idea that we can know the Holocaust via humor.

It is often difficult to separate a kind of political correctness from the due reverence with which many cultural and literary scholars feel obliged to approach the Holocaust. We must not take lightly the magnitude of this event that destroyed so many lives and prevented the birth of so many future generations. This reverence, however, should not reduce the Holocaust to a sacred cow so untouchable that we can only judge works of art dealing with it through some pre-ordained, unchallengeable template. Criticism of literature and theatre concerned with the subject of the Holocaust usually faces a reverse situation – if writers tackling the Holocaust fail to adhere to a loosely agglomerated set of critical guidelines, of which one of the unspoken rules is that humor not be allowed, then they are doomed to scathing criticism from the start. Cynthia Ozick calls *Life is Beautiful* an "ignorant lie" and *Inglourious Basterds* a "defamation" in a 2010 essay for *Newsweek*. The fact that she does not spend much time analyzing either film in depth says much about her reluctance to engage with them on a critical level, choosing instead to dismiss them out of hand because of their use of comedy, as if the artist is incapable of juxtaposing two things against each other to reveal something true that neither could have revealed alone and as if the spectator is incapable of thinking about two things at once.

` The crux of Ozick's essay, though, is that only artists who experienced the Holocaust directly can write or paint about it honestly and that all art about it has been fraudulent. Well,

where does that leave us? Obviously, artists "haunted by history," as Ozick calls them, will continue to write books and make films about the Holocaust.[6] Are we to ignore them or dismiss them from the start for not having been there? Obviously, serious artists deserve serious consideration, and Roberto Benigni's film, as well as the other films and plays in this study, are the works of serious artists.

Comic Theory

The urge to find humor within the darkest and most serious situations or to use humor to face these situations in Western culture dates at least to Ancient Greece, where the phallic songs of sacred festivals ripened into comedies illuminating the gravest of issues, from the decline of Athenian political culture as criticized in the lost comedies of Eupolis to the politics of the Peloponnesian Wars in the work of Aristophanes. Later, Restoration comic playwrights injected serious issues of nationalism reflecting the sometimes fatal conflict between Whigs and Tories into their comic works, and even later, stand-up comedians like Lenny Bruce and Richard Pryor would infuse personal stories of abjection and despair with comedy. In Theresienstadt, the Jews' own cultural council supported and even encouraged productions of theatrical comedies as well as performances by comedians as part of the council's artistic and entertainment offerings for the camp's inmates.[7] They recognized that laughter was a psychological necessity for combatting the darkness of life in the camp and creating a sense of community as audiences laughed together (Carr). Comedy provides amusement, to be sure, but also succor, an alternative point from which to view a serious issue, and a disarming way to frame an argument. The compulsion to laugh,

[6] Ozick herself, who was not a Holocaust victim, has produced fiction exploring the Holocaust theme, including her well-known short story "The Shawl."

[7] Theresienstadt was the model concentration camp in Czechoslovakia that the Reich presented to the Red Cross in 1944 as part of an elaborate effort to dispel rumors that they were mistreating Jews.

whether in delight, discomfort, disapprobation, or approval, is natural and essentially human. It should cause no great surprise or outrage, then, that some playwrights employ comedy to illuminate Holocaust themes. Nonetheless, many prominent critics abjure the use of comedy in treating such sensitive and – to some – sacred subject matter.

The use of the term "comedy" in and of itself can be troubling, as all plays dealing with the Holocaust would presumably have a serious intent. Most Holocaust dramas are tonally tragic for obvious reasons, and all lack catharsis for equally obvious reasons. One neither can nor should purge the feelings of despair engendered by a serious play – even one using humor – casting light on the Holocaust; we can only bear witness, learn, and remember.

We are missing a traditional starting point for a critical definition of comedy. Aristotle's definition of tragedy, so often used as Genesis 1:1 for drama criticism, is without its comic counterpart. Umberto Eco's first novel, the 1980 medieval murder mystery *The Name of the Rose*, in which a demented, blind, fourteenth-century monk resorts to subterfuge and murder to prevent Aristotle's lost treatise on comedy from entering general discourse, might serve as a literary stand-in for the historical wild goose chase upon which critics have embarked for millennia to pin down the elusive core of comedy in definition. Eco's delightfully wordy and erudite chase is, indeed, a handy metaphor for the ultimately fruitless task of filtering Holocaust plays that make use of humor through traditional genre analysis; it just does not work. When critics cite the issue of the "happy ending" of *Life is Beautiful*, for example, they fall back on millennia of classifying any work with a happy ending as a comedy, and, in so doing, they ignore that the mother and child reunion is shot through with the awful knowledge that the father has been brutally murdered and cannot participate in what should be a meeting with joy unlimited. As Robert Skloot notes, "…even in dealing with survivors, death must be acknowledged before

it is transcended…. these plays are emptied of the comic emotion of joy… and despite deliverance, a mournful quality often remains" (*The Darkness*, 45). The comedy in these works does not deliver us from anything; that is simply not its purpose.

This is not to say that we should not consider genre at all in critical examinations of these works. Using genre in a proscriptive way, though, keeps any critic or scholar from approaching a full and thorough analysis of any work, especially a work whose creator employs humor to explore the darkest years of recorded history. Not even classical definitions of tragedy are completely useful when studying "tragic" Holocaust plays and films. There can be no catharsis when a life (or six million) is brutally snuffed out for no reason in the most depraved way imaginable. There is no noble figure in the ovens; no tragic flaw brings about a hero's downfall. There is no peripeteia or anagnoris on the way up the chimney.

Our consideration of comedy as genre begins with Aristotle, who speaks only briefly of comedy in the *Poetics*, his foundational work on tragedy, saying that comedy is a ludicrous treatment of characters of low station. In the tenth-century manuscript the *Tractatus Coislinianus*, a controversial work that critics have alternately accepted and rejected as Aristotle's notes for a second section of the *Poetics*, the author states that "comedy is an imitation of an action that is ludicrous and imperfect, of sufficient length, the several kinds of embellishment being separately found in the several parts of the play; directly presented by persons acting, and not in the form of narrative; through pleasure and laughter effecting the purgation of the like emotions. It has laughter for its mother" (228). If we could accept this without reservation as Aristotle's work, we would have a requisite for comedy that appears much earlier here than in all the historical comedy criticism that follows – that of laughter. Regardless

of whether the work is Aristotle's, it still stands as an early critical work positioning laughter as a foundation of comedy.

The earliest extant scripted comedy, that of Aristophanes, is cultural and literary criticism unfolded via a theatrical plot. *The Frogs* and *Lysistrata* suggest a social function – a space in which the playwright can critique society's mores and actions. Likewise, through the Middle Ages and into the Renaissance, many critics, most notably Desiderius Erasmus in the allegorical *The Praise of Folly* (1509), assign an instructive function to comedy, offering an early argument for its usefulness in teaching morality. Claiming that folly is man's natural state (32), Erasmus offers a defense of folly and humor as inextricable from human nature and as an effective method of moral instruction. His is a key text in making the case that comedy is as legitimate a vehicle for conveying themes of gravity as tragedy and is occasionally even more powerful

Definitions of comedy, as well as the form comedy can take, began to shift significantly in the Renaissance. With William Shakespeare's conscious experiments with form, tragedy and comedy began to commingle onstage in plays like *The Winter's Tale* (1610) and *The Tempest* (1611). Though some critics were quick to deride this blending of forms, others, including Italian playwright and poet Giovanni Battista Guarini, saw it as closer to nature than the more crystalline separate forms. Gaurini also noted that laughter does not have to be derisive and that compassion can accompany comedy **(**151**)**. The plays and films in this study make use of mixed forms, and, while a few do filter their subjects through a veil of black comedy, others utilize a compassionate, occasionally heartbreaking sense of humor. Critics in later time periods would likewise note the inextricability of tragedy and comedy. Perhaps not coincidentally, the insistence of the observance of the complex relationship between the two forms became pronounced among European playwrights of the absurdist vein after the massive destruction of

World War I. In 1920, Luigi Pirandello wrote that “comedy and its opposite lie in the same disposition of feeling, and they are inside the process which results from it” (747). Anything we can imagine or feel is subject to and for comedy (748), and to jettison comedy from art is to oversimplify nature (752). Pirandello’s kindred playwright Eugène Ionesco wrote in 1958 that he “never understood the difference people make between the comic and the tragic. As the ‘comic’ is an intuitive perception of the absurd, it seems to me more hopeless than the ‘tragic.’ The ‘comic’ offers no escape” (27). Though Ionesco’s own plays in the Theatre of the Absurd mode have a distinct structure quite different from the comedies in this study, his almost Artaudian ideas of pushing comedy and tragedy to their limits and then testing those limits is suggestive of the idea of using comedy to examine the Holocaust, an event lying at the limits of the imaginable.

In *The Darkness We Carry*, Robert Skloot notes a function for comedy not only as a “continuance of tragedy” but also as an “antithesis” to the seriousness of the Holocaust (43). It is important to note that Skloot's use of “antithesis” does not indicate an advocacy for comedy as an anesthesia or antidote for the seriousness of the Holocaust. Rather, he implies a kind of comedy that challenges the primacy of the tragic viewpoint as a means of exploring and commenting on the Holocaust. The works making use of comedy in this way confront the Holocaust theme aggressively and often even mockingly, parodying or even burlesquing, as in the case of *Sammy’s Follies*, the “Holocaust experience and… the victims' suffering” (43). The clash between comedy and tragedy here reenergizes our perhaps conditioned responses to the Holocaust (43). Maybe these works shock or enrage us, but, more importantly, they leave us unable to retreat to the numb sadness occasioned by the more traditionally crafted tragic

Holocaust treatment. In his discussion of Holocaust comedy, Skloot objects to a frivolous approach but admits:

> There is… no sure agreement as to what constitutes a frivolous treatment, and there is much disagreement among critics and audiences concerning plays whose incorporation of comic elements seems to show this attitude, whether or not the playwright intended to. (44)

He also states that our knowledge of the outcome of the Holocaust prevents in most cases a full-on comic approach, generally leaving the comedy to lie in the hands of individual characters rather than in the theme of the play (45).

Skloot also notes that the comic and tragic meet brutally as the playwrights insist on their equal footing in life (46), as in the horrible climax of *Life is Beautiful*. Other playwrights and critics had noted before the twentieth century that the intermingling of the two forms was effective not only dramatically but also because it mimicked nature more closely than artificially distinguishing between the two did. During the British Restoration, for example, playwright and poet Oliver Goldsmith observed that comedy, studying as it does human folly, is more "natural" than the overblown tragedy and purple prose of that period's popular heroic drama (424). Two centuries later, Søren Kierkegaard noted that comedy and tragedy are naturally intertwined and, in fact, inseparable (556). In 1940, Mikhail Bakhtin likewise observed an inextricability in the relationship between the comic and the serious, exploring laughter through his theory of the grotesque, through which he analyzed the flavor of Renaissance festivals during which the nobility and peasantry came together to celebrate life and death through feasting and bawdy, scatological rituals. Bakhtin noted in the grotesque an emphasis on the "lower bodily stratum," necessary for depicting a contradictory and double-faced fullness of life" (62). The body is of

the earth, and, like the earth, contains all potentialities of decay and rebirth. Bakhtin argued that the growing rigidity of the class system that developed during the Renaissance brought less opportunities to question the status quo and its hierarchies through the grotesque in festivals and rituals that had existed alongside formal tragic forms since the Greeks. The grotesque opposes the official order (4), encouraging the audience and participants to mock the formal, which enforces the status quo. The grotesque makes no distinction between the high and the low, and, as we see in *Sammy's Follies*, its lack of limitations lead it to overcome fear (90) and establish "a new outlook on life" (91). It contains the potential for transformation as it rejoices in the fecundity emerging from rot. Bakhtin saw in the grotesque laughter of the carnival "an interior form of truth" whose transformation into seriousness destroys the truth it reveals (92). True seriousness, in fact, is part of an unfinished whole without laughter (122), just as laughter without acknowledgement of its serious function is missing its complement. Though Bakhtin noted that late fifteenth and early sixteenth-century European philosophers saw laughter as one of "mankind's spiritual privilege," separating him from other animals (68), he felt laughter lost its social function as an equalizer and communal emetic in the seventeenth century as the focus of laughter shifted from the community to the individual (101).

Nonetheless, some seventeenth-century artists still found a social function for comedy, though the inclusion of "the low" as ritual that Bakhtin had noted in communal performance forms and rituals before the Renaissance diminished greatly in the era of the court theatre. The great comic playwright, actor, and theorist Molière made a career of using comedy as seventeenth-century social subversion. Molière encourages us to laugh at the bluebloods and their affectations and, in effect, invites us to make fun of society with him. The grotesque is not totally absent from Molière's oeuvre. Consciously inspired by the street performers and

travelling players of the commedia dell'arte, Molière's mocked characters were never far from the grotesque characters of medieval festivals, though their status as the officially sanctioned theatre of the court eliminates the necessary component of the masses. Obsessed with enemas and phlegm, *La Malade Imaginaire*'s Argan is only the most obvious example of Molière's interest in the grotesque, though his focus on the upper classes precludes the full spectrum of life that Bakhtin would see as a vital component of the grotesque. In this study, I look at Eugene Lion's *Sammy's Follies*, whose low, occasionally naked, characters dwell aggressively in the world of the grotesque. Lion's mercilessness as he shoves our faces into the grotesque and then holds them there is for more than mere dramatic effect; he is ruthlessly attacking those whom he sees as responsible for genocide, opening eyes and urging change in the process.

Other critics have noted specific functions and characteristics of comedy beyond its broad-stroke social functions. Henri Bergson's oft-quoted 1900 essay "Comedy" places much emphasis, for example, on the idea of the mechanical; we laugh automatically at certain character gestures and habits at which the comic playwright directs us (70-71). While we laugh at the mechanical habits of the body, however, we also laugh at the disruptions of those habits (89). Bergson also describes certain kinds of stock plot devices such as the snowball effect (112-114), in which the central action accumulates more and more complications until it thunders out of control. Bergson's analysis of comedy becomes problematic, as Betrand Russell notes, with its insistence upon the indifference of the beholder (Bergson 63). While Bergson concedes that we might "laugh at a person who inspires us with pity… or even with affection," we must silence our pity to laugh at them (63). I am not convinced that M. Bergson is correct in enough cases to warrant a blanket acceptance of this part of his theory. We may laugh at Malvolio's comeuppance in *Twelfth* Night without feeling much for him, but we care a great deal about

Born Yesterday's hilarious Billie Dawn, even while we laugh at her. Bergson seems to find that most laughter is derisive, and I cannot agree with him. Much of Bergson's theory is difficult to refute, however, especially in terms of stock devices to which we are conditioned; even the most complicated and innovative of contemporary comedies contain plot devices to which we can find parallels in classic comedy. The 2005 American film *Wedding Crashers*, for example, contains a plethora of classic comedy tropes: mistaken identity, outsiders upsetting the established social order while simultaneously attempting to fit into it, repetition, physical slapstick, grotesque gastrointestinal bits, surprise, subversion of expectations, and young lovers whose attempts at being together are continually thwarted. It all ends with the couples for whom the audience has rooted uniting and looking forward to a happy – and funny – future.

Northrop Frye noted these tropes when looking back to the classical critics to note that the archetypal theme of comedy is *anagnorisis*; specifically, it is the moment of critical discovery that leads to the rise of a new society around the hero (192). In *Twelfth Night*, for example, the revelation of Viola's sex means that she and Orsino can marry and that Olivia's Sebastian is a biological Sebastian. The siblings and their spouses will rejuvenate what had become a stale and joyless social order before the shipwreck of the twins on Ilyria. In other words, the integration of an individual into society acts as a catalyst for the integration of society in general (43). Often, Frye noted, the rise of the hero balances against the revelation of the *pharmakos*, or comic scapegoat (45). For instance, Tartuffe's exposure means that Valère and Mariane may marry, and Malvolio's humiliation counters no less than three weddings. Frye also notes that actions are twisted to accommodate a happy ending in comedy (206), but we will see that this is not always the case with Holocaust comedy. Holocaust comedy challenges many of these "rules," in fact. Importantly, Frye also pointed out that the qualities "tragic" and "comic"

not only apply to certain genres but to certain characteristics of genres (162). Genre can thus be descriptive and not merely proscriptive, and perhaps that is its greatest use. Twentieth and twenty-first century playwrights are much less concerned with adhering to generic proscriptions than their classical and neoclassical forebears. Why must generic criticism dismiss a work as inappropriate before we even examine its content? Successful execution of complex themes requires complex forms. Finally, Frye saw the most important function of genre classification as its ability to establish relationships between works (246-248), providing us with a reason to look at certain works together, noting their commonalities and playing them against one another as well.

It is also important to consider potential ethnic qualities and functions of comedy when considering how we might use it to explore the Holocaust. In the preface to *Semites and Stereotypes: Characteristics of Jewish Humor* (1993), Avner Ziv argues that humor has been an important part of Jewish life since at least the time of the writing of the Bible. He claims that humor "helps change, if only for a short while, the sadness of reality, twisting it into something funny and so more easily bearable" (vii). The desperate father's use of humor in *Life is Beautiful* to twist his son's sad reality into something more bearable than it is stands within a long tradition. In the same volume, Jay Boyer contends that the black humor of much late twentieth-century fiction such as that found in the work of John Barth, Thomas Pynchon, Joseph Heller, and others has its roots in the Jewish shtetls of Eastern Europe (4). In identifying the protagonist of these works, Boyer coins the term "schlemiezel… one who is a loser, a failure, a man out of control, a city dweller living most often on the East Coast…" (4). Not unlike both protagonists of Mel Brooks's *The Producers*, the "schlemiezel" is a combination of the shtetl archetypes the schlemiel and the *schlimazl*. Boyer defines the schlemiel as "a failure… born without the

resources necessary to become more than he already is…. the butt of the joke" (5-6), ultimately "too sweet, too kind, too human to fit in" (6). The *schlimazl*, on the other hand, possesses a combination of winners' and losers' characteristics; he has potential (5). He knows what he must do to succeed and does it only to fail anyway (6-7). The "schlemiezel" possesses characterstics of both types and dwells in a modern, urban world.

While writing not about an artistic genre but about human acts, Sigmund Freud's analysis of jokes can be useful in theorizing the effects of humor. Sigmund Freud posits that "the origin of comic pleasure lies in a comparison of the difference between two expenditures" (Freud *Jokes*, 270) in *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* (1905) and "Humour" (1928). The subconscious prompts us to release as laughter energy that we would otherwise release in a negative manner. Humor liberates us (Freud "Humour," 2), giving us a way of temporarily dismissing the world as being less difficult and frightening than it actually is. It allows us to ease pain. Freud's famous examinations of jokes, the comic, and humor are contingent upon the liveness and immediacy of human exchange. While their potential helpfulness in the analysis of dialogic exchange in the theatre is clear, Freud's theories seem less helpful as a tool through which to discuss thematic issues or the effect of these plays as a whole. Jokes are specific acts undertaken by individuals. Even a visual joke in a play is the act of an individual, whether it is enacted by a character or a scenic or costume designer. While jokes are comic and humorous acts, the terms "comic," "humor," and "humorous" refer to states of being and feeling.

Holocaust Drama Theory & Criticism

When art exploring the Holocaust began appearing after World War II, artists and critics realized quickly that traditional forms and "rules" would not suffice as frameworks for the investigation of this event. There was no tragic hero, no catharsis, and no moral. Works that used

traditional forms, like *The Diary of Anne Frank* with its well-made, kitchen-sink realism, often erased what was unique about the Holocaust. For example, Anne was no tragic hero suffering from a tragic flaw. She was one of thousands of anonymous girls chosen for destruction because of being born Jewish. In erasing this essential difference between Anne and any American girl her age, the playwrights erased what was essential about her connection to the Holocaust. But because of this play and the others following it that explored the Holocaust theme, a special subset of theatre criticism dealing specifically with Holocaust plays would eventually begin to develop.

With a history significantly shorter than that of comedy theory, Holocaust drama theory did not begin to develop in earnest until the 1980s, with the 1982 publication of Robert D. Skloot's first Holocaust theatre anthology, followed by his *The Darkness We Carry* in 1988. In the introduction to *The Theatre of the Holocaust, Volume 1* (1982), Skloot writes of the moral necessity for writing about the Holocaust that many playwrights dealing with the subject feel (11), observing five general goals among Holocaust playwrights:

1) To pay homage to the victims,
2) To educate audiences to the facts of history,
3) To produce an emotional response to those facts,
4) To raise certain moral questions, and
5) To draw a lesson from the events re-created. (14)

Skloot also outlines several difficult and vital issues facing Holocaust playwrights, including the difficulty in selecting events or situations against which to compare the uniqueness of the Holocaust (15) and the inherent inability of realism to tackle such an unreal and misunderstood event (16-17). Most significantly, he sees in Holocaust drama a "search for meaning, or at least

intelligibility, in an event which, from nearly every angle, shelters some kind of truth about us all" (21). To call the Holocaust an aberration is to deny the darkness in our humanity. This insistence that these plays reveal truth about our lives after the Holocaust rather than simply recreate hermetically sealed events from the past informs my work in a fundamental way.

In Skloot's major work, *The Darkness We Carry* (1988), he deepens his earlier discussion from *The Theatre of the Holocaust, Volume 1* and examines several ways – from trope to genre to national voice – through which playwrights have explored the Holocaust and ultimately claims that the Holocaust reveals a truth about all humanity. He is also particularly concerned in this work with playwrights rooting their ideas in historical accuracy. For example, a play dealing with survivorship should be written with a thorough understanding of the history of the time as well as with the concept of survivorship in that time (11), even though the playwright creates his or her own reality onstage. Peter Barnes's "Auschwitz," for example, is particularly effective because Barnes understood a late twentieth-century concept of the complicity of the Nazi-era German bystander as well as that bystander's own concept of himself.

In the introduction to *The Theatre of the Holocaust, Volume 2* (1999), Skloot notes significant changes in the field of Holocaust theatre and in Holocaust art in the decade since the appearance of his first anthology. He also adds a qualification to the list of reasons why playwrights engage with the Holocaust theme:

> Missing from the list is explicit reference to the necessary ways in which playwrights can achieve these specific objectives through new approaches to their subject at a time when cultural and political understandings have become less monolithic or universal than a generation ago. (8-9)

This addendum describes the resistance to universally accepted interpretations of individual works of art that grew among critics during the late 20th century. With Marxist, Lacanian, feminist and other interpretations considered equally valid forms of criticism, the likelihood of univocal readings of plays, books, and events decreased substantially after World War II. Anne Frank's diary itself has inspired a myriad of plays and other works of art, each different in terms of form and theme. There is no single accepted way to tell the Holocaust; it is a kaleidoscope of stories told by different voices in different ways, like the pieces in this study.

Elinor Fuchs's 1987 *Plays of the Holocaust: An International Anthology* advances Fuchs's view that Holocaust plays focusing on collective suffering are generally more effective than those that focus on the event through the story of an individual.[8] While this point is certainly arguable, it does highlight the reality of the Holocaust as an event focusing on the destruction of vast groups of people, primarily for reasons of ethnicity. She theorizes that Holocaust tragedy represents the "failure of the entire human enterprise" (xxi) rather than that of an individual or even a nation. Most of the pieces in this study are ensemble pieces, but there are some that challenge Fuchs's assertion.

Edward R. Isser's *Stages of Annihilation: Theatrical Representations of the Holocaust* (1997) analyzes the qualities that make a "good" Holocaust play, rating plays in the context of historical accuracy and ethical conscientiousness. Though Isser calls Skloot's critical parameters for Holocaust drama more "prescriptive than descriptive," he ultimately adheres closely to those parameters except in one rather significant way. Claiming that Skoot "rejects the notion of universality in Holocaust representation," Isser disallows the idea that playwrights should

[8] Theatre Communications Group, the publisher of Fuchs's anthology, claims on the back cover that the book is "the first major anthology of Holocaust drama," but her anthology was published five years after the publication of Skloot's first anthology.

necessarily present the Holocaust as a uniquely historical and uniquely Jewish event (25). Isser also argues the indefensibility of outside critical constraints placed upon the artist and advocates a willingness to look critically at viewpoints outside the accepted critical purview of standard Holocaust portrayals, rejecting outright only those that purposefully or carelessly distort fact (26).

In 1998, Claude Schumacher claimed in the introduction to *Staging the Holocaust: The Shoah in Drama and Performance* that theatre is a particularly apt vehicle for exploring the Holocaust as the presence of an actor onstage "underlies the absence of the character" (5). In other words, when we see Anne Frank's story onstage, we are keenly aware that Anne could never be here to tell it. Schumacher also outlines his definition of the successful Shoah – or Holocaust – play:[9]

> …the successful Shoah drama or performance is one that disturbs, offers no comfort, advances no solution; it is a play that leaves the spectator perplexed, wanting to know more although convinced that no knowledge can ever cure him of his perplexity. It must be a play that generates stunned silence. (8)

The difficulties we have in explaining the Holocaust even in historical terms should not be erased with pat answers in art. The use of comedy cannot preclude this "stunned silence." Sometimes, the preceding comedy enhances the penultimate astonishment. The preceding laughter cannot prepare us for the murder of Guido in *Life is Beautiful* or of the gunning down of the residents of Joshua Sobol's *Ghetto*. In these two cases, in fact, the sense of fun that the characters have built for the audience only makes their deaths more difficult to accept.

[9] "Shoah" is a Hebrew word connoting a disaster of cosmic proportions. It is often used in place of "Holocaust," a more ecumenical and often controversial word implying sacrifice.

Vivian Patraka's 1999 book, *Spectacular Suffering: Theatre, Fascism, and the Holocaust*, offers an unpacking of several standard Holocaust tropes and explores ways of representing the unrepresentable, describing an essential problem with theatrical signification of the Holocaust that she calls "goneness":

> …the definitiveness, the starkness, and the magnitude of this particular genocide… dictating the scope of what and who has been violently lost, including succeeding generations that cannot be. (4)

In other words, performers and playwrights bear the weight of millions who cannot be here. They must find a means to invoke a sense of truth in the theatricalization of an event that defies believability when addressed in a literal manner.

In *Holocaust Drama: The Theater of Atrocity* (2009), Gene Plunka does not erect a theoretical framework beyond his stated intention to judge the plays by their historical veracity and their potential to make good, interesting theatre. Nonetheless, his book does examine many plays not studied in those Holocaust theatre critical texts preceding his. Though Plunka's work is a diligent and thoughtful survey, it does not substantially change or add to the framework of Holocaust drama theory erected by his forebears.

This dissertation consists of five chapters, including this introduction. The second chapter, entitled "Axis Grease: The Workers of 'Auschwitz' and *Ghetto*," concerns two plays that explore the rank-and- file workers who serve as the foundation for the Third Reich, from the office workers of Peter Barnes's dark comedy "Auschwitz" to the forced laborers of Joshua Sobol's *Ghetto*. In the one-act play "Auschwitz," an SS administrative office in Germany in 1942 becomes a location for the shenanigans performed by sitcom-variety clerical workers. Our

identification with the office workers, jockeying for promotions and bonuses just to make their own lives easier, forces us to examine our own actions in the workplace and in society at large. The scatological humor of the workers is naughty and, in many moments, uproarious. Joshua Sobol populates *Ghetto* with characters that use humor as a coping mechanism as they seek a function in the ghetto that will keep them alive. Set in the Vilna ghetto, which had a thriving theatre, *Ghetto* has several characters who are performers, from ventriloquists to singers to comedians. These characters bring a particularly theatrical humor to the show, providing it with a sense of vaudevillian absurdity. Working at counterpoint in Sobol's devastating work is the dark, nasty humor of Kittel, the SS officer in charge who forces the performers to entertain him and even perform with him at his whim. Both plays push the envelope of what is acceptable with comedy. They each place the issue of complicity uncomfortably close to home.

In chapter three, "Happy Days: Memory in *Sammy's Follies* and *The Model Apartment*," I will analyze the humor in two plays whose characters look back – Donald Margulies' *The Model Apartment* and Eugene Lion's withering *Sammy's Follies*. In *Sammy's Follies*, Sammy, the barkeeper of the Follies, and his motely group of outcasts-turned-actors perform a burlesque reenactment of the trial of Rudolph Höss, commandant of Auschwitz-Birkenau from 1942-1943. The play's dramatic techniques defy traditional, nearly sanctified, Holocaust literature proscriptions: it is a burlesque that baits its audience. In *The Model Apartment*, an elderly couple, both Holocaust survivors, arrive at their Miami retirement home only to find it unfinished. As they move temporarily into their complex's model apartment with non-working appliances and glued-down accessories, they are unexpectedly joined by their thirty-something bipolar daughter and her intellectually challenged teenaged African American boyfriend. This play is one of few dealing with the descendants of survivors and the problems they have inherited from their

damaged parents. Margulies even takes on one of the Holocaust's most sacred cows in the form of Anne Frank. Both plays deal with the Holocaust as a past issue, raising questions of memory and sacredness.

Chapter 4, "Come Hear the Music Play!: Singing and Dancing the Holocaust," explores two works that approach the Holocaust from that most American of theatrical art forms, the musical. In Joe Masterhoff, John Kander, and Fred Ebb's classic musical *Cabaret* (1966), the denizens of the Kit Kat Klub test the bounds of the permissible. Set in Berlin during the rise of the Nazi party in the 1930s, *Cabaret* is essentially about denial, one of the great tropes of the Holocaust. All the characters in the musical are confronted with opportunities to take stands against the encroaching evil of the growing Third Reich, but they remain in a state of denial – dancing, drinking, and screwing until their time runs out. Mel Brooks's and Thomas Meehan's *The Producers*, based on Brooks's 1967 film of the same name, gives us two Broadway producers who hatch a scheme to get rich quick by overselling shares in a turkey they know will fold – a musical comedy called *Springtime for Hitler*, set in the Third Reich and complete with showgirls and Busby Berkeley-styled production numbers. Their scheme places them in danger when the tasteless but hysterical musical-within-the-musical becomes a smash hit. Much has been made of the question of whether anyone but a distinctly Jewish wit like Mel Brooks could have gotten away with a show revolving around such a potentially offensive plot.

As artists continue to create works exploring the issue of the Holocaust, these questions will continue to arise. Holocaust critics, in turn, will continue to guard the memory of the dead, insisting upon a specific set of critical guidelines for addressing this event. Propriety is, of course, a social construction that changes rapidly, and though it can provide guidelines that can help us navigate through works of art just as it can help us navigate society, it can also conceal

and constrain. It can strangle artistic license and creativity while locking critics into a blinkered way of seeing. At the risk of being accused of essentialism, I think that the most unarguable characteristic of an effective and good Holocaust play is that it refrains from dishonoring the victims. They are the reason for remembering the Holocaust at all. Tell the truth, even if it reveals questionable conduct by some Jews during the Holocaust, as in the case of the ghetto leader of *Ghetto,* but respect them and their absence from this earth. Must laughter be taken as disrespectful as a matter of course? Must comic treatments of events set in the Holocaust automatically be targets of disapprobation? As the number of those who can speak to the experience of having survived the Holocaust dwindles, this question and others will become more vital to those who insist upon the sacredness of this event and upon the need to speak of it in tones of respect. Artists will continue to explore the Holocaust for various reasons and in various ways, and critics must be willing to meet their work on its own ground in whatever form it takes, even if that form evokes respectful, honest laughter.

CHAPTER 2

Axis Grease: The Workers of "Auschwitz" and *Ghetto*

British playwright Peter Barnes and Israeli playwright Joshua Sobol each debuted major works set in the Holocaust within a few years of each other. Barnes's work initially faced a hostile public and critical field at its 1978 opening while Sobol's 1989 creation was immediately successful, collecting accolades and awards wherever it played. Today, each of these plays – Barnes's one-act "Auschwitz" and Sobol's full-length *Ghetto* – is anthologized in Holocaust drama anthologies, and each has had a successful life of productions since its debut. Though differing wildly in structure, tone, and effect, they do share a commonality other than their location in the Holocaust – they both revolve around the institution of work. One explores the work of the average German during the Third Reich and the Holocaust while the other examines the work of the Jew in the ghettos, where work was simultaneously a way to survive and a process of slow extermination.

The workers of the administrative office of "Auschwitz" embrace and adhere to the Nazi party line to varying degrees and for different reasons, reflecting the choices made by flesh and blood non-Jewish inhabitants of war-torn Europe in the 1930s and 1940s. Adolph Hitler's Third Reich began passing laws restricting access to certain types of employment to Jews shortly after his appointment as Chancellor of Germany on January 30, 1933. In April of that same year, Hitler's government passed the Laws for Reestablishment of Civil Service, which barred Jews from holding state, civil service, and university positions. In 1935, the Nazis would ban Jews from serving in the military and then strip them of German citizenship. 1936 saw a prohibition of Jewish doctors from practicing in German medical institutions, and on November 10, 1938, all German Jews were ordered to hand over their retail businesses to Aryans. Throughout this time,

Aryans moved into the positions Jews had been forced to surrender. As for intellectuals, the Nazi *Weltanschaunng* had become so totalizing that criticism was not tolerated (Kater 264). Many writers, including Thomas Mann and Bertolt Brecht, fled the country. University professors were forced to swear allegiance to the party line, teaching approved or innocuous subject matter, or to resign, and publishing houses could only publish approved material (Kater 266). As Germany invaded other countries, they enforced these policies even more ruthlessly than they had at home. In Poland, for example, Hitler intended the total depopulation of Poles so that the country could be inhabited by Germans (Evans 11-13). The Nazis targeted the intelligentsia for death to prevent them from forming a new "leadership stratum" (Evans 16). Furthermore, new jobs for non-Jews were created with the construction of concentration camps and administrative offices throughout Europe as more countries fell to the Reich.

Peter Barnes & "Auschwitz"

> "The best way to beat hydro-cyanide gas is by holding your breath for five minutes. It's just a question of mind over matter. They don't mind and we don't matter."
>
> -"Auschwitz"

British playwright Peter Barnes took on the subject of death camp administration in his 1978 play "Auschwitz."[10] Barnes sets the play in the Economics and Administrative Office of

[10] Together, "Auschwitz" and Barnes's one-act "Tsar" make up his full-length play *Laughter!*, which debuted at London's Royal Court Theatre in 1978. "Tsar," sometimes billed as "Ivan the Terrible," deals with the terror of the bloody latter half of the reign of the mentally unstable Ivan IV in sixteenth-century Russia. The implication is that the refusal of the Russian government to take action against its mad ruler has the same result as the inability or refusal of the German office workers to admit that the numbers on the folders from their complicated filing system represent people murdered on a vast scale.

the SS at Oranienburg in 1942 and presents it as a typical office with sitcom-variety clerical workers performing everyday office activities. Near the play's end, when the set opens to reveal piles of concentration-camp victims lying dead behind the office's omnipresent, monstrous file cabinets, those in the audience who have not already figured it out now realize that they have been the butt of the joke. Our identification with the office workers, jockeying for promotions and bonuses just to make their own lives easier, forces us to examine our own actions in the workplace and in society at large. What we ignore and what we hide behind administrative language have consequences we do not often care to examine; according to Peter Barnes, these actions can lead to Auschwitz.

Peter Barnes, better known in his native Britain than in the United States and probably best known for *The Ruling Class* (1968), adapted into an Academy Award nominated film in 1972, wrote plays noted for their "celebratory use of language, abrupt juxtapositions – between the comic and the philosophical, the metaphysical and the materialist, the abject and the sublime – and the use of comedy to examine the most serious subject matter" (Woolland 23). He did not rub the sacred against the profane in his work so much as highlight the profane within the mundane:

> Barnes's drama was, is and will always be a startling and exhilarating combination of uproarious comedy and fierce defiant enquiry; a testimony of moral faith in language and an anarchic joy in formal experimentation and transformative visual spectacle. His plays … subvert both conventional sympathies and habitual ironies, are unstoppably persistent in their irreverence and inclusiveness, and explode the orthodoxies by which a national spirit degenerates into the routine of social associations and exclusions which add up to

> a deathliness (and, ultimately, the order and logic of the *auto-de-fe* and death camp) … (Rabey 252)

Barnes's primary concern as a playwright was with the potential for stagnation under the standard of mindless nationalism and the resultant ultimate putrefaction to pure, rotten evil. This is no insignificant mission when we consider philosopher Giorgio Agamben's caveat that "despite the necessity of the trials[11] and despite their evident insufficiency, they helped to spread the idea that Auschwitz had been overcome" (19). Barnes's work, which British playwright Paul Lucas once described as "custard pie filled with broken glass" (qtd. in Rabey 255) serves as a corrective to the idea that Auschwitz has "been overcome."

Aside from its comedy, perhaps the most discomfiting aspect of "Auschwitz" is its lack of a traditional well-made play plot structure. According to Elinor Fuchs, however, this is not an uncommon strategy amongst playwrights addressing the Holocaust. She asserts that these playwrights search for a potent metaphor or dramatic approach that will "lead beyond individual character and linear plot to summon the Holocaust experience in an [sic] historical, cultural or metaphysical totality" (xii). Robert Skloot is even more specific, as I outlined in the introduction, listing five objectives for "serious" playwright tackling the issue of the Holocaust:

> honoring the victims, teaching history to audiences, evoking emotional responses, discussing ethical issues, and suggesting solutions to universal, contemporary problems. To a large degree, achieving these philosophical epideictic, didactic, or theatrical objectives depends on the capacity for symbolizing, or finding the

[11] Nuremburg, et. al.

> appropriate metaphor to carry the performance to a satisfactory conclusion. (*The Darkness* 10)

The office in Barnes's play is a metaphorical location, becoming a physical site for the interplay of what Fuchs calls "the banal and the diabolic" (xvi) rather than simply Hannah Arendt's familiar "banality of evil." This space represents the totality of the modern world in which Christopher Browning writes that the "administrative/bureaucratic and technological capacities of a modern nation state and western scientific culture" were harnessed in order to kill "every last Jew, man, woman and child, throughout the Nazi empire" (qtd. in Eaglestone 1). Peter Barnes uses this ordinary space, one in which many of us find ourselves in the "real world," to reveal what Anat Feinberg calls "the Nazi," or evil, "latent in all human beings" (278).

Structurally, the play has no beginning, middle, or end in a well-made sense; the audience catches Cranach, Stroop, and Else going through what seems to be an ordinary workday in the office. As they grumble about the exigencies and inconveniences of living in wartime, they endure a brief visit from Wochner, a black market peddler who makes clear the inevitability of dealing through illegal channels during times of war for even the most basic of necessities, and a longer one from Gottleb, a worker from another department who brings discord into the office by attempting to trick Cranach, the office manager, into saying something incriminating that might give Gottleb, a Nazi since the Beer Hall Putsch of 1923, ammunition against him in Gottleb's quest to purge Nazi offices of civilian workers, whom he regards as "Johnnies-come-lately" to National Socialism.[12] Though ultimately unable to accomplish his goal, Gottleb does make the three office workers at least temporarily face the truth of the results of their labors. As he forces

[12] The Beer Hall Putsch was a failed attempt to take over the government in Munich in 1923. It brought the Nazi part to national attention and resulted in Hitler's incarceration, during which he wrote *Mein Kampf*.

Cranach, Else, and Stroop to see the people behind the numbered files at which they are constantly working, the massive file cabinets at the back of the set part to reveal corpses of gassed Jews being searched and disposed of by members of the *Sonderkommando*.[13] The three office workers initially undergo shock and horror over the truth that they had not hitherto wanted to admit, but they eventually marshal their strength and expel Gottleb from the office and with him, the awful knowledge that they must force back down into their subconscious in order to continue their toils. *Anagnorisis* does not lead to *peripeteia* in this play.

The four main characters constitute familiar types: Cranach, the jocular, somewhat cavalier office manager; Stroop, the older, rather befuddled worker trying to keep his head low as he trudges toward retirement and a pension; Else, the lone female character and, consequently, the object of double entendre and titillating jokes; and Gottleb, the crass hard-liner from another era out to sabotage Cranach, thereby purifying the Party. If these characters seem familiar, it may be because they are not unlike the characters one might find inhabiting a 1970s British sitcom such as *Fawlty Towers* or *Are You Being Served?* Though much has been made – and rightly so – of Barnes's use of British music hall techniques (Fuchs xvi and Skloot *The Darkness* 64), little has been written of the similarities between the characters in the play and those of British television comedy. Every Holocaust playwright, though addressing the same universal event, filters the event through his own culture (Fuchs xi). A British audience predisposed in 1978 to laughing at Mrs. Slocombe, Mr. Grainger, and Captain Peacock of *Are You Being Served?*, a popular British sitcom that ran from 1972 to 1985, would more than likely have seen them refracted through "Auschwitz's" Else, Stroop, and Cranach, respectively, and would have

[13] The *Sonderkommando* were Jews in concentration camps forced onto work details that ransacked the bodies of their fallen fellow-prisoners for gold teeth and other items of possible value to the Reich before throwing the corpses into the furnace.

immediately intuited that these were familiar character types at whom it was permissible to laugh. According to Scott Banville, the characters of *Are You Being Served?*, which serves as a pop culture contemporary of "Auschwitz," may not only have served as a source of comedy in and of itself for its audiences but may have also produced cultural echoes as an iteration of a kind of British humor that audiences would have known in one form or other for decades before the sitcom began running in the early 1970s.[14] Using a Foucauldian model to look at artistic and media forms as means of transmission of cultural values, Banville argues that sitcoms like *Are You Being Served?* present the lower middle class to viewers with strategies learned from music-hall performances, novels, and conduct books popular since the Victorian era (31-32). The character types in *Are You Being Served?* that appear again in "Auschwitz" situate viewers not only in the present but also in a tradition of pop culture images that had been transmitted to them for almost a hundred years by the time Barnes's play premiered. The familiarity with his music-hall-sitcom characters and the long-standing permission to laugh at them increases the horrifying payoff at the end of the play when we realize what it is at which we have been laughing, especially if we have snickered at these ordinary joes with the "absence of feeling" that Bergson claimed usually accompanies laughter (64). It seems likely that we have laughed at them just that way, as Barnes has given us nothing to love or admire in any of these characters.

Other than Wochner and the four office workers, the other characters are nameless but vital in demonstrating Barnes's point that there were many cogs – famous and not – in the wheel that kept the Reich's death engine running. Furthermore, they serve as ingredients in Bergson's recipe for comedy, in which laughter "is an exposure of our *ready-made* gesture and values, and

[14] It is only coincidental but nonetheless fascinating that *Are You Being Served?* debuted on BBC1 as a replacement in the slot for the 1972 Munich Olympics, site of the terrorist massacre of Israeli athletes, an event historians often link to the Holocaust and to the 1936 Berlin Olympics.

the comic figure is one who is not a man but, instead, a clockwork apparatus leading the special kind of life a puppet seems to have" (Sypher Introduction x). Like Charlie Chaplin caught in the gears of *Modern Times* or Lucy and Ethel at the end of the wild conveyor belt pelting them with an endless deluge of chocolates, we – like the characters of "Auschwitz" – grease the machine.

The idea of the machine or system gives Barnes something quite concrete around which to build his story. Barnes himself said that the play was his reaction against the "pernicious explanation that the Holocaust shows the operation of abstract evil" (qtd. in Fuchs xv). Barnes believed that the Holocaust, in other words, was not the visitation on Earth of some platonic ideal of evil, as some would have us believe; rather, the Holocaust was a specific set of acts committed during a specific time in a specific place and growing from a specific set of ideals. In an essay on Holocaust survivor and poet Paul Celan, Jacques Derrida wrote:

> Nazism was not born in the desert … it had grown in the shadow of big trees … In their bushy taxonomy, they would bear the names of religions, philosophies, political regimes, economic structures, religious or academic institutions. In short, what is just as confusedly called culture, or the world of the spirit. (qtd. in Eaglestone 295)

Derrida meant that Nazism developed under a particular set of circumstances, and Peter Barnes's attention to detail in "Auschwitz" indicates that he realized this and knew the circumstances well; playwrights of the Holocaust, according to Robert Skloot, are obliged to clearly establish "their own understanding of history" (11). However, the system of labor in "Auschwitz" is quite similar to systems still in place in 1978 and in 2015. Such a ubiquitous and mechanical system is the kind of "automatism" that laughter – and *Laughter!* – "singles out and would fain correct" (Bergson 145). The risk for the playwright in this situation, of course, is forcing upon the

audience the realization that it is we rather than a set of fictional characters that stand corrected at the end of the show. How the audience responds to that realization is beyond the playwright's control.

On the way to "Auschwitz's" sobering and stunning ending, Barnes satirizes some familiar Holocaust tropes, injecting them into the workday of the play's office workers. One of these familiar Holocaust tropes, the one used most prominently in Barnes's play, is the Nazi destruction of language, written about famously by Auschwitz survivor Primo Levi and many other Holocaust writers. The play opens, in fact, with a torrent of bureaucratic language spilling from Cranach's mouth as he dictates a memo to Else:

> CRANACH. WVHA Amt C1 (Building) to WVHA Amt D1/1. Your reference ADS/MNO our reference EZ/14/102/01. Copies WVHA Amt D IV/2, Amt D IV/4: RSHA OMIII: Reich Ministry PRV 24/6D. Component CP3(m) described in regulation E(5) serving as Class I or Class II appliances and so constructed as to comply with relevant requirements of regulations L2(4) and (6), L8 (4) and (7). Component CP3(m) shall comply with DS 4591.1942 for the purpose of regulations E(5) when not falling in with the definition of Class I and II. There shall be added after reference CP 116 Part 2:1941 the words "as read with CP 116 Addendum 2: 1942…." Six copies, Fräulein Jost. Dispatch immediately. (107)

Cranach continues dictating this litany of dense codes to Else before saying:

> CRANACH. A word with you, Fräulein. As civil servants we must be ready at any time to answer for our administrative actions…. It is therefore essential that we keep accurate records. That's why everything has to be

written down. It's the basis of our existence. Words on paper… The civilization of the Third Reich'll be constructed from the surviving administrative records at Oranienburg, 1942 A.D. Unless of course they've the misfortune to dig up a memorandum of yours, Fräulein ... Paper size A4 not A3 and the margins should be nine elite character spaces, seven pica on the left and six elite, five pica on the right.

ELSE. Naturally, Herr Cranach, if you look for mistakes you'll find them. (108)

On the page, Cranach's speech, which I have edited, seems to run forever, but any good comic actor knows the key to delivering the speech is to run through it rapid-fire with no inflection as if it were the most natural and mundane way of speaking in the world. By the time Cranach arrives at the end of the incomprehensible list and corrects Else on mistaking details that only the most exacting of eyes could possibly catch, her brisk, understated reply caps the bit with a great laugh. Cranach and Else can only be so blasé about these seemingly indecipherable codes because they either do not know or pretend not to know what they symbolize. Only when Gottleb forces them to see the truth later do they and the audience acknowledge that this code is a system of semiotics for murder. Their compliance with this system makes them – to borrow a phrase from Saul Friedländer – "administrators of extermination" (Eaglestone 4-5).

Barnes uses the device of the obscure codes throughout the play before revealing their true meaning; repetition is, after all, one of the key ingredients of comedy (Bergson 107). He is careful, though, not to let it get in the way of character development. The playwright himself said, "My characters come on full-blast. They don't take the whole play to reveal who they are"

(Rabey 253-254). Most of Barnes's character development in "Auschwitz" reveals itself through jokes:

ELSE. Coming to work this morning, I stopped to pull in my belt. Some idiot asked me what I was doing. I said, "Having breakfast."

CRANACH. I hear they're experimenting with new dishes. Fried termites from the Upper Volga and grilled agouti with green peppers.

ELSE. They can't be worse than those dehydrated soups. They actually clean the saucepans while they're cooking. (108)

Barnes uses dry, crisp jokes for Else. In this first exchange, she comes across like Miss Brahms, the young, blonde sarcastic clerk from *Are You Being Served?* Later, when Wochner makes Else the butt of a joke, she brings to mind the older, oblivious, purple-haired clerk Mrs. Slocombe:

WOCHNER. Fräulein, I'm looking for a wife – anybody's wife. What would it take to make you fall in love with me?

ELSE. A magician. My father said, work hard and be a good girl. You can always change your mind when you're older. Now I'm older and it's too late. I've reached the age where I'm beginning to find sex a pain in the arse.

WOCHNER. That means you're doing it the wrong way. (120)

Else, then, represents more than one British female comedy "type" from her era rolled into one, while Wochner, in this latter exchange, reveals his primary comic function, one that makes him more than a symbol for the necessity of black market living – he is an instigator, setting up the other characters, usually Else, to be the butts of their own jokes.

Stroop, the old man close to retirement, pretends to be clueless, but we realize quickly that this is a ruse he devises in order to keep himself from being noticed:

> STROOP. German cheese gives me nightmares. I keep dreaming I'm punching Herr Gottleb in the face, though it's difficult from a kneeling position. The nightmares've got more frightening lately. I've started wanting to protest about conditions. I fight it but I can't resist. I must make my stand without the slightest "but." So I finally do it. I put a blank piece of paper into an envelope and send it to the Reich Führer himself. Afterwards I feel so proud! It's terrible. I wake up trembling with fright. I must stop sleeping with my eyes closed. (113-114)

He is thoroughly and comically aware that there are Orwellian spies at every turn ready to benefit from the unintended verbal blunders of others.

Gottleb, in particular, is the kind of character who – much like the obsequious Roz, office informant from the film *9 to 5*[15] – no doubt keeps a notebook of overheard conversations that he uses to blow the comments of his peers out of proportion as he reports them to his superiors. A Party veteran, he is as nasty a character as they come, and we laugh at him initially because his nastiness seems ineffectual when we first meet him. His commitment to a Party line now twenty years old makes him seem somewhat obsolete next to the slick, opportunistic civilian workers with whom he speaks:

> GOTTLEB. I warned Brigadefürher Glucks about you and your kind. He didn't listen. What gifts I've thrown before swine. You were seconded, didn't volunteer. Now you're a malignant virus in the healthy body of the SS-

[15] Another workplace comedy that would have been going into production, coincidentally enough, around the time of the original Royal Court production of *Auschwitz!*

> WHVA. You've no business here with your damn bureaucratic principles of promotion by merit and such. Merit, merit, I shit on *merit*. We old Party men didn't fight in the streets, gutters filled with our dead, to build a world based on merit. What's merit got to do with it? We weren't appointed on merit. Take merit as a standard and we'll all be out. (114)

Cranach, ever-casual, responds, "Gottleb, a man with a forehead as low as yours has no right to criticize" (114). Their back-and-forth continues with Cranach generally getting the upper hand until the moment when – as Skloot notes (65) – the play turns nasty. The characters, urged by the malicious Gottleb, begin joking under the influence of the schnapps they have purchased from Wochner:

> CRANACH. Don't laugh. It's an offense to make people laugh. Jokes carry penalties. So don't. Have you tried the new Rippentrop herrings? [16]
>
> They're just ordinary herrings with the brain removed and the mouth split wider.
>
> *Shrieks from Else and Stroop, while Gottleb roars and slaps his thigh in delight. Their laughter grows louder and more hysterical.*
>
> GOTTLEB. That'll get you five years hard labor, Viktor. Here's one carries ten: my dentist is going out of business. Everyone's afraid to open their mouths.
>
> ELSE. The only virgin left in Berlin is the angel on top of the victory column – Göbbels can't climb that high.[17]

[16] Joachim von Rippentrop, Hitler's Foreign Minister.

[17] Joseph Goebbels, the Reich Minister of Propaganda.

GOTTLEB. I sentence you to fifteen years, Fräulein.

ELSE. A German's dream of paradise is to have a suit made of genuine English wool with a genuine grease spot in it.

GOTTLEB. Another fifteen.

STROOP. We can't lose the war, we'd never be that careless.

GOTTLEB. Twenty years hard.

STROOP. The time we'll really be rid of the war is when Franco's widow stands beside Mussolini's grave asking who shot the Führer?

GOTTLEB. Thirty.

CRANACH. Listen, listen, what do you call someone who sticks his finger up the Führer's arse?!

GOTTLEB. Heroic.

CRANACH. No, a brain surgeon!

GOTTLEB. That's DEATH.

Cranach, Else and Stroop collapse in hysterical laughter as they become aware that suddenly sober Gottleb is staring balefully at them.

CRANACH. You're not laughing, Hans. (130-131).

In this increasingly hysterical scene, the jokes achieve a snowball effect as Barnes "forces us to laugh not merely at but along with his obtuse characters. Little by little we become involved in their rivalries and forget the frightening title of the play" (Fuchs xvi), but Gottleb suddenly increases the stakes by revealing that he has recorded the conversation and plans to turn Cranach in to their superiors.[18] It is to Peter Barnes's great credit as a playwright that he is

[18] Before Gottleb's entrance, Cranach finds an electronic bug that Gottleb has planted in the office. He yanks the cord attached to the bug, and the audience hears a yelp offstage followed by a thud. This is a bit of physical

actually able to make the audience sympathize with Cranach, at least momentarily, in a situation in which we should not – morally, at any rate – sympathize with any of the characters on stage. They are all part of the Nazi death machine, players at the entrance to the Hell-Mouth, and Gottleb is soon to pull the curtain back to reveal the entrance to that infernal hole.

Initially terrified at the prospect of Gottleb's recording, Else and Stroop waffle as to where their loyalties lie – with Cranach or with Gottleb. Gottleb is almost able to make Else and Stroop believe that they actually hear Cranach's joke clearly on the tape when, in truth, the tape has picked up nothing but garbling and distortion. Cranach breaks Gottleb's hold on Else and Stroop by shattering the promises of promotions and salary-increases Gottleb has made in exchange for their allegiance:

> CRANACH. Fräulein, he won't let you see a Grade I salary, pension or toilet seat. You're marked dead meat, cold water. And you, Heinz (Stroop). You'll never become Department head. It'll be Gottleb's thirty pieces reward for denouncing me. But he can only get it if you lie about me and the Führer-make-him-happy-he-deserves-it famous arse. I know you won't lie. Over the years we three've formed an abiding relation, working together, grieving together when your wife died, Heinz and your mother didn't, Fräulein. The best way to help ourselves is by helping each other. The times're sour, we've lost the true meaning of things, but I know I can still find integrity and trust amongst my friends. (134)

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comedy reminiscent of the Lina Lamont microphone cord scene in the film *Singin' in the Rain* (1952). Gottleb's production of the tape recorder here connects us to that earlier moment in the play so that we know it is he who has been bugging the office.

Cranach is able to convince Else and Stroop that he is right, and they begin jeering at Gottleb. In his defeat, however, Gottleb coldly reveals once and for all to the other three the truth behind their work:

> GOTTLEB. All these years fighting. The forces of reaction are too strong. Pulled down by blind moles in winged collars. Your kind can't be reformed, only obliterated. As you build 'em we should find room for you in one of our complexes in Upper Silesia: Birkenau, Monowitz or Auschwitz.
>
> *Cranach, Else and Stroop look disturbed.*
>
> That's where I should be too. Out in the field. Not stuck behind a desk in Oranienburg, but in the gas chambers of Auschwitz, working with people. Dealing with flesh and blood, not deadly abstractions: I'm suffocating in this limbo of paper. Auschwitz is where it's happening, where we exterminate the carrion hordes of racial maggots. I'd come into my own there on the Auschwitz ramp, making the only decision that matters, who lives, who dies. You're strong, live; you're pretty, live; you're too old, too weak, too young, too ugly. Die. Die. Die. Die. Smoke in the chimneys, ten thousand a week. (135)

For several minutes, Gottleb continues his litany of hatred against the hypocrisy of those who feign ignorance about what it is they are actually doing while working within the concentration camp system. Cranach, Else, and Stroop – like the audience – have been disarmed by laughter, as Henri Bergson might say (149). They have been lulled by jokes and a spirit of collegiality into letting their guards down and thinking that they are safe, and when Gottleb drops

his horrifying revelation upon them, they try desperately to deny its truth. In subscribing to conformity, part of the Nazi ideology stressing "collective *volkish* virtues" (Eaglestone 213), they have become, in the words of Michael Burleigh, "men and women coldly and calculatingly" organizing the murder of "thousands of people" (qtd. in Eaglestone 309).

Gottleb's nearly evangelical fervor grows as his anger feeds on itself:

> GOTTLEB. Now see, see 'em packed, buttock to buttock, gazing up at the waterless douches, wondering why the floor has no drainage runnels. On the lawns above, Sanitary Orderlies unscrew the lid shafts and Sergeant Moll shouts, "Now let 'em eat it!", and they drop blue, Zyklon B hydrocyanide crystals changing to gas in the air as it pours down and out through false shower heads, fake ventilators. What visions, what frenzies, the screaming, coughing, staggering, vomiting, bleeding, breath paralyzed, lungs slowly ruptured *aaaaah!* See it! See it! (138)

And see it they do. As the three, who have grown increasingly frantic in their wild efforts not to see, scream in panic, Barnes reveals one of the most horrifying visual effects yet imagined for the theatre:

> *As the sounds of the gas chamber door being opened reverberates, the whole of the filing section slowly splits and its two parts slide apart to reveal a vast mound of filthy, wet straw dummies; vapor – the remains of the gas – still hangs about them. They spill forward to show all are painted light blue, have no faces, and numbers tattooed on their left arms. Cranach, Stroop and Else stare in horror and Gottleb smiles as two monstrous figures appear out of the vapor, dressed in black rubber suits,*

> *thigh-length waders and gas masks. Each has a large iron hook, knife, pincers and a small sack hanging from his belt. As they clump forward, they hit the dummies with thick wooden clubs. Each time they do so there is the splintering sound of a skull being smashed.* (138)

Peter Barnes has ratcheted the ghastly energy in this scene to fever pitch, and when the filing cabinets part to reveal what is behind them, the audience finds itself not only shocked but ashamed, for we have come to identify with these characters in denial; we have their jobs, we have their concerns, and now we bear their shame. As Bergson said:

> The comic character is often one with whom, to begin with, our mind, or rather our body, sympathizes. By this is meant that we put ourselves for a very short time in his place, adopt his gestures, words and actions, and, if amused by anything laughable in him, we invite him, in imagination to share his amusement with us; in fact, we treat him first as a playmate. (186)

Our playmates bear the responsibility for the death of the 6 million, and so do we. Neither the Chevron middle manager in California, the society matriarch wearing the diamond ring crafted by DiamondWorks, nor the clerk in the Economics and Administrative Office of the SS at Oranienburg may claim innocence.[19] In a truly shocking theatrical moment, Peter Barnes has shown us that our actions in the workplace or in society in general – our confidentiality agreements, our secret files, our capacity to close our eyes at work in order to acquire "things" and to keep our jobs – can and sometimes do lead to the most horrific actions imaginable. The feeble cry of "But I didn't know!" is revealed as a shallow, morally bankrupt excuse for

[19] Chevron is the single largest American investor in Myanmar and has undergone criticism for allowing its guards to torture and kill trespassers near its pipelines there. DiamondWorks is one of the major companies profiting from "dirty diamonds" mined in Sierra Leone.

accepting and participating in the status quo without bothering to seek out its source or ruminate upon its ends. The comedy in "Auschwitz" performs an activity essential to culture – criticism. It is an action essential for the middle-class society onstage and in the audience, for in our society, we "gravitate easily toward that dead center of self-satisfaction" (Sypher "The Meanings of Comedy" 252-253). It shows characters onstage doing what we do.

Cranach is finally able to break Gottleb's spell and lead the others back into purposeful, belligerent ignorance:

> CRANACH. Fight. Fight. Can't let him win. We're Civil Servants, words on paper, not pictures in the mind, memo AS/7/42 reference SR 273/849/6. Writers write, builders build, potters potter, bookkeepers keep books. E(5) Class I and II, L11, L12, F280/515 your reference AMN 23D/7. "Gas chambers," "fire ovens," "ramps," he's using words to make us see images, words to create meanings, not contained in them; then nothing means what it says and our world dissolves. Words're tools. CP3(m) is CP3(m). Two capitals, an Arabic numeral and a bracket round a small letter "m," the rest is the schnapps talking. (140)

As Cranach rallies his coworkers, the three advance on Gottleb and force him out of the office and resume their work, taking solace in its opaque codes. They are theatrical stand-ins for those whom Christopher Browning describes as "numb and brutalized, they felt more pity for themselves because of the unpleasant work they had been assigned than they did for their dehumanized victims" (qtd. in Eaglestone 214). Finally, just in case anyone in the audience has missed Barnes's point, he lets them have it square between the eyes:

> CRANACH. In centuries to come when our complexes at Auschwitz're empty

> ruins, monuments to a past civilization, tourist attractions, they'll ask, like we do of the Inca temples, what kind of men built and maintained these extraordinary structures. They'll find it hard to believe they weren't heroic visionaries, mighty rulers, but ordinary people, people who liked people, people like them, you, me, us. (142-143)

The people who created and ran Auschwitz are "you, me, us."

The main body of the play concludes with Cranach, Else, and Stroop advancing toward the audience and singing "Brotherhood of Man," the eleven o'clock number from the 1961 Broadway musical *How to Succeed in Business without Really Trying*, winner of the 1962 Pulitzer Prize for Drama as well as several Tony awards, including Best Musical.[20] Robert Skloot calls the number a "saccharine, upbeat musical-comedy anthem" (*Darkness* 66), and he is correct. However, we can further analyze Barnes's choice to use the song in "Auschwitz" in light of its context in *How to Succeed*. This musical, extraordinarily popular in the 1960s in the United States and in England, follows the exploits of J. Pierrepont Finch, a young window washer who follows steps outlined in a guidebook that tell him how to ascend the corporate ladder. Some of the rules include refraining from thinking too much, avoiding making suggestions, always smiling without asking questions, and, in general, doing it "the company way." After backstabbing and betraying each other – all with smiles on their faces – the company of *How to Succeed* ends the show with "Brotherhood of Man." Famed New York theatre critic Walter Kerr said of the musical's original Broadway run, "Not a sincere line is spoken in the new Abe Burrows-Frank Loesser musical… *How to Succeed in Business without Really Trying* is crafty, conniving, sneaky, cynical, irreverent, impertinent, sly, malicious, and lovely… Even the

[20] It began its successful London run in 1963.

orchestral arrangements are dishonest" (14). The significance of the song's use in "Auschwitz" is clear – if we wish to end up in a corner office rather than on a window-washing scaffold or if we wish to curry favor with the Reich Führer, we must play it "the company way." "Mediocrity," the musical's hero Finch sings, "is not a mortal sin" (Loesser). Barnes would have us believe otherwise. This is the brotherhood of man. On the other side, in Auschwitz, are those excluded, the "brotherhood in abjection" (David Rousset qtd. in Agamben 17).

Barnes is relentless; he ends the play with an epilogue in which two characters, introduced by an announcer as "the Boffo Boys of Birkenau, Abe Bimko and Hymie Bieberstein" (144), present a short comic sketch reminiscent of a British musical hall sketch or Borscht Belt routine:

BIEBERTSTEIN. Bernie Litvinoff just died.

BIMKO. Well if he had a chance to better himself.

BIEBERSTEIN. Drunk a whole bottle of varnish. Awful sight, but a beautiful finish. Everyone knew he was dead. He didn't move when they kicked him. He's already in the ovens.

BIMKO. Poke him up then, this is a very cold block house.

BIEBERSTEIN. They're sending his ashes to his widow. She's going to keep them in an hourglass.

BIMKO. So she's finally getting him to work for a living.

BIEBERSTEIN. The camp foreman kept hitting me with a rubber truncheon yesterday – *hit, hit, hit*. I said, "You hitting me for a joke or on purpose?"

> "On purpose!" he yelled. *Hit, hit, hit*. "Good," I said, "because such jokes I don't like." (144)

The two continue their comic patter, dancing a shuffle step with canes to the song "On the Sunny Side of the Street" until a blue vapor begins to fill the stage. Even as they fall to their knees dying, they continue the routine:

> BIEBERSTEIN. To my beloved wife Rachel I leave my Swiss bank account. To my son Julius who I love and cherish, like he was my son, I leave my business. To my daughter I leave one hundred thousand marks in Trust. And to my no-good brother-in-law Louie who said I'd never remember him in my will – Hello Louie!
>
> BIMKO. Dear Lord God, you help strangers so why shouldn't you help us? We're the chosen people.
>
> BIEBERSTEIN. Abe, so what did we have to do to be chosen?
>
> BIMKO. Do me a favor, don't ask. Whatever it was it was too much…. Hymie you were right, this act's dead on its feet.
>
> *The spot fades out.*
>
> BIEBERSTEIN. Oh mother…
>
> *They die in darkness.*
>
> *End of play*. (145).

On one level, Bimko and Bieberstein are reduced to performing objects, forced into a song and dance routine by Barnes, just as the Jews of Europe were systematically dehumanized and turned into objects by the Nazis, making their slaughter easier for the perpetrators. But Bimko and Bieberstein resist this dehumanization as they remember loved ones, recall old scores, and

implore God to remember them as they die. In the end, the Nazis fail to strip away their humanity before murdering them. According to Skloot, the dying may resort to laughter as a final way of clinging to humanity, but "for those who use it to distract themselves from the reality of evil (as audiences *are asked to do* before Barnes turns the laughter back on them), laughter itself becomes an instrument of death" (67). Bimko and Bieberstein joke as long as they can in order to stave off the horror of their brutal murders, but the laughter that the audience has afforded the office jokesters responsible for the deaths of these two men and millions of others has come back on us in cold indictment.

Barnes takes an extraordinary risk with "Auschwitz." Will the audience "get it," or will it rip the auditorium seats up and throw them at the stage? Do they leave mortified but enlightened and exhilarated, or do they simply leave mortified? Irving Wardle, reviewing the original Royal Court production for *The London Times*, wrote that he felt as if he were witnessing a moment of "genuine stylistic change" in which Peter Barnes reinvented "what a play ought to be":

> Mr. Barnes erects some fine black farce … Then Mr. Barnes wipes off the grin with a literal enactment of a Zyklon-B extermination, leaving you to draw an all-too-obvious conclusion on the crimes countenanced by middle-class compromise.

Other productions have not been so fortunate. New York-based actor Guy Olivieri, who played Wochner in a production of the play as a student at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill in the mid-1990s, says:

> My friend Jordana was in it with me, and her grandmother lost her fiancée and brother in a concentration camp. Jordana, who has a very Jewish face, bleached her hair for the role (of Else). Last minute, her grandmother came to see it. She

> didn't get it. Hell, we didn't get it. It was a kind of awful, terrible feeling. Too soon?

"Auschwitz" will and should make audiences uncomfortable, but they should understand why. The key to the failure of the UNC production, it would seem, lies in Olivieri's statement that "We didn't get it." If the humor is not played authentically and if the middle-class regularity of the characters onstage is not made clear, then the point is lost. We are left with an "awful, terrible feeling" for ourselves if we are onstage and for the actors if we are in the audience, and we fail to understand Barnes's criticism of "the deathly sickness of obedience to power" (Rabey 253).

Though Peter Barnes did not set "Auschwitz" in Auschwitz, it is, nonetheless, a play about Auschwitz if we see that terrible place as Emmanuel Levinas did, as the "ultimate source of war … the paradigm of gratuitous human suffering, where evil appears in its diabolical horror" (qtd. in Eaglestone 263). For Levinas as well as for other Holocaust writers, including Primo Levi, Auschwitz becomes a synecdoche for all the camps and, ultimately, for evil. In "Auschwitz," Peter Barnes further expands upon the idea of this synecdoche by using the Oranienburg administrative office for the camps as a representative for all offices in which codes and deals are made that lead to inhumanity against mankind. When we begin the business process in the office by replacing the human with case numbers and signs, we divest ourselves of concern for the repercussions of the atrocious actions that we initiate. We cannot feign ignorance or innocence. The lesson of Peter Barnes's "Auschwitz" is clear: genocide begins in bureaucratic language that turns humans into numbers. Auschwitz begins with the decision to replace a name with a number followed by the stroke of a pen.

Barnes's use of humor to make this point is a vital ingredient in his recipe of shame and horror. Making the audience laugh and then pulling the wool from their eyes to show them what is hiding behind the subjects of their laughs seems akin to having them drop a handful of Zyklon B through a tube without telling them there are people on the other side. He performs a sort of theatrical Milgram experiment.[21] Audiences have sometimes reacted to this tactic with anger. Barnes noted "waves of hate" from the audience during the original Court Theatre production of *Laughter!* (Bly and Wager 43), but his motives for using laughter contained no small amount of hostility themselves. He was uncomfortable with the notion that laughing at our problems might actually ease them, especially in the case of matters of life and death:

> One of the reasons the second part of *Laughter* is about Auschwitz is because the Jews have a great reputation of being able to laugh and make the most marvelous one-line jokes about their situation. I wonder if one of the reasons they have been persecuted (not the only reason of course) and haven't done anything about it is because of their ability to laugh at it, laugh at the terrors that have afflicted them…. So *Laughter* was an examination of me as a comic writer – as a humorous writer, because I don't want to write if I feel that I'm helping to increase the injustices and miseries of the world in some way. (Bly and Wagner 46)

This is a difficult statement to digest. Barnes was not Jewish, and even a casual bit of research into the history of Judaism would reveal the inaccuracy of his belief that the Jews had not done anything about their persecution. There is a tradition of Jewish resistance throughout history as

[21] The Milgram experiment was a series of experiments conducted by Stanley Milgram at Yale in the early 1960s. Inspired by questions raised during the Eichmann trial, the experiments measured the willingness of subjects to commit violence against strangers when ordered to do so by an authority figure.

well as during the Holocaust that gives lie to the myth of the Jews as a people who perpetually allow the aggressor to flatten them. Consequently, the first part of the preceding statement reveals an ignorance that borders on the callous. Barnes was willing to face the anger and hatred of his own audience as long as the work causing their anger could raise awareness, promote critical thinking, and ease "the miseries of the world in some way, " but does his Music Hall treatment of the hapless Jews in the gas chamber and his depiction of the office workers as victims of bureaucracy rather than as aggressors reveal a problematic streak of anti-Semitism in the work? A problematic issue certainly occurs if the anger caused in the audience by this tactic becomes too great to allow them to think critically, as seems to have happened in the two productions mentioned earlier, at least within the confines of the ephemeral night of production. If the audience, after leaving the theatre and digesting the material, comes to the same conclusion as Wardle of the *Times*, that "Auschwitz" redefined "what a play ought to be" and demonstrated that complacency is complicity, then we can perhaps say that Barnes's play successfully uses comedy to consider the Holocaust theme. In a review of a 1995 production of the play at Philadelphia's Temple University,[22] *Philadelphia Inquirer* reviewer Douglas J. Keating wrote that, though critics of the original production had called the play a "mockery," he had found it "inspiring" and "significant." He noted, however, that "the overlong conversations and riffs of comical incident – some of it pointed, some not so – had probably tickled the playwright more than they do the audience." Considering the sensitive nature of the subject and the unwillingness of American audiences to laugh when they think it may be politically incorrect to do so, this point is well-taken. One wonders, though, if the fiercely and specifically British nature of the humor had something to do with this. One must also wonder how the pairing of "Auschwitz"

[22] In 1982, Temple had also produced the USA's only previous production of "Auschwitz."

with Barnes's 1969 one-act play "Noonday Demons" at Temple rather than as part of *Laughter!* with "Tsar" - as Barnes wrote it - affected the play's meaning. In "Noonday Demons," two ascetic saints compete for the same cave in the Egyptian desert in the fourth century. What it says on a double-bill with "Auschwitz" is not clear to me from reading them together. The connection between "Tsar" and "Auschwitz" in *Laughter!*, however, is evident. At the end of "Tsar," the archangel Samael gives Ivan his grim prediction for the future:

> SAMAEL. In the coming years they'll institutionalize it, take the passion out of killing, turn men into numbers and the slaughter'll be so vast that no one mind'll grasp it, no heart'll break 'cause of it. (365)

The final spotlight fades on Ivan as "Deutschlandlied" begins to play. That song, the German national anthem, will open the curtain on "Auschwitz."

Perhaps, too, Barnes's use of comedy in "Auschwitz" draws attention to the fact that there is no adequate referent for representing the Holocaust on the stage. I have already discussed the inadequacy of tragedy for the exploration of the Holocaust; a purgation of emotions seems immoral for this theme. We must live with the enormity of the Holocaust as best we can, even if admonitions that we "never forget" have seemingly failed in their task of preventing another genocide. Vivian Patraka writes that "the relationship between representation and reiteration must be posited as a risky struggle (between object and process, between history and memory) that has certain consequences" (5). The risk that Barnes takes in the way he presents history in "Auschwitz" forces us to look at it in a way that effectively damns us for our participatory laughter just as it damns the German civilian workers of the Third Reich. It is a risk that is ultimately successful.

Joshua Sobol's *Ghetto*

Joshua (Yehosua) Sobol was born in Tel Mond in what is now Israel in 1939 to parents whose families had each fled persecution in Europe – his mother's family from pogroms in Kiev in 1922 and his father's family from the Nazis in Warsaw in 1934. He earned a degree in philosophy from the Sorbonne before beginning his career as a playwright in Haifa in 1971. Most of his earlier work premiered there, where he worked as a playwright and assistant art director at the Haifa Municipal Theatre throughout the 1970s and 1980s until he resigned after controversy prompted by his 1988 play *The Jerusalem Syndrome*, a work exploring the negative effects of Jewish zealot fundamentalism throughout history and in contemporary Israeli society. Noted "not only as a representative of the Israeli liberal conscience… but also as a dissident whose views overcome the narrow limits of the Israeli political and cultural consensus" (Abramson 103), Sobol, a Jew and an atheist, has spent his career interrogating entrenched ideas concerning the conditions of Israel's statehood and important cultural milestones in its history. He became interested in the idea of Holocaust ghetto theatre when he read the diary of the Polish-Jewish Herman Kruk, former director of the Bundist Grosser Library in Warsaw and creator and director of the Vilna ghetto's library, and encountered a slogan that Kruk had coined in that ghetto – "One does not perform theatre in a graveyard" (Fuchs xviii). The Nazis would ultimately execute Kruk at the Lagedi camp in Estonia in 1944, only a day before the arrival of the Red Army. His diary, published posthumously in 1961, noted the vitality of the theatre in the ghetto and detailed, among other things, the opening of the ghetto's brothel where by both the *Judenrat* and German officers attended orgies.[23] What impressed Sobol about the diary aside from the extraordinary detail was its "vision of a society very busy with living, and not preparing to die" (Kustow). Sobol also

[23] Each ghetto had a *Judenrat*, or council of Jewish elders, that had nominal charge of the ghetto and made decisions about who would be deported to camps and who would be assigned what job in the ghetto.

discovered the wild coincidence that the former artistic director of the Vilna Ghetto lived quite near him in Tel Aviv.

Sobol's interest in Kruk's diary would result in the play *Ghetto*, part of his triptych of plays concerning Jewish resistance during the Holocaust.[24] In them, Sobol argued against the idea that there had been no resistance against the Nazis by the Jews during World War II (Jelen 90). *Ghetto* premiered at the Haifa Municipal Theatre in May 1984 and two months later at the Freie Volksbühne in Berlin with popular Israeli singer Esther Ofarim as Hayyah. The play would win the prestigious Kinor David award from the Israeli newspaper *Yedioth Aharonoth* in 1984 and the Theater Heute German Critics' Circle Award for Best Foreign Play the following year. In 1989, Nicholas Hytner directed the play's first London production in a translation by David Lan at the Royal National Theatre. That production received the *Evening Standard* Award and the Critics' Circle Theatre Award for Best Play as well as an Olivier nomination for Best New Play, losing the latter to David Hare's *Racing Demon*. *Ghetto* fared less well in its first major U.S. productions. It made its American debut in 1986 at the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles in an adaptation by Jack Viertel of a literal translation by Kathleen Komar.[25] This Gordon Davidson-directed production was somewhat star-studded, with American cabaret singer and actress Andrea Marcovicci as Hayyah, Tony-award-nominated actor Harry Groener as Kittel, and Tony-award-winning actor Ron Rifkin as Weiskopf.[26] *Los Angeles Times* theatre critic Dan Sullivan was underwhelmed, despite admiring Marcovicci, klezmer player Giora Feidman, and the songs, all of which had been written in the ghetto and interpolated into the script. Despite recognizing that the

[24] With *Adam* (1989) and *Underground* (1991).

[25] Unless otherwise specified, I use the English translation by Ron Jenkins based on a literal translation from Hebrew by Sobol as contained in the anthology *A Terrible Truth: Anthology of Holocaust Drama, Volume 1*. The Viertel adaptation is available in Elinor Fuchs's *Plays of the Holocaust: An International Anthology*.

[26] Rifkin's Tony was for the 1998 revival of *Cabaret*, discussed in Chapter 4 of this dissertation.

play's fantastic tone may be the "only way to convey the strangeness of the place," Sullivan said that "for a fantasy," it was "an extremely heavy and talky play." *Ghetto* played New York on Broadway at Circle in the Square in 1989 in a production featuring Tony-award-winning actor George Hearn as Weiskopf and directed by Gedalia Besser, who had directed the original Haifa production. Frank Rich called it a "tedious stage treatment of the Holocaust," referring to David Lan's translation – the translation commissioned for the award-winning production at the National, incidentally – as clichéd and canned. He also felt that the placement of the songs was somewhat arbitrary and haphazard. Neither Rich nor Sullivan had anything to say about the comedy in the play, which is one of the most striking things in the script. Perhaps the humor was either downplayed or poorly performed in these productions. I must also wonder at the arresting differences in reception between the British, Israeli, and German audiences as opposed to the American reception. Can we reliably say, removed from the historical moments of these productions as we are, that the productions outside America were simply better than the American ones? Or might a reflexive American political correctness have affected critics' perceptions of these productions? Might political correctness have affected not only their perceptions but also what they were willing to say about them?

Ghetto opens in an empty public square on a foggy morning.[27] A one-armed old man, whom we later learn is Srulik the ventriloquist, enters on roller skates and begins speaking to the audience of things that they will only understand later. He speaks of the last performance, of the murder of Gens by Kittel, and of the liquidation of the ghetto. As he tells the audience of the vitality of the theatre in the ghetto and of the packed night of the play competition, he skates to

[27] In the Viertel adaptation, *Ghetto* opens in the aged Srulik's "bourgeois" home. As he remembers, the walls crack and fall to reveal the bare stage that becomes the playing space for the play.

one of the wings and pulls a lever. The light changes drastically, and hundreds of shoes and garments fall from the ceiling as bundles of rags that had been scattered about upstage begin moving and reveal themselves to be the inhabitants of the ghetto. The scene is now the Vilna Ghetto.[28]

We meet all the major characters of *Ghetto* early in the play. In addition to Srulik, the ghetto performers include Hayyah, who had been a well-known singer before the war and is now working for the underground resistance, and Lina, Srulik's dummy. Also living in the ghetto is Gens, initially the chief of police but eventually the ghetto's leader; Weiskopf, the fabric merchant whose industry gives the ghetto its reason for existing in the eyes of the Nazis; and Kruk, the ghetto's librarian and chronicler. The SS is represented in this play by Kittel, the officer who – unbeknownst to the ghetto's inhabitants – has been charged with the closing of the ghetto.

Sobol packed *Ghetto* with action, giving it a sense of urgency and inevitability as its characters rush from moment to moment. Delineating the play into French scenes demonstrates an almost overwhelming level of activity in the play, making one wonder about production choices that led American critics to complain about the play's "wordiness." The energy is almost manic, giving lie to any notions we may have of the ghetto as a grey, lifeless place. The will to live is palpable in the play's characters as they throw themselves energetically into the business of finding a function that will make them assets to the Nazis as they work simultaneously to lighten their lives either by distracting themselves from their state or by mocking it. The humor in this play does more than one thing, and its function is determined at least partially by the character who is responsible for it at any given moment. The comedy of the imprisoned Jews might at times be a

[28] The Nazis ran the Vilna Ghetto in the Lithuanian city of Vilna (or Wilnius or Vilno) from September 1941 until 1943. It was known as the Jerusalem of the Ghettos for its cultural life and its thriving theatre. Only a few hundred of its initial 40,000 inhabitants survived the Holocaust.

coping mechanism or a criticism, but the comedy of Kittel is never anything less than disconcerting and is, more often than not, terrible – not extremely bad as in the watered-down sense of the word "terrible" – but calculated to produce terror.

We meet Kittel almost immediately after the big reveal of the ghetto, when he enters on a bridge over the stage demanding organization. The stage directions describe him as "twentyish," and the historical German Oberscharführer Bruno Kittel,[29] was, indeed, 21 in 1943 when the ghetto was liquidated (Hayford). Before the war, he had been an actor and was a graduate of a theatre school in Berlin (Good). He only arrived at Vilna during the last few months of its existence. While stationed there, he played saxophone on the radio on Sundays. People described him as constantly smiling and very personable, even when hanging a Jewish family of three – one at a time, child first – for hiding in the city. He then had 50 ghetto residents shot because of their "collective responsibility" (Good). The list of punishments and tortures inflicted by him seems excessively imaginative and horrible. On the day of the ghetto's liquidation, he sat in public view playing piano, stopping to shoot a young boy in the back of the head for begging for his life (Hayford).[30] He disappeared after the war.

In *Ghetto*, Kittel begins to reveal his devious intelligence and diabolical, masochistic sense of humor right away. When he discovers that the "baby" Hayyah is carrying is actually a kilo of beans, he scatters the beans to the floor and prepares to shoot her despite having stared at her obviously and lasciviously and commented on her beauty. Implored by Srulik and Lina to spare her, he tells her that she might live if the Jews can find all the spilled beans in thirty seconds. As

[29] Not to be confused with Otto "Bruno" Kittel, the Luftwaffe pilot who is the object of much more biographical study than is Bruno Kittel of the Vilna ghetto.

[30] This moment echoes the liquidation of the Kraków ghetto scene in Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List* (1993) as one of the Nazi soldiers stops to play the piano of one of the ghetto's departed or deceased inhabitants.

we watch the harried Jews scurry to find the beans, we are aware that Kittel is playing a joke for his own amusement. We do not find this funny, but we know that he does. We become aware at this early moment in the play that Kittel has a twisted sense of humor and enjoys using the Jews of Vilna as playthings. When the Jews come up 60 grams short, Kittel offers Hayyah a choice:

> KITTEL. How will you pay? *(lifts the Schmeisser[31])* Shall I use this or *(points to the black case)* that? Choose!
>
> HAYYAH. *(hesitates, then points to the case)* That.
>
> KITTEL. Well well… *(He kneels, opens the case, pulls out an object and puts it together. It's a saxophone. He plays a few notes of a German song: "There once was a king in Tulla." Stops.)* You know it? *(Hayyah nods)* Sing it. (173)

The moment when Kittel opens the case to reveal the saxophone operates on several levels. Of course, those who know of the historical Kittel will recognize his proclivity for playing the saxophone on the radio and in public in Vilna during the last months of the life of the ghetto. Presumably, the director and cast will have knowledge of this historical fact, and this knowledge as they experience the moment in production will provide an extra frisson of horror as the audience sees them experience it. But besides horror, the moment is also infused with a certain level of humor. On one level, we – and the actors, depending on how the moment is staged – may laugh lightly out of a sense of relief. The saxophone is surely the better option. Not only is it better, but it is also completely unexpected, one of the historical hallmarks of comedy. Malvolio enters in yellow stockings with cross garters, or Cary Grant steps into the one astonishingly deep hole in the otherwise shallow brook. Kittel pulls out a saxophone instead of a gun. The sheer surprise of

[31] A submachine gun developed in Nazi Germany and used by the Axis.

this moment reveals much about Kittel's mercurial nature. Whether it produces a laugh from the audience or not, they will know that Kittel thinks it is funny. This raises the question of whether the audience has to think a moment is funny for it to be so. If the horror or disgust overrides what impulse the audience may have to laugh, does it lessen the impact of the humor? Sobol has structured this moment and many other similar moments for Kittel in such a way that we see his sense of humor even if we are too horrified to laugh at it. We might well laugh at the saxophone moment in a different context, but here we see the delight this character takes in playing with the others' lives. We know who he is because of his sense of humor, even if we do not laugh with him.

Later, Kittel has another moment that is funny to him but horrifying to the Jewish characters and to the audience. We see the actors rehearsing a skit they will perform in a revue at the theatre. Weiskopf enters to tell them that he has acquired a new curtain for the theatre. As he criticizes the gloominess of their skit and of their attitudes in general, he shares his philosophy with them:

> WEISKOPF. I'm an ordinary Jew. But we Jews are gifted. More than all other people. If more of us follow my example instead of shedding tears, we'll become a productive ghetto. The Germans – *(He spits.)* will need us. We'd become indispensable to their war effort. And then we'll survive! *The actors applaud. One of them stands to give a standing ovation. He takes off his casquette to make a curtsy and throw away his coat, and is revealed as Kittel.*
>
> KITTEL. Bravo, Weiskopf! *(The actors scream with fear, they jump up and freeze in two groups on both sides of the stage, with Weiskopf freezing in the center.)* I love this man. And so long as I love him, he'll survive. *(Uma remains seated on a chair leaning on her crutch. Kittel goes*

> *over to her and kicks away the crutch. Uma falls to the floor.)* What's wrong? You don't welcome me anymore…? I'll forgive you this time. I took you by surprise. I didn't use the ghetto gate. Your lookout couldn't warn you that Kittel is in the ghetto. Relax. Kittel never uses the gate. Kittel slithers into the ghetto like a snake. Out of the blue he may shoot at you from an attic eh? Or pop out from a cellar! *(He rushes behind the curtain and re-appears carrying two black cases. He puts them on the floor and turns to Weiskopf.)* What's in this case? The wrong reply may cost us dearly. (192)

Kittel repeats his macabre joke, and, again, both actors and audience are aware of the stakes involved in the choice, and all are aware that Kittel finds his joke amusing and that he knows they do not, but he does not care. The kicking of Uma's crutch from beneath her is also evocative of a moment at which we might laugh in a Three Stooges film, but here we flinch at its cruelty. What Kittel finds funny is deeply disturbing to us.

This macabre scene continues with Kittel producing an actor's makeup kit from which he pulls a pot of black paint or base and begins painting the actors' faces while delivering a speech about why he loves the Jews:

> KITTEL. I love you because you're beautiful and productive…. I just created the right conditions for your Jewish gifts to flourish. Your mad vitality, Godamn it! I took a walk through the streets of Catholic Vilna. Pfui! What blockheads! What heavy-handed, pedestrian creatures. No spark of spirit. I almost suffocated. It's them we should trample underfoot, not you…. I get into your ghetto, and all at once it's another world.

> Everything's full of life. Sparkling. Exploding with frantic desperate activity. There's such beauty, so much imagination in that…! Your Kiosks, your cafes. You chop beetroots, and call it caviar. You serve sauerkraut brine, and baptize it as champagne. I love your sense of humour. That insane resilience of yours. I didn't create you, I just furnished the circumstances for your quintessence to blossom. And this is only the beginning. This intimate contact between the German soul and the Jewish spirit, so painful yet so fruitful, it's going to do wonders. (193-194)

Kittel's professed affection and admiration for the Jews only makes his brutal jokes more perplexing. After he finishes making them up in blackface, he lines them up in what appears to be an execution line. Instead of shooting them, however, he pulls out the saxophone – Weiskopf has chosen correctly – and begins to play "Swanee" as the Jews in blackface dance. The choice of "Swanee," an American standard written by George Gershwin, is interesting, as is the choice to have Kittel making up the Jews in blackface. The Third Reich had enacted some prohibitions against people of African descent and displayed prejudice toward them, but there was no great plan for their elimination as there was for the Jew (Kestling 96). Because the Nazi upper echelons saw jazz as a cultural product naturally inferior because of its origin among musicians of African descent (Kater, "Forbidden Fruit" 14), they attempted throughout the course of their reign to issue general prohibitions of jazz, though its popularity among German soldiers and the rank-and-file of the populace as well as German musical experts' inability to come to an agreement about what jazz was made it difficult to enforce the bans (Kater, "Forbidden Fruit" 14-17, 21, 29). Jewish musicians and music, however, had undergone a systematic purging (Kater, "Forbidden Fruit" 14-

15), leading to an explicit ban on the importation of music by foreign Jewish composers after the Nazis discovered that Benny Goodman, whose music was quite popular in Germany, was Jewish (Kater, "Forbidden Fruit" 21). As went Goodman, so went Gershwin. Kittel's flirtations with the forbidden here border on fetishization and remind us that he is the only character in the play who is free to do whatever he wants without fear of repercussion.

After "Swanee," a clarinetist begins to play a cadenza so beautifully yet so aggressively that it seems a challenge to Kittel. The cadenza and waltz are so lovely, in fact, that they move Kittel to tears. His macabre humor steals the moment again, though, as he tells them that their choreography, though beautiful, could stand improvement:

> KITTEL. When you dance jazz, the body must be light and relaxed. Like this.
>
> *He demonstrates the Nazi goose-steps, enjoying his own joke.* (195)

I think it would be difficult for anyone with a knowledge of all the works in this study or even of twentieth century film in general to avoid comparing this moment to the goose-step of the Emcee in the film version of *Cabaret*. The goose step in and of itself is such a jarring and specific sight that it would likely seem comical to anyone had it not been appropriated by the Nazis.[32] In this case, the unexpectedness of the physical act of the goose-step is underlined by Kittel's comic intention. Again, even if we do not find his joke funny, we know that it is a joke. His sense of humor helps define him even as it makes him almost impossible to comprehend. Later, Lina will put Kittel's humor to the test:

[32] Or re-appropriated. It originated in 18th century Prussia.

KITTEL. I adore Jewish chutzpah. Give me more.

LINA. You look awful.

KITTEL. How kind of you to be concerned.

LINA. A series of head baths would take care of everything.

KITTEL. A series of head baths? What's that?

LINA. Put your head in the water three times, and take it out twice.

Kittel laughs. All laugh. He stops, all stop.

KITTEL. I bet you won't dare show more chutzpah than that.

LINA. How much?

SRULIK. That's enough.

LINA. He wants to gamble. My head for a thousand marks.

KITTEL. I've only got two hundred.

Weiskopf comes offering his purse.

WEISKOPF. Help yourself, Herr Kittel.

KITTEL. Got a pen? I'll sign an I.O.U.

LINA. Who needs an I.O.U.? Everyone knows how honest the Germans are. You took Stalingrad, you gave it back. You took Leningrad you gave it back. You'll give him back his money, penny for penny.

Kittel is stunned. All are. Kittel gives Srulik the bills.

SRULIK. No, thank you…

LINA. Take it, idiot. It's no crime to steal from a thief.

KITTEL. Enough! (228-229)

The Viertel adaptation contains an extra joke. After the head bath joke, Lina – known as "Dummy" – in this version, says:

DUMMY. Do you know why a German laughs twice when he hears a joke?

KITTEL. No, why?

DUMMY. Once when he hears it, and once when he gets it! (197)

Here, we see the limits of Kittel's good humor when Lina implies that the Germans ultimately will "give everything back," meaning that they will lose the war and that Kittel and, by extension, all Nazis are thieves. Kittel's ill temper in the face of Lina's joke after all his much nastier ones further heightens the character's malevolent whimsy, letting the audience and the characters onstage know that Kittel's sense of humor is a way of framing his sadism and his will to make the lives of the characters in the ghetto utterly dependent on his caprice.

Sobol's use of the ventriloquist's dummy in *Ghetto* is interesting in light of Peter Barnes's use of the straw-filled dummies standing in for Jewish bodies in "Auschwitz." Unlike those dead and dying bodies, however, Lina has a voice, albeit someone else's. The ventriloquist's dummy, whether in the form of Lina or simply as Dummy as in the Viertel version, is fully manipulated by the ventriloquist Srulik. We can never forget that it is a substitute for some part of Srulik. At the same time, without the dummy, Srulik would not exist as we know him. David Goldblatt calls this

relationship the "ventriloqual exchange," a conversation in which the ventriloquist is talking to another as he talks to himself. Goldblatt notes:

> …it is important to recognize that the binary opposition between these modes of ventriloqual exchange are continually being undermined by the act itself, suspending suspended disbelief on the part of the audience, deflating the pressure of being caught with one's lips moving (by not taking the mild illusion of two people talking too seriously) and by playing with the ontological levels by vacillating between them in comedic reflexity. On the one hand there is an exchange between persons and on another there is one person talking to himself, and, then too, there are those reflexive moments when the exchange falls between the two. (393)

We accept the convention that the dummy is independent of Srulik while constantly being aware that Srulik is speaking through the dummy. This relationship is inherently comic because of the ludicrous sight of a performer conducting a conversation with what is essentially a doll as if the doll is a rational human being, but we are also trained to accept the relationship as funny through exposure to traditional ventriloquist acts like Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy, Señor Wences and Johnny, and Shari Lewis and Lamb Chop.

However, audiences are also accustomed to a frisson of horror or, at the very least, discomfort with many ventriloquist acts. In his 1919 essay "The Uncanny," Sigmund Freud offers a sentient doll as an example of the uncanny, a feeling of fear that one might characterize as "chills up and down the spine." Freud traces the feeling of the uncanny to something we feared in childhood but have since repressed (16). We may get a sense of the uncanny, then, when the ventriloquist's dummy reminds us of the dolls that we were convinced came alive and

walked about at night when we were children. For example, the 1978 American psychological thriller film *Magic*, starring Anthony Hopkins as a ventriloquist inspired to commit acts of murder by his dummy, not only haunted my childhood dreams but is also merely one of several works of art to explore the subject of an unbalanced ventriloquist whose dummy, acting as his murderous id, encourages him to commit acts of violence. The manipulator becomes the manipulated. Generally, audiences spend much of the time wondering during these works if the dummy has somehow come to life and committed murder through some supernatural intervention only to learn in the ultimate reveal that the ventriloquist, suffering from some identity disorder, is the true killer. Dummies less violent but still dangerous to their operators generally say the things that those who voice them are too polite to say. "Neverland," the final episode of the second series of the British television program *Endeavour*, as recently as 2014 explored physical and sexual abuse at a boys' boarding school through a ventriloquist who can only speak of his childhood and abuse at the school through his dummy. These dummies make us uncomfortable, blurring the lines between what is "funny-ha-ha" and "funny-peculiar" as we become aware that they can create serious problems for those who voice them, depending on what they reveal. The relationship between Srulik and his dummy posits the dummy as the mouthpiece for the things that Srulik is thinking but are too dangerous to say aloud. In the Viertel adaptation, the following exchange occurs:

DUMMY. Stop! Halt! *Arrêtez*! Whoa! For God's sake, hold your fire!

SRULIK. *(To the Dummy)* Cut it out, Ignatz! He's got a gun!

DUMMY. Oh, terrific! She's about to be blown to bits and you're pissing in your pants.

SRULIK. *(To the Dummy, a well-worn routine)* Well at least I know how!

DUMMY. So much for chivalry! Whatever happened to the days of yore, when damsels in distress were rescued by knights in shining armor?

SRULIK. So get a knight. I'm a Jew.

DUMMY. You don't have to brag about it.

SRULIK. Who's bragging? I'm trying to stay alive.

KITTEL. Hold it! Who are you?

DUMMY. He stole the beans.

KITTEL. Is that right?

SRULIK. Would you take evidence from a dummy? He's pathological!

DUMMY. Pathological! I'm not even Jewish!

KITTEL. That's enough!

SRULIK. You heard the gentleman. That's enough.

DUMMY. He was speaking to you!

SRULIK. No, you.

DUMMY. No, you.

SRULIK. *(To Kittel)* You see, I'm helpless. He's driving me crazy. I can't get rid of him.

DUMMY. He's quite right Herr Kittel, but he's got it backwards. I can't get away from him.

Loaded into this comic exchange is Srulik's commentary on the fact that Dummy is, indeed, a dummy, especially as the dummy doesn't have a name, as in the Jenkins adaptation. Though we accept the convention that he is a separate entity from Srulik for the sake of performance, we still know that his voice is Srulik's and that he walks a dangerous line with Kittel. Though this dialogue

is less critical of Kittel and Nazis than the betting sequence is, the audience knows that merely irritating the Nazi is enough to be dangerous for Srulik. The scene is loaded with a kind of humor that gives us jokes that we recognize as such and that would be funny in a different context but make us hold our breath as we wait for Kittel's response. Srulik must find a way to repress his/Dummy's wisecracking hostility if he wishes to live (Patraka 100). The humor here hangs the audience on tenterhooks worrying for the safety of Srulik and, by extension, the safety of everyone under Kittel's dominion.

Robert Skloot includes his discussion of *Ghetto* in *The Darkness We Darry* in a chapter titled "Tragedy and the Holocaust," and *Ghetto* is a tragedy, albeit one infused with biting humor, mostly coming from the mouth of Kittel, surely one of the nastiest characters of twentieth-century theatre. *Ghetto* is ultimately the story of Gens and the dreadful power over life and death he has in the ghetto. His goal is to save as many Jews as possible; in the end, he is unable to save any and perishes with those who remain at the play's end. During the 1980s, Joshua Sobol was part of a larger literary movement demanding that Israel take a fresh look at historical figures like Jacob Gens of Vilna and, most famously, the Łódź Ghetto's Chaim Rumkowski, whom many Israelis had viewed as collaborators. Up until this point, Israeli literature had provided audiences with uncomplicated heroes whose contributions to the new nation were clear, heroes like Hannah Szenes, who was part of a mission to parachute into Hungary and help rescue Jews who were scheduled to be deported to Auschwitz. Captured at the Hungarian border, Szenes refused to reveal details about her mission, even under torture. She was eventually executed by firing squad in Budapest. The Six-Day War of 1967, the Yom Kippur War of 1973, the Lebanon War of 1982, and the occupation of Gaza and the West Bank had disillusioned many of the more liberal members of the Israeli intelligentsia (Mueller 46), however, and Sobol and others suggested that audiences

consider “another kind of heroism, and heroes—those who, while never firing a shot, were responsible for saving thousands of lives” (Taub 139). Standing in opposition to Gens is not Kittel the Nazi but Kruk the librarian, who exemplifies many of the noble qualities that mid-century Israelis looked for in their heroes. Kruk maintains his ideals to a fault, accusing Gens of collaborating with the enemy and contributing to the death of Jews, but Gens holds firm, saying, “Write it down in your diary. Let the coming generations judge between you and me” (189). Gens emerges as a kind of tragic hero whose difficult choices grant many ghetto inhabitants a temporary stay of execution but who is finally unable to save any of them.

German audiences saw Gens as a villain in the 1984 production at the Freie Volksbühne in Berlin, so Sobol revised the play so that his view of Gens was clear and then directed it himself at the Grillo Theater in Essen in 1992 (Mueller 44). The 1984 Haifa production was largely well-received but did receive criticism for presenting Jewish characters who were not resistance fighters. Critics felt that Israeli audiences would be unable to identify with those whom they had historically regarded as weak (Mueller 47). Kerstin Mueller sees *Ghetto* as asking what constituted collaboration during the Holocaust and if ghetto leaders like Gens were partially responsible for the Holocaust (51). Sobol answers by showing us several difficult situations during which Gens must make hard decisions. Perhaps the most harrowing is the children’s selection. Gens must send the “excess” children of families that have over two children to their deaths. Kruk chronicles the event in his journal:

KRUK. A family of five people. Gens counts:

“Father, mother, child, child.”

The third child, a 12-year-old boy, he shoves out of the line. He pushes him to the side.

Beats the father with his stick on the back.

The family stands with the survivors, sobbing:

"Gens took our child!"

The crowd is outraged. People shout at Gens:

"Traitor! You kill our children!"

Gens goes on. He is possessed:

"Father, mother, child, child."

A family with one child.

Gens yells at the father:

"Where's your other child?"

"I haven't got another child – "

Gens doesn't let him finish:

"You moron! Here's your other son!"

Gens grabs the child who had been standing on the side, the one who had been torn from his family. Gens pushes him into the one-child family, and shouts:

"Keep an eye on him, you idiot! Next time you'll lose him for good!"

The child joins the new family. He has been saved. (Sobol 206).

Still, Gens is unable to save all the children; 219 die in the murder pit in Ponary. The audience must decide if Gens's decision is evil or heroic.

Ghetto does more than examine Gens and his choices, however. According to Yael Feldman, *Ghetto* marked the first time that an Israeli playwright had presented the Holocaust

victim as a subject rather than as some "external 'other'" (168). In fact, *Ghetto* plays through the eyes of a Jewish Holocaust victim as subject – Srulik the ventriloquist. Sobol places the audience right inside Srulik's vision of the ghetto. With him, we experience the "vitality of the 'defenseless'" (Feldman 168), a subject with which Israel had been uncomfortable, choosing instead to view Holocaust victims as weak and not admitting them as part of Israel's story. *Ghetto* insists upon a sense of empathy for its characters and succeeds in achieving it.

Ghetto never becomes anything less than a reverent and thoughtful consideration of the Holocaust in the Vilna Ghetto. Any argument that the use of humor in the play somehow trivializes the Holocaust falls apart as we bear witness to the noble struggle for life by the ghetto's inhabitants. From the moment that humans begin to emerge from the rags lying onstage, we are aware of the emptiness that Sobol attempts to fill by bringing these long-dead victims of genocide back to us (Patraka 99). The sense of loss the audience feels as the performers of the Vilna ghetto are murdered once again is not undermined by the wicked humor of Kittel or the comedy convention of the ventriloquist and his dummy. If anything, this use of humor draws us deeper into the world of the play by increasing our unease and our desire to protect the characters from the twisted sadism of Kittel in some instances and from themselves in others.

It is difficult to understand how a critical aversion to the use of comedy for exploring the Holocaust could prevent anyone from understanding and viewing these two plays as serious theatre pieces that investigate aspects of the Holocaust with great depth and respect, despite their use of humor. The humor in both cases give us a way of looking at the Holocaust that is not only unusual but also illuminating. The workers of Peter Barnes's "Auschwitz," deliberately obtuse to the point of buffoonery, show us through their comic denial that the outright evil of the Third

Reich could not have functioned without the willfully oblivious rank-and-file middle class to grease its gears. This, in turn, alerts us to the possibility of our own complicity in creating the dehumanizing atmosphere that can lead to the marginalization of others. In Joshua Sobol's *Ghetto*, humor in one case leads us to a better understanding of the motivations and contradictions of an antagonist based on a historical figure. Despite fears some Holocaust scholars have had that to explain the Nazi mind is to normalize it, the look inside Kittel's mind shows us nothing normal while at the same time showing us nothing that we cannot accept as truthful. In the other case, humor allows us to see a character's resistance to his oppressor while increasing our own empathy and concern for that character.

CHAPTER 3:

Happy Days: Memory in *Sammy's Follies* and *The Model Apartment*

"Reliance only on *collective* memory can be said to suffocate realities characterized by difference, discontinuity, and heterogeneity, while an appreciation for *collected* memories invites discordant voices to be heard."

-Janelle L. Wilson, *Nostalgia: Sanctuary of Meaning*

Holocaust memory, despite the warnings of critics who caution that we have a responsibility to the victims to remember the event accurately and reverently, is as susceptible to revision and re-vision as any other historical event. Even nations and groups bound by ethnicity or religion will contain a multiplicity of interpretations of the Holocaust, making it difficult to determine what the "real" history of the event is. Polish Jewry, which was largely decimated, will invest the Holocaust with a meaning different from German Jews, whose longer oppression under the laws of the Third Reich before the implementation of the Final Solution ironically gave more of their community a greater chance of escaping Europe than their eastern cousins. The oppressor will remember differently from the oppressed, and the descendants of the surviving victims endow the event with meaning created from their parents' trauma and the trauma in their own lives which often results from having parents who left the camps with damaged psyches. Time layers memory and history with more accretions, and the only way to arrive at the "truth" of an event is to consider all of them. Collective memory is "what the present chooses to make of the past" (Bigsby 86), or what we have decided the events of the past mean now beyond their physical facts of their occurrences. Holocaust scholar James E. Young disdains the notion of collective memory, however, preferring instead to study "collected memory, the many discrete memories that are gathered into common memorial spaces and assigned common meaning" (xi).

According to Young, a society can only "remember" what it codifies of its individuals' memories and experiences, but the exclusion of competing memories from the official narrative can never completely silence them.

The dreadfully funny plays considered in this chapter reflect upon both memory and the Holocaust – remembered memory, imagined memory, unwanted memory, and staged memory – creating a theatrical space in which collected memories create wildly differing but equally valid truths about the Holocaust. Eugene Lion's *Sammy's Follies* and Donald Margulies's *The Model Apartment* use comedy to pose questions about what we remember and how we remember it. Is one memory of an event more legitimate than another? Is it acceptable to use Holocaust memory in the service of another cause? Is it unethical to use the Holocaust as a metaphor? How and why do we appropriate other people's stories, and is it ever right to do so? How do we know if our memories are real, and is there a certain point when a fiction becomes such a part of our personal story that its facticity no longer matters? How do our parents' memories become entangled with our own? Where do the memories of our grandparents and parents end and our own begin? Does the use of humor in asking these questions when they concern the Holocaust cheapen the memory of that event?

Eugene Lion's *Sammy's Follies*

Eugene Lion's play *Sammy's Follies* is perhaps the most unflinchingly scathing play in this study. Set in a run-down theatre, *Sammy's Follies* is a burlesque and a trial play or, as the play's subtitle tells us – "a criminal comedy." The subject of the play's trial reenactment is Rudolf Höss, the commandant of Auschwitz. Höss, like Bruno Kittel, is a historical figure, though certainly much more well-known than Kittel. Historians estimate that at least 1.1 million

people, approximately 90 % of whom were Jews, were murdered under Höss's command at Auschwitz. The Supreme National Tribunal in Poland tried him in March 1947 and hanged him the following month in Warsaw. Lion does not try for Höss for any of these crimes or even for the more specific crime of murder; Lion tries Höss for indifference.

Lion, originally a New Yorker, was a writer, director, choreographer, actor, and designer not only for the stage but also for film and television internationally before his death in 2013. Known for his collaborative work with his wife and artistic partner Jo Lechay, Lion began his career in the alternative theatre scene in New York in the 1960s. He helmed creation of the Guthrie 2, the Guthrie's alternative stage, in 1976 and served briefly as its artistic director. Lion and Lechay then moved to Canada where they lived and worked from the 1980s until the end of Lion's life. He wrote *Sammy's Follies* as early as 1970, when it was produced by the New Theatre Workshop in New York City, but it remained unpublished until 2003. Though the Holocaust drama anthology *A Terrible Truth, Volume 1* announced at that time that *Sammy's Follies* would premiere in 2006 at the Persephone Theatre in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan and at Northern Stage Ensemble in Newcastle, England, the show remains unproduced in the twenty-first century. Lion's widow Jo Lechay says:

> "The best play to cross my desk," turns into rejection once fear of controversy and the loss of subscription audiences sets in. Neither the Persephone nor the Northern Stage panned out, the first due to the death of the (courageous) director, and the second due to actor Klaus Maria Brandauer's loss of interest at the last moment.

As in the case of the two plays discussed in the previous chapter, Eugene Lion reveals much of the comedy in *Sammy's Follies* through character. Sammy is the director of a ragtag

performing ensemble that might be classified as a burlesque company. Certainly, they burlesque much of their subject during the show, and their troop does contain an ex-burlesque queen in the form of its leading lady, Rosie. Joining Sammy and Rosie in their hellish performance are ex-civil servant Simon; gay waiter Addy; black porter Jocko-Ali; ex-GI Flip; former divinity student MacIAN (*sic*); retired quack Mazo; unpublished author Ab; ex-high court judge Bertie; and Kerr, a lawyer between clients. Joining them are the band: cook and drummer Jimmy, accordionist Parnell, and trumpeter Heisel (358). Sammy introduces us to these characters with a theatrical flourish:

> SAMMY. *Lights blaze up, disclosing their operators in varying stages of garish makeup and costuming; operatic TRAMP CLOWNS chronically incomplete. Other lights, on wheeled stands, are also operated by the performers.*
>
> Twelve low comics!
>
> *A tardy light reveals ROSIE, an aging ex-stripper, now a white-face clown navigating an eternal bacchanal.*
>
> One burlesque blonde! And me! Sworn this show to diversions more real than natural. Madcap athletes! Gutter *artistes*! Hired to rid an audience of its illusions. Trust in nothing. The spectacle is bait, the jokes a stratagem. Our performances? Sugar on the arsenic! *(presents his face)* This face? Samuel Kestor, operator-owner of a carefree corner bar called The Follies! (359)

With this theatrical introduction of the cast, reminiscent of the Emcee's introduction of the denizens of *Cabaret*'s Kit Kat Klub, Sammy not only hawks his theatrical wares like a sideshow

carny but also gives us an ominous warning as to the tack this company of misfits will take throughout the evening. They will rid us of our illusions. “The spectacle is bait, the jokes a stratagem…. Sugar on the arsenic!” This sugar may, indeed, help the medicine go down, but it may also kill us in the process. Sammy and company mean to suck us in with jokes and spectacle before shooting us square between the eyes with their message. This motley crew of oddballs, themselves disillusioned – Simon is, after all, not an ex civil servant but an ex-civil servant, and Bertie is an ex-high court judge – will disabuse the audience of its illusions before the performance ends.

Lion employs humor in Sammy’s individual introductions of the play’s characters in an acerbic way that reveals Sammy’s contempt as much as his affection for them. This funny and direct way of calling out the company’s faults, which they counter, gives them an air of authority and honesty. It is almost as if Lion expects that we will accept the truth of their story or at least of their belief in it if they are brutally honest about who they are, warts and all. Sammy first introduces the accordionist Parnell, “orange hair parted by a white streak” (359). According to Sammy, Parnell “plays for drinks. Washed ashore from County Cork. Now, like any red pepper in ale, permanently afloat” (359). Right away, Lion plays on racial stereotypes to let us know that nothing is off-limits at the Follies. Sammy next introduces the drummer Jimmy, also the cook. “His specialty? Yesterday’s menu” (360). These are grim tidings for those from the audience who will be eating later and funny in a nasty sort of way. Last in the band is Heisel, the trumpeter, who, Sammy tells us, is tone deaf (360).

After introducing the band, Sammy moves to the players. Simon, the civil servant, is a statistician “reduced to zeroes” (360). Flip, the dead soldier, comes to life when lifted by his colleagues but dies again immediately from the sound of a sharp drumbeat (361-362). MacIAN,

the former divinity student, is "more worldly now – but still devoted to the spirits" (364). He passes out in a drunken stupor as soon as Sammy finishes his introduction. We next meet Jocko-Ali, the company's sole African American member, in the process of applying blackface. He calls himself "Desdemona's dessert," but Sammy calls him he "of the wide nostril… and a toilet brush" (360-361). We meet Addy, a "carafe-queen," running his fingers through Jocko-Ali's hair while teasing that he will buy him an oil well. When Sammy bids Addy bow to the gentlemen in the audience, he flirts with the men he finds attractive while he does so (361).

Next, Sammy takes us "down the evolutionary scale," introducing us to the company's "intelligentsia," all of whom are derelicts (362). Bertie, a former judge, lost his position due to a scandal involving a chorus girl with "the bosom of Victoria and the bottom of m'mom" (362). His cohorts include Ab, a Jewish "writer, refugee, and professional victim" (362) and Angus, a criminal lawyer and "accessory after the fact" between clients (363). Rounding out the men of the company is Mazo, "anarchist, socialist, and back-alley abortionist. Presently searching for the perfect anesthetic" (363). But Lion and Sammy have saved the best for last. All the players save one are present onstage from the rise of curtain. Rosie is "in the can, saving her entrance for last" (363). As the "accessible" Rosie enters, the ensemble is complete, and the play proper can begin.

We can look at these drunkards, lushes, and whores as representatives of the "material bodily lower stratum," a term Mikhail Bakhtin uses in *Rabelais and His World*, his study of carnivalesque laughter during the Renaissance. Though Bakhtin does not concretely define the term, he uses it to describe the body parts and processes associated with sexual activity and with the expulsion of waste. Bakhtin's theory posits that carnival laughter directed at those parts and functions during the Renaissance mocked the death and rot of the body while simultaneously affirming the life and fecundity that will ultimately come from the same body, whether through

giving birth or returning to the earth in death. Throughout *Sammy's Follies*, the playwright ridicules the characters' physical infirmities and vices, but he also uses them to critique the audience and society at large in a way that explicitly leads to the possibility for change and growth. Sammy's players also constitute a microcosm representing all people, and their determination to live and be useful despite their abject state echoes Bakhtin's claim that the carnival laughter with its "images, indecencies, and curses affirm the people's immortal, indestructible character" (256). These abject people will survive – and they will survive together – and the truth they tell will create the potential for a change in consciousness in the audience.

Stepping forward while wearing Jocko-Ali's mop head as a wig, Bertie announces that he will preside over a trial with Ab serving as counsel for the prosecution and Sammy playing the defendant:

AB. *(with accent)* His crime –

KERR. As charged.

AB. - INdifference.

BERTIE. In time of need.

AB. Willful, personal, prolonged *in*difference. (368)

Bertie lays a surprise on the audience – eight of them will serve as jurors with four cast members. The cast members serving as jurors rotate from performance to performance, as does the audience, clearly creating a different dynamic for each show. The players at first try to seduce audience members onto the stage with promises of carnal delight:

MACIAN. *(with papal arms outspread)* Eight jurors! Eight! We need eight! Unbend thy knee! Cast off the shackles of passivity! Sit on our jury! *(waits, to Jocko-Ali)* Try a little sex.

JOCKO-ALI. *(to audience)* Last row! On the end! You, Miss! I'm Black! I'm beautiful! I'm yours!

ADDY. *(presents a haunch)* Better yet, some white meat! (370)

The company also tries to bribe the audience into participating with appeals to conscience and promises of food and drink before going into the audience and making direct appeals to individual patrons. Only when these eight audience members are in place onstage with scripts in hand does Sammy reveal who he will be playing in this mock trial – Franz Ferdinand Höss. Mazo asks the audience, "Thought it was going to be all fun and pretzels, didn't you?!" (374). With this raucous jury selection and ominous joke directed to the audience, Lion serves notice to the audience that it will bear some responsibility for the way the performance and the verdict will proceed. As with the Bakhtinian carnival, the distinction between audience and actor disappears (Bakhtin 265). Ab confirms the audience's responsibility and culpability for what has come and what will come in his opening remarks:

AB. *(downs his drink)* May it please the Court, ladies and gentlemen of the jury. We stand upon a mountain of skulls. We smile. We are alive, careful never to ask why. After the war, justice being conveniently blind, the defendant was found guilty of murder, mass murder, and executed. I say "blind" because another crime, a crime of greater significance, never came to trial. The crime of indifference…. Instead of human beings with individual identities, they became trainloads of flesh to be dispatched upon arrival and discarded upon use. Their suffering – as we shall demonstrate – their degradation, their dehumanization, their deaths meant nothing to the accused. No one mattered. *No one.* We resurrect the defendant, not as

> scapegoat for our remorse. We are beyond redress, as he is beyond penalty. Our wish, our only wish, is to see a crime *never fully examined* finally brought to justice. The crime of indifference. (375)

Throughout this speech, edited here to about half of its length, Ab extends his empty glass at various intervals for a refill to no effect. As he ends his oration with a plaintive "please" only to be refused a fresh drink once again, we learn from Addy that Ab is only allowed one per scene. Bertie generously offers Ab his drink. Does it undermine the credibility of these characters to know that they are drinking throughout the trial and that at least one of them is seemingly willing to beg for his next drink? The levels of mediation through which the audience must wade provide an epistemological conundrum. The spectator is watching a play performed by actors playing performers who play other people in a trial, some of them ostensibly altered by alcohol. Creating further distance for the audience from any kind of sense that they are witnessing a slice of life on the stage is the fact that some of the spectators with whom they entered the auditorium have now left them and joined the cast onstage for what will be the duration of the play. These and the play's other Brechtian flourishes, including frequent digressions from the mock trial as the performers break character to beg for a drink or tell a dirty joke prevent us from "losing ourselves" in the action of the story. Lion reminds us that his is a work of artifice many times throughout the performance. Sammy must remind Jocko-Ali as the very first witness, in fact, that it is winter as he moves to the stand as Prisoner A134015, Chaim Schneider. Jocko-Ali turns and leaves the acting space only to re-enter shivering (377). Any attempts at verisimilitude are obvious fakery.

Kerr's opening defense argument asks if any of us can afford to live without indifference, if any can bear the weight of others' pain in addition to his own before Jocko-Ali enters as

A134015 and swears on the Word, which, at the Follies, is a stiff drink (375-376). Jocko-Ali tells the Court of his execution in Auschwitz – a hanging for attempting escape (378). His scene is quite serious, but only momentarily. As he begins to tell of how the Nazis forced his mother to watch his execution, Rosie, playing the mother and clutching her pearls in agony, snaps the strand around her neck and throws herself to the floor in pursuit of the rolling beads. Addy barks, "She walks, she talks, she crawls on her belly like a reptile!" (379).[33] Jocko-Ali is upset that she is ruining his death scene, but she tells him to go ahead and "jump" (380). When Jocko-Ali is finally hanged, his death throes at the end of the noose turn into "the latest dance craze" (382). He then has a brief return to life before dying again slapstick style. Kerr interrupts the scene to protest "reenacting the moment of death." He says that "such an exhibition is morbid and in questionable taste" (382). This is a common criticism of works of art that present Holocaust violence in a realistic manner. Vivian Patraka engages with film critic Philip Brophy's concept of horrality in *Spectacular Suffering* to address this issue. Patraka describes horrality as a kind of "direct representation of graphic physical violence to the body, including acts of atrocity in which the camera specifically focuses on damage to the revealed insides of the body…." (88). Brophy claims, "It is a mode of fiction… that has no time for the critical ordinances of social realism, cultural enlightenment, or emotional humanism…. The contemporary Horror film tends to play not so much on the broad fear of Death, but more precisely on the fear of one's own body, on how one controls and relates to it" ("Horrality"). As Patraka notes, the delight we take in recognizing the conventions of the horror film and the pleasure we take in squealing and wincing at the destruction of the victim's body run in direct contradiction to the empathy we need to properly understand the Holocaust film; should the violence that we see in horror films

[33] This line has been used as a barker-cry to entice potential viewers into the stripper-tent at least since it appeared in the 1962 Coasters pop single "Little Egypt," written by Jerry Lieber and Mike Stoller.

as well as in countless action films in contemporary cinema influence the way we view scenes of realistic violence in Holocaust films – and, by extension, plays – then we run the risk of not investing the Holocaust film or play with the proper "acknowledgement, credulity, and even understanding of our own complicity" needed for an informed viewing (88). Perhaps, then, the literal, comical dance of death danced by Jocko-Ali forces us to consider the reasons for and ramifications of his murder in a manner that is different from and more intellectually stimulating than the shooting of Diana Reiter (Elina Löwensohn) in Stephen Spielberg's *Schindler's List* (1993), for example. When Reiter, a Jewish engineer, argues that the foundation of the barrack in Płaszów must be re-poured to prevent collapse, prompting Commandant Amon Goeth (Ralph Fiennes) to order her execution, the bullet through her head is filmed so realistically and viscerally that it becomes difficult for the spectator to avoid imagining that shot through his own head. For a moment, my viewing experience becomes about me rather than about the Holocaust, even though that moment is based in fact.[34] By morphing the prisoner's death throes into the Nae Nae or the Dougie or some other recognizable popular dance, Lion eschews any attempt at creating a moment of either horrality or identification. He also eschews any pretense of good taste, but the end does justify the means in this case if this Brechtian distancing technique forces the audience to question the moment critically in terms of the show's theme rather than forego critical thinking in a moment of shudder-inducing realistic violence or of compassionate identification with the prisoner.

[34]Spielberg's version of Reiter's murder is actually less violent and less prolonged than it was in reality. Reiter was badly beaten by an SS man before being shot after part of the building she had been engineering collapsed during morning roll-call (Bau).

Prisoner A134015 is not quite dead yet, though, as Jocko-Ali resurrects him to endure Ab's cross-examination, and the two play a classic mispronunciation bit when Ab asks Jocko-Ali if the defendant is in the courtroom:

AB. Point him out to the Court, please.

JOCKO-ALI. Commander House.

SAMMY. Pardon, it's pronounced Höss.

JOCKO-ALI. Horse.

SAMMY. Höss.

JOCKO-ALI. Hearse.

SAMMY. Höss.

JOCKO-ALI. Suck ass, you were there. (384-385)

The juvenile yet funny vaudevillian shtick of mispronouncing the defendant's name plays on North Americans' difficulties in pronouncing umlauted vowels and any culture's tendency to make fun of those who speak with different accents but also gives us a chance to belittle this monster who is in our power. An offended critic might argue that this short exchange makes light of Rudolph Höss, whose command led to the murders of over a million people. Obviously, there is no joke that will erase the crimes of Höss or the violent deaths of the Jews in Auschwitz. But this joke and others like it in the script function as part of a revenge fantasy, and the desire for revenge is a basic drive in the human species. According to Sandra Bloom, "Reciprocity, or 'tit-for-tat' is the basis of social relationships… Behavior that sabotages cooperation, so necessary for survival, will be punished…. The desire for revenge is an evolved outgrowth of our human sense of unsatisfied reciprocity, what today we consider a desire for justice" (62). As society has evolved over millennia, we have turned our personal sense of social reciprocity over to the

community, which has codified these feelings into laws. The high emotion that fuels our desire for personal vengeance makes us poorly equipped to apply it; we must turn it over to a higher or "neutral" authority:

> The inherent problem with revenge is that no injured individual is in the position of applying a balanced solution to a wrong that has been done to him or her, a fair retaliation. Vengeance is a problem that must be shared and resolved in the complex interaction between the individual and his or her social group. Acts of revenge can be viewed as much as a failure of the social group as a failure of the individual. Revenge is "wild justice," justice gone wrong. Revenge may turn a victim into a perpetrator. (Bloom 87)

In the relatively safe space of this theatrical event, the audience may engage in a communal act of revenge sanctified by the legitimacy of the event and of the gathering. Though Höss was tried and executed over 60 years ago, the crime of indifference was not one of the charges on the docket. In 1963, Hannah Arendt posited indifference and stupidity rather than evil – or, at least – alongside evil – amongst the members of the bureaucracy of the Third Reich in her famous work *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. Bettina Stagneth has now challenged the primacy of Arendt's view in her book *Eichmann before Jerusalem: The Unexamined Life of a Mass Murderer* (2014), but the idea of the banality of evil has permeated popular culture to the extent that the audience may feel that it is now involved in the symbolic prosecution of a crime of which the original court was not yet sophisticated enough to understand.

Adding to the spectacle is the fact that Jocko-Ali is hanging in the air for the entire exchange. After Ab finishes with Jocko-Ali, who indicates that Höss's face at the execution was

"politely impassive… expression unchanging" (387), Kerr begins his cross-examination by setting up the dangling Black Muslim Jocko-Ali for a bleak joke:

KERR. Funny. You don't look Jewish.

JOCKO-ALI. Nobody's perfect.

KERR. Comfortable?

JOCKO-ALI. *(at his blackest)* It's an old family tradition. (387)

Jocko-Ali lets the face of Prisoner A134015, which he has not attempted to fully embody anyway, slip again to make us cognizant of the fact that he is fully aware of the ramifications of a black body hanging from a noose in front of an audience. His joke is intended to make us uncomfortable; it is not a funny joke but a joke nonetheless, and the metatheatricality of it forces us to consider violence committed against ethnic groups other than Jews and the attendant spectatorship that inevitably accompanies it.

Kerr bases his cross-examination on the fact that no one else at the execution, including Prisoner A134015's own mother, helped him or offered him comfort:

KERR. …your life about to be snuffed out, did – *(looks toward AB)* – these "friends" – the ones who cared – did any of them attempt to help you?

JOCKO-ALI. They couldn't.

KERR. *(gently)* The witness will kindly answer. Did any of them try to help you?

JOCKO-ALI. They were prisoners.

KERR. *(patiently)* You're not answering the question.

JOCKO-ALI. The question's ridiculous.

KERR. You were about to die. Did anybody come to your aid?

JOCKO-ALI. The guards would've opened fire –

KERR. - at anyone who made the slightest effort to help you.

JOCKO-ALI. You bet.

KERR. *(calmly)* In other words, among all those thousands of people, most of whom had every reason to identify with you – friends, mothers, fellow prisoners, perhaps even some of those in uniform – no one, whatever their sympathies, *no single individual could do anything*. (389-390)

Kerr is counting Höss as one of those individuals who could do nothing, which is, of course, untrue, but Lion's use of the clever lawyer trope creates a trap for Jocko-Ali as the prisoner. He carefully phrases his questions so that Jocko-Ali can only answer in a certain way. Though real-life courtrooms are likely to operate in a much more mundane fashion than those we see on television or in movies, the attorneys of *Law & Order* and its ilk have conditioned audiences to feel a reflexive frustration with the lawyer who badgers the witness into vexation without allowing him to give full answers or to clarify his statement. Courtroom dramas have taught laymen to think that they can spot improper legal procedure when they see it. Lion arouses the audience's indignation at Kerr's bluntness and false sympathy here while still not letting them know that the play's indictment is directed toward them as much as toward Höss.

Act II of *Sammy's Follies* opens with the troupe reenacting a Jewish "resettlement" (i.e. deportation to the camps) scene. Though the performers continue to slip in and out of character and banter with each other, the initial mood of this act is somewhat darker than that of the first. As Mazo is shot when attempting to escape from a cattle car on the way to a camp, Jocko-Ali sounds cymbals to signal the return to the Follies. Ab calls to the stand a "noted surgeon" played

by MacIAN. With the upper half of his body covered in toilet paper, MacIAN is unable to speak. Mazo, with a script in hand, speaks on behalf of MacIAN to protect his privacy. Bertie complains, "So that's where the bloody paper went!" (404) before the court swears in MacIAN and Mazo and recommences the trial. We learn that MacIAN is playing the surgeon in charge of Auschwitz's Block 21 operating theatre. Though Mazo/MacIAN/surgeon is reluctant to describe his camp responsibilities, Ab pressures him into revealing that he "performed experiments" (407). With this revelation, a gruesomely funny reenactment begins alongside Mazo/MacIan/surgeon's testimony:

> *SAMMY rings up the cash register – music – removes an icepick from the drawer, wraps it in an apron along with silverware. JOCKO-ALI and ROSIE have mounted the bandstand. JOCKO-ALI pulls on black rubber gloves.*
>
> ROSIE. *(slips on evening gloves)* One female volunteer, please!
>
> ADDY. *(takes wrapped silverware from SAMMY)* Coming, honey!
>
> JOCKO-ALI. She said female.
>
> ADDY. *(hurries to bandstand)* Right up my alley, luv! Lights! Action! Travesty! *(hands ROSIE silverware)* Your instruments, doll! *(flings back his arms)* Ruin me! *(swoons into JOCKO-ALI's arms)*
>
> JOCKO-ALI. We need help!
>
> BERTIE. Two jurors! To the bandstand!
>
> *Muffled drums. ADDY is lowered onto the tables on the bandstand. JOCKO-ALI and ROSIE put on aprons, lay out silverware. SIMON selects two AUDIENCE-JURORS, conducts them to the bandstand, amusing them*

with asides. Music halts. ADDY, now horizontal, shakes hands with the smiling JURORS.

BERTIE. Please! Empty your faces. Sanitize your emotions. This is a sterile drama! *(to AB)* Proceed, councellor.

SIMON positions the AUDIENCE-JURORS.

AB. *(to MacIAN)* You were saying you performed experiments.

MAZO. Yes.

AB. Their nature, Doctor?

MAZO. Sterilization. Mass sterilization of defectives.

ADDY. *(sits up)* What did he say? (407-408)

This could be the set-up for a "Veterinarian's Hospital" sketch on an old episode of *The Muppet Show* with Addy clowning as he prepares to play the patient before springing up in comic shock when he realizes upon which part of his body the surgeon will be operating. Again, we see characters to whom Sammy has introduced us by other names playing other roles, but this time Lion takes an even greater step toward distancing the audience from the action by, ironically enough, bringing two audience members directly into it. Though he prepares for the inevitable nervous giggling of the two new actors by having Bertie admonish them while reminding us that this is supposed to be a "sterile drama," it is extremely unlikely that the rest of the audience will be able to view their confreres as characters in the drama even if they turn out to be good actors. They will laugh at their discomfort, giggle with them, and applaud their efforts when their scene concludes, but they will always view them as the people in street clothes who got dragged onstage. The job the playwright gives them ensures that they will have a time of it onstage – they are to hold Addy's limbs down as Jocko-Ali performs surgery on him. The irrepressible Addy

will no doubt give them plenty of flailing with which to cope as Jocko-Ali and Rosie reenact the procedure that was actually performed on 20 "defective" Salonikan women in Auschwitz. The audience members' job is made even more difficult as the legit actors admonish them not to laugh even as Addy and Mazo continually break character to laugh without being disciplined.

Despite the gruesome details of the surgery, Lion builds in plenty of laughs during the scene: Addy reads a newspaper while he is under the knife, Rosie applies lipstick to his belly to simulate blood, and a cymbal accompanies the moment of incision. A string of knockwurst stands in for the excised ovaries. Only the knockwurst is enough to prompt the performers to stop the action:

SAMMY. Hold it!

Everything halts. Sammy has entered the scene.

SAMMY. Where'd those come from?

JOCKO-ALI. *(deep smell of the knockwurst)* Hung-garee!

SAMMY. Hack-kneed.

ROSIE. *(takes the knockwurst)* Makes for great intestines.

SAMMY. You're removing ovaries.

JOCKO-ALI. Where's the mustard?

SAMMY. It's a low stock cliché.

ROSIE. So is the mad-doctor routine. (411-412)

Sammy is annoyed on two counts: the knockwurst appropriated for the scene had been destined for the soup, and the scene has devolved into a "low stock cliché." He echoes critics here who might themselves decry the use of a low stock cliché to represent the forced sterilization of these women. But we must remember that an accurate representation of the ordeal of the Holocaust

victim runs the risk of either succeeding so well in simulating verisimilitude that any point the playwright is trying to make either becomes subsumed by a kind of stunned horror at what is being seen or runs the risk of creating a frisson of titillation at the theatricalized violence. If the knockwurst makes us squirm because of its inappropriateness, it also forces us to consider the actual historical event and its meaning as we consider its unseemly representation rather than view a realistic simulacrum that replaces and thereby obliterates it. The operation ends with an apple representing an ovary being held aloft with tongs as the audience-member/jurors return to their seats with drinks, but the scene is not quite finished. Mazo reveals that "the first patient died within hours, another the following day, three days later a third" (414) while Höss remained "remote. Aloof. Distant" (415). Kerr begins his cross-examination by asking what Höss had to do with the vivisection of these women. When Bertie cautions him, he responds by lashing out with the central conceit of the play:

> KERR. How partial is this court? The jury has a right to know.
>
> BERTIE. The Court, Mr. Kerr, is not on trial.
>
> KERR. *(erupts)* Everybody's on trial here! (416)

Again, Lion is not simply putting Höss on trial; he's putting everybody on trial. Kerr prods Mazo to reveal that he performed hundreds of surgeries in the camp (417), all while Höss remained "Remote. Aloof. Distant" (415). Kerr attempts to displace the blame for the surgeries solely onto the camp physicians by arguing that they were acting independently of Höss's authority:

> KERR. I further suggest, Doctor, that you've depicted the defendant as distant and remote… so that we – *(turns suddenly on MacIAN)* – but especially *you*… will overlook your own extraordinary behavior… Your

> own willful, personal, prolonged *in*difference…. Yes, Doctor, we know. You're blameless, a reluctant bystander not a willing participant. Whose innocence and testimony cannot be questioned. (419)

In anger and frustration, MacIAN finally speaks for himself while Kerr continues to undermine his credibility by questioning his reasons for working with a small underground resistance movement in the camp rather than with the "largest, the single most effective group" (421).

> MACIAN. They were communists. *(indicates MAZO)* Like him.
>
> KERR. They were prisoners.
>
> MACIAN. They were extremists! I've never been political.
>
> MAZO. But you were all fighting for your lives!
>
> MACIAN. They were from the gutter. I was a professional.
>
> KERR. *(repulsed)* No more questions.
>
> MACIAN. Nor will I reply to any more. *(leaves, turns)* I was a gentleman. (421)

Thus ends the story of the women of Salonika.

Next, Rosie, "led by a regal bosom" (422), takes the stand as Prisoner A84111. Unlike her colleagues, Rosie is off-book, describing her/A84111's arrival in Auschwitz. At this point, the play takes a turn for the serious from which it never quite recovers, though it retains much of the nastiness that has accompanied the humor to this point. Rosie "remembers" the deplorable conditions and deaths on the cattle car, the Selection immediately upon arriving at the camp, the separation of families, the smell from the chimney, and the denuding of the women, all while the men of the cast chant with glee and goad her to strip, recalling Rosie's past as a burlesque queen:

MacIAN. *(offers ROSIE a drink)* Hey, gorgeous! *(ROSIE reaches for the glass.)* One Hebe! One christening! *(splashes the drink in ROSIE's face) A silence.*

ROSIE. Sammy –

SAMMY. *(implacable)* Höss.

ROSIE's head drops. Then slowly – regally – she bares her breasts.

MacIAN and JOCKO-ALI fall to their knees before ROSIE. ADDY, shot glass in one eye, appraises first one breast, then the other.

ADDY. Demeter? Or is it Ishtar?

MacIAN and JOCKO-ALI sample ROSIE's breasts with their mouths. The music resumes.

(arms thrown wide) Tutti Frutti!!

MacIAN. God!

JOCKO-ALI. *(blackfaced, kneeling, Jolsons the moment)* She beats Mammy, pound for pound! (427)

The men continue to goad her until she "completes her strip: an aging showgirl totally exposed" (428). As she describes the shaving of the prisoners' heads, her own hair "comes away in Simon's hand; her head is shaved to the skull. She stands frozen: a naked, old display mannequin" (429). As the players head toward the end of the second act, they speak and act in dissonant counterpoint. Rosie inhabits the character of A84111 while the male players, for all intents and purposes, forget the camp arrival scene that she continues to play in order to assault

her with a barrage of catcalls and orders to "take it off." This display of male privilege and entitlement may be funny to a certain kind of viewer, but all in the audience will recognize the smugness of the man who thinks he is being amusing when he loudly proclaims a woman as an object by asserting that she exists for his titillation. These men think they are funny, even if they are not. Juxtaposing this scene, which we might see in some variation while walking down the street of any large city, against the scene of Nazis asserting their dominance of Jewish bodies by stripping and shaving them not only serves to cast an unflattering light on the everyday behaviors of one gender asserting its dominance over another but also gives us a new and sickening way of looking at a widely known Nazi behavior in the camps. Dehumanization is dehumanization, Lion seems to be saying, and when we decide that we have ownership over other people as we have over objects, we create and maintain the possibility for Auschwitz, and not only are the instigators guilty but so are all of us who watch and do nothing:

> *The WOMAN (Rosie) weeps. SAMMY places a robe over her shoulders. ADDY puts a drink in her hand and follows SAMMY into the wings.*
>
> *Alone, the ACTRESS (Rosie) examines her glass. Then without drinking, she lifts her head and faces down her AUDIENCE – nakedly, soberly, dauntlessly.*
>
> *The lights fail.* (*431)*

Before the third act begins, all the actors except Rosie return to the playing area for dinner. Jimmy doles out soup to all of them and to the audience-jurors. The actors eat noisily, and Lion's stage directions indicate that "The sight and sound of audience-jurors and performers eating is meant as unsavory counterpoint. Genuinely delicious soup and bread, therefore, would

be a mischief" (432). In one sense, this dinner offered to only a privileged few parallels the relationship between Nazi and Jew during the era of the Third Reich - some suffer; some feast. The dinner also evokes the Rabelaisian "feast of fools," as described by Mikhail Bakhtin in his examination of carnival laughter in *Rabelais and His World* (75). The Follies feast is part of an event in which the characters onstage give vent to laughter which must be repressed outside the Follies in the face of hegemony. This laughter continues throughout the feasting scene as the characters and jurors refill and rejuvenate their bodies before marshalling their forces to put the official – and in this case evil - order on the stand.

The attention shifts to the Nazis in the third and final act as Simon takes the stand as Sturmbannführer Aumeier, who has been executed for his role at Auschwitz. Though Ab reminds Simon more than once not to deviate from the script, the irrepressible Simon ad libs and airs his jealousy; he thinks he should be playing Höss. His assessment of Höss is poetic but unflinching, not what one would expect from a loyal Nazi soldier:

> SIMON. Höss? Iron Cross, First War. Liked to charge about on horseback, slicing up Iraqi natives.
>
> AB. *(incensed, to SAMMY)* He's using his own material!
>
> SIMON. *(pulls foolscap from an inside pocket)* You left out a few delicacies…. *(blows SAMMY a kiss)* His kind never comes home from the wars. Even as old men in bed, they hunger after the great blood-feast. *AB advances on SIMON.* *(rises, retreats)* Toy soldiers under the quilts, dreaming of arms grappling in the dark, their bayonets buried to the hilt in some young man's breast. Battlefield Casanovas lusting after innamoratas. And God! How

> suggestive a wounded body is. Stab it, shoot it, slash it, blow it up, and it opens like hungry pussy. Red, wet, warm and quivering! *(sings out, in SAMMY's direction)* CARNAGE! Well, shall we toast our apron-stringed Pyrrhus over there? – who dreamed of the greatest orgy of all. Hail the huntsman-hero, he brings us flesh! *(moves behind lights as AB stalks him)* Pity we don't eat our meat raw anymore. The world's progressed since Torquemada and Siegfried. Personal combat's been laid to rest. Poor Höss. Faced by death in the abstract, with one hand on his dress sword, the other on his fly, our romantic little knight fell down in a fit, overcome by his own baroque obsolescence! Indifferent? Hardly. (437-438)

The jokes and cynicism of the first two acts have not prepared the audience for this bayonet thrust of a speech. Though it does share with Rosie's brutal striptease a shattering honesty that acts as a full stop to the quips and nihilistic feel of the rest of the play thus far, Simon's speech is different from Rosie's devastating moment in that there is no chance with Simon that the audience will feel sympathy for anyone involved. No less poetic for being intensely suggestive and sexual, this speech is an accusation intended to undermine any illusions of Höss's supposed indifference and paint him instead as an ardent soldier, a bellicose fuck-buddy of Mars and Set. Lion has issued a challenge to purveyors of the theory of Nazi banality and indifference.

As Jocko-Ali and Mazo attempt to calm down playwright Ab, who yells, "None of that was mine!" (438), Rosie re-enters "smashed," announcing that the election returns are in – "The winners won, the losers lost. Nothing's changed accept the cost" (439). The cast riffs on this for a few minutes before growing indifferent and pouring themselves another round as Kerr returns to questioning Simon, who continues to deviate from the script:

> SIMON. …Logistically, Höss was an asshole, and his camps were a disaster…. The executions, the experiments, the crematoria…. You don't kill your minorities. Your work them! Think of the labour force we would've had! Add the occupied populations, and we'd have been unbeatable. Put to work on the outside, however, our prisoners lasted a month, maybe two. In peacetime we would've gone bankrupt. (444)

What Simon does here in an unexpected way is underscore the absurdity inherent in the Final Solution. Though the Holocaust and World War II are intertwined, they are also separate events. No country kept them more separate than Germany. By declaring its Jews non-citizens and then condemning them to death, Germany deprived itself of a much larger armed force. Hitler's hatred of Jews also diverted resources away from the war to the death camps. Lion is proposing that Germany might have won the war had it not shot itself in the foot with its own irrational prejudices. The United States of America, after all, built a world-class economy between the American Revolutionary War and the American Civil War by working its minorities.

But when Ab forces Simon to admit that, despite his criticism of Höss, he would do it all again if he had to, Ab demands that Simon's testimony be stricken from the record:

> AB. … He's judging history *after the fact*…. Current events, current considerations do not apply. And we – counsel, witnesses, the jury – are duty bound to judge the crime of indifference for what it *was*! – unburdened, unbiased! by what it may have become. The present has nothing whatsoever to do with this case…. (447)

Simon's question, of course, is one that Eugene Lion asks and addresses in this play. The only way to judge history is after the fact; we have yet to master the ontological dilemma of going

back to judge history in its present. In *Sammy's Follies*, Lion judges the past through his judgment of Höss and manages to judge the present as well. Some of the characters onstage cannot handle this. Bertie instructs the jury to disregard Simon's evidence, and Heisel shreds Simon's testimony into pieces that he shoves into his trumpet, from which he showers the audience with the testimony (448). Simon's words literally land on the audience, and they become responsible for them. Do they brush them away, hang onto them for a few moments and toss them into a garbage can on the way out of the theatre, or do they carry the words with them? As they make their decisions, Sammy – as Rudolf Höss – takes the stand.

Sammy/Höss, an atheist, declines to swear to God on the stand, choosing, rather, to swear on his honor as an officer. Sammy/Höss immediately takes responsibility for his own actions but warns the Prosecution that "without its own obedient soldiers our positions here might be reversed" (450). Kerr presses him to acknowledge if he was responsible "in fact" rather than simply due to his rank (452). Sammy/Höss declares that his orders were often disregarded as the camp was large and served to fulfill the "perverse appetites" of much of its staff (452).

Kerr then asks Sammy to describe an incident that occurred during the death march as Auschwitz was evacuated:[35]

> SAMMY. I was away from camp at the time. *(turns a page)* In Lower Silesia. Our major cities had been bombed. Berlin was in ruins. The Russians were advancing in the East. My orders were to return immediately. Everything had to be destroyed…. Our armor was in full retreat. Thousands of prisoners had been evacuated from the camps. Driven by a few exhausted

[35]As the Allies advanced upon the Third Reich, the Nazis held death marches, evacuating the death camps in order to destroy as much evidence as possible that verified the existence and extent of the Final Solution. Many prisoners, already weak and starving, died from exhaustion on the marches; many others were shot.

soldiers, they trudged through the snow, clogging the roads. I had to turn back. Where possible, I gave strict orders that prisoners were not to be killed. Those unable to march were to be handed over to local militias. On my way however, I found a never-ending trail of dead prisoners. Most had been shot.

SAMMY drinks for the first time.

Near Liebesnest I came across a non-commissioned officer. His motorcycle was at the side of the road. He was holding his pistol to the head of a prisoner, who'd stopped to lean against a tree. I leaped from my car and shouted at him to stop. He fired, blew the smoke from the barrel of his pistol, then inquired into the state of my health…. I drew my pistol and shot him.

AB. On the spot?

SAMMY. Yes.

AB. *(consults his script)* A sergeant-major in the air force.

SAMMY. Correct.

AB. And you a lieutenant-colonel.

SAMMY. Right.

KERR. The question, of course, is did you pull the trigger for the dead prisoner's sake –

AB. - or because the Sergeant-Major had been impertinent? Remember, Colonel, you're on your honour.

KERR. *(after no reply)* Sam?

SAMMY. I shot him for both of us. (453-454)

I find the cap to this exchange to be strikingly ambivalent and therefore remarkable in a play that is otherwise quite decided in its point of view. For whom did Höss shoot the soldier? Did he shoot him for himself and the soldier or for himself and the Jew? Did he shoot the soldier because he disobeyed an order or to save him from the new world that would soon dawn for Germany with its impending, inevitable loss? When writing about the Frankfurt Nazi trials, which he attended, Arthur Miller said many non-Germans struggle with the Germans' capacity for "moral and psychological collapse in the face of higher command" (qtd. in Bigsby "Arthur Miller" 188). While aware that this totalizing statement is a generality and a stereotype, we might at least say with some certainty that during the time of the Third Reich, German culture placed a premium on discipline, finding "honor and decency and goodness in discipline" (188). That national characteristic combined, as it is here, with a military setting, leaves us little room for shock at the revelation of this brutal murder. However, the fact that the sergeant-major is shot for killing a Jew when Höss has already stated that he gave free rein to his men to do what they would with Jews along with Sammy/Höss's strange statement leaves the audience to wonder what his real reason for the killing was. "I shot him for both of us" is a wonderfully ambiguous and dramatic moment, complicating this Höss.

After Sammy/Höss admits to having been responsible for personally arranging the gassing of over two million people (Lion 455), Kerr notes that Sammy is sweating, which Sammy blames on the stage lights (456). He says that it would have been a useless gesture to kill himself, as the camp by then could run without him. As Jocko-Ali holds a brass spittoon over his head like a halo, Sammy/Höss tells of creating jobs digging ditches just so more Jews had the

opportunity to live. When he argues that the sick had to be "dispatched" to keep the camp running smoothly, however, Jocko-Ali places the spittoon upside down on his head:

> *SAMMY rises abruptly, spilling his drink, and smashes JOCKO-ALI to the floor with a back-handed blow.*
>
> SAMMY. *(turns back, furiously tearing off the spittoon)* You moralists! Full of self-righteous accusations, denouncing the world but doing nothing to change it! *(savagely)* I did something!
>
> KERR. *(softly)* We noticed.
>
> SAMMY. No longer defending me, Angus?
>
> KERR. You're beyond defense.
>
> SAMMY. *(elated)* As Höss? Or Sammy?
>
> KERR. You wanted to play both. Curious ambition. (456-457)

This is another metatheatrical moment that reminds us that this is not a piece in which we are to "lose ourselves." Kerr reminds us that an actor is playing performer and businessman Sammy, who is in turn playing Höss. What's more, Kerr asserts that the actor playing Sammy wanted the roles of Sammy and Höss, implying that an actor is playing an actor who wanted to play two characters. At this moment, which of his several personae are we seeing? Lion is now advising us to question not only the words of those onstage but of those same people offstage as well. Are they here because they wanted an on onstage gig, or do they have another agenda? And what is Sammy's? In his climactic speech as Höss, he tells us:

SAMMY. It was a normal evening…. I stood on the loading platform half-listening to the cries, as families were broken up…. I had found my place…. I stood there – *(gazes directly at the AUDIENCE)* - their faces were as close as yours – I stood there looking out from my place on the platform, and I thought, in a few moments – *you* and *you* and *you* will not be here. And it was so. With the smallest gesture – *(flicks his fingertips)* – I disposed of a hundred, a thousand, a million human beings. For one brief moment I articulated a few muscles – *(flicks his fingers again)* – and startled all of history…. The office of commandant was privileged. It gave me the chance to observe our species stripped of its disguises. And I tell you the human being is a ravenous beast that will commit any crime, given the proper incentive. With some it's money. With others, hunger…. In winter, when rations ran low, we sometimes found, stuffed under the huts, bodies half-buried in the frozen mud, pieces chewed out of their thighs. Oh yes. Prisoners would push each other in the electrified fence over mere scraps. And the hope of a few more days of life led the most moral to inform on their neighbours. *(unequivocal)* I think you will believe me when I say I never grew indifferent to the day-by-day annihilation of my fellow man. I welcomed it.

ADDY steps forward, hands SAMMY a towel, waits, a jar of face cream at the ready. (460-461)

As Sammy/Höss begins to muse on the seeming willingness of many of the prisoners to die, he takes off his eyelashes and then uses a towel and face cream to begin removing his makeup.

Does this mean Sammy is no longer playing Höss? Is Sammy speaking for himself now, or is it the actor playing Sammy who is speaking to the audience now rather than Sammy? The answer is again unclear. He continues to hold court, turning the spotlight of inquiry onto the audience:

SAMMY. *(avid, directly to the AUDIENCE)* Surely some of you recognize the urge, the impulse, the craving that hungers for an end to the uselessness, the emptiness, the indifference of our civilized lives. My prisoners were sunk up to their nostrils in existence, and the only undeniable truth they could discern was the stench of our own bodies. It's at that point – when futility stands at the edge of the abyss – that finalities become irresistible. *(ROSIE comes up behind him, waits quietly. He finishes his face.)* Reminds me of an evening at the National. The show was over, the audience gone. The female lead stopped by my dressing room. We were both young – she, a vain little ingénue in her first role. *(ROSIE: small smile)* We chatted till the building went quiet. I watched her in the mirror watching me. I got up, walked over to her, and forced her down onto the floor. *(hands ROSIE the towel)* She struggled exquisitely. Without uttering a sound, she thrashed about and tore at my face. Then, gasping, lay on her back trembling, her neck arched. *(pause)* She wanted it. She had wanted it all along.

ROSIE. *(dryly)* He says.

SAMMY. I was nauseated. I reached for her throat. She screamed. She had finally found her voice. *(rises)* I left her sobbing theatrically under the dressing table. There are few victims not party to their own violation. The

sheep bleats, you cut its throat, its very helplessness invites its slaughter. *(suddenly with a terrible anguish)* Oh, God, is there no other role to play in this stockyard of a world but butcher?! *(looks out into the AUDIENCE)* And you?! *You!* What are you?! Lamb or executioner?!! (461-462)

Waits

SAMMY. *(impassioned) That is the question, isn't it!?!!*

Searches the AUDIENCE for a response.

(appalled) No one – with an answer?!

Waits. Note: Should anyone in the AUDIENCE be moved to reply, they might be welcomed onstage to more openly declare themselves – and other urged to join them – before resuming: "Wonderful! Great! Stupendous! Any more? Surely! No? (Waits. Silence.)

SAMMY. So it goes. Until the final butchery. (461-462)

Throughout this final portion of Sammy's speech, he continues to shift ontological ground. When is he playing Höss? When is he Sammy? When is he the actor whose name is in the program? Is that actor an actor playing an actor? Which one of them took advantage of Rosie? Or was it the actress playing Rosie? Sammy's portioning out of blame for that incident – the rape of Rosie – parallels, of course, the tendency of many people to blame victims for their suffering. He has already spoken of the lack of resistance he observed in the camp, and others have asked since the end of the Holocaust why there was no more resistance than there was. However, it is a simple matter to dispel the notion that there was no resistance. Despite knowing that they were

hopelessly outnumbered and had no hope of stopping the Nazis, Jews staged uprisings in several ghettos and camps. Jews who did not resist had many reasons, not the least of which was that many simply did not believe that they were going to be killed; the Nazis did a fine job of keeping Jews in the dark as to their fate before murdering them upon their arrival in the camps. They then systematically weakened and dehumanized those they allowed to live by working and starving them to the point of despair and physical infirmity. Sammy/Höss is unwilling to implicate himself here in that process. His argument that the world is made up only of lambs and executioners fails because of its lack of nuance and his refusal to accept responsibility. He is the weak one. Nonetheless, his direct accusatory question to the audience is bound to cause discomfort and self-reflection.

As the summations begin, Addy argues that Sammy's impassioned final speech proves that he is innocent of indifference. He wonders if indifference can even exist and then cautions the audience to consider the era in which Höss lived – "If the defendant was indifferent, so, too, is the world that produced him. Condemn him and you condemn an entire civilization" (463). Then, suddenly, Sammy seems to remember that he is not actually Höss:

> SAMMY. *(with dry vehemence)* Forget civilization. Your obligation is not to be humane but just. The defendant lived among us and we were forever diminished by his actions. Clemency now would be gross. The facts alone merit your attention; the rest is supposition. The accused superintended a campaign of torture, pillage and extermination. All of it, according to the witnesses – remember them?! – all of it performed without pity or remorse. No mercy. No regret. And none except the defendant and a non-existent witness have testified to the contrary. You have one duty, to

> render an objective verdict. Given the evidence, there can be but one judgment. Of the crime of indifference – guilty! (463)

Sammy lets us off the hook, at least temporarily, upon which Addy has hung us. Freed from the paralysis of having to indict an entire culture or itself, the audience can now vote on Höss's innocence or guilt.

Sammy walks among the jury, poking them or shaking them awake, if necessary, to cast their ballots orally. He must throw a bucket of water on the now drunken, unconscious Bertie to wake him to pronounce the verdict. Lion prepares for each outcome, allowing a guilty verdict, an acquittal, or a jury without conviction (464). With the trial's end, Sammy has one more salvo before sending the audience on its way:

> SAMMY. *(to AUDIENCE)* And for those who like a little bit of pepper on their apple pie, let's end the night with a little bite by demonstrating – with your help! – that indifference belongs to history and not to the theatre…! Thank you for coming! Thank you also for your laughter! Come again! Bring friends! Next month we do Rwanda! To those who have lived in this world and are alive – *(hand to heart)* – we the dead salute you! *(raises his arm)* You have survived!
>
> *SAMMY surveys the AUDIENCE. A patriotic strain has fouled the music.* (467)

No one here is indifferent; the audience members' hands are clean. Or are they? As the patriotic strain "fouls" the curtain music, Sammy raises his arm. Does he raise it in a Nazi salute, or is he merely waving goodbye? Either way, the audience will surely be uncomfortable leaving as Sammy congratulations it on having survived. In light of his speech separating people into lambs and executioners, those who hear his congratulatory remark may ask themselves what the actions

they have taken that have led to their survival thus far have cost. What lambs have they slaughtered to get there?

Lion layers yet another controversial moment into this short farewell speech with Sammy's proclamation that "Next month we do Rwanda!" Robert Skloot cautions Holocaust playwrights that "no Holocaust drama can be successful if it distorts or denies history for the purpose of advancing otherwise unrelated causes" (*The Darkness* 116). Jewish-American playwright Tony Kushner was the target for a great deal of negative criticism for his comparison of the AIDS epidemic and Ronald Reagan to the Holocaust and Adolph Hitler, respectively, in his play *A Bright Room Called Day* (1985), but he argued a decade later that "…the Holocaust is only useful as a standard of evil if you're actually willing to apply it, and if you don't apply it, if it's set up as a unique metaphysical event that has no peer, then those people really died for nothing" (McLeod 78). Playing these two statements against each other in the context of *Sammy's Follies* raises some difficult questions. First, we must ask what Skloot means by "unrelated causes." Does this mean that a Holocaust play should only be about the Holocaust? As Robert Skloot did in *The Darkness We Carry*, I use Martin Sherman's popular 1979 play *Bent* as a test case for this issue. Does *Bent*'s use of the Holocaust to explore another issue – specifically the persecution of homosexuals – undercut its effectiveness and humaneness, and does it make light of the Holocaust? Starring Ian McKellen in its original West End run, Richard Gere on Broadway, and Clive Owen in the 1997 film version, *Bent* tells the story of Max, a hypersexual gay man who pretends to be Jewish when sent to Dachau, as he has heard that having a yellow star sewn onto his clothing will keep him safer than a pink star would.[36] Having beaten his lover Rudy to death and having had sexual intercourse with a dead girl on the train to

[36] The Nazis forced Jews to wear yellow stars and forced homosexuals to wear pink triangles to identify them.

the camp in order to prove to the guards that he is not "bent" (i.e. gay), Max initially resists the friendship and affectionate advances of Horst, a gay prisoner in the camp who senses Max's true sexual orientation. They eventually fall in love, and after prison guards shoot Horst, Max at last claims his identity as a gay man by donning Horst's jacket with its pink triangle and killing himself on the electrified fence surrounding the camp. There are certainly several problems with the play in terms of its classification as an effective Holocaust play, not the least of which is its arguable assertion that gays faced worse conditions than Jews did in the Nazi camps. There are plenty of scholars and websites arguing for one group or the other having had it "worse" in the camps, and the play itself provoked bitterness between Jewish and gay advocacy groups upon its original production (Isser 30). This is an unproductive and tasteless argument. If we ask a homosexual beaten to death or a Jew beaten to death who had it worse, we get an answer from neither. They share a "goneness" and a history of abuse in Nazi Germany – and the rest of the world – that unites them more than their dissimilarities can divide them. As Skloot notes, however, Sherman makes this tenuous and unnecessary claim a defining point in his play (*The Darkness* 119-120). Despite its flaws, though, *Bent* stands as a watershed moment in the history of Holocaust drama and gay theatre, establishing, as it did in 1979, a sense of continuity in gay history as it shed light on a part of that narrative that had hitherto been little-known. The political AIDS organization ACT UP later adopted as its logo the pink triangle, of which Sherman had first made popular audiences aware with his play. Edward Isser recognizes that *Bent* is, at least on one level, "a period piece that captures the gay zeitgeist of the late 1970s" (151). Squint, and Sherman's Berlin of the 1930s is not unlike Greenwich Village in the 1970s. But *Bent* has done more good than bad over the past 35 years; for a certain generation of gay men, it is the first English-language play to present gay men who are not all like the self-loathing characters of

Matt Crowley's *The Boys in the Band*, and it was certainly a revelation at a time when scholarly and popular work about gays in the Holocaust was scant. Though it is not about the Jewish experience in the Holocaust and clumsily makes an unnecessary comparison between the gay and Jewish experiences during that time, it is otherwise an effective, affecting and deeply important work in the canon of Holocaust plays.

Sammy's Follies, too, explicitly points its gaze away from the Holocaust when Sammy advertises the theme for the next show: "Next month we do Rwanda!" (467). The Rwandan Genocide occurred between April and July of 1994 when the Hutu Power movement, comprising Hutu supremacist militia groups, the state government of Rwanda, the Rwandan army, and Rwandan civilians, murdered at least 500,000 ethnic Tutsis, thousands of Tutsi sympathizers, and moderate Hutus during the Rwandan Civil War. Though this genocide is different from the Holocaust in that issues of land control and governance reaching back to the days of Belgian colonialism lie at the heart of it rather than an irrational hatred of a group with the intention of destroying it simply because it exists, it is, nonetheless, still a genocide and crime against humanity. One ethnic group attempted to annihilate another. The Hutus sought to exterminate the Tutsis, and the rest of the world watched on television while the United Nations Security Council did nothing. If Sammy's Rwanda show follows the form of his Holocaust show, then the audience can again expect to be put on trial for its indifference, this time directly. The number of audience members alive and mature enough to have understood the Holocaust while it was happening will undoubtedly be much less than the number of those in the audience cognizant or at least in a position to be cognizant of the events in Rwanda. Furthermore, the Rwandan genocide came into our living rooms nightly or even several times a day via technology that did not exist during World War II. The Third Reich kept the Final Solution from the gaze of the

world until it could not, thereby ensuring that the rest of the world would not band together to stop its genocide. Though many human rights organizations have vowed to uphold the Jewish Defense League's motto "Never again" in stopping not only genocides of Jews but of all people, the world stood by and watched the Rwandan genocide unfold. If Eugene Lion positions the Holocaust in *Sammy's Follies* as an indictment of humanity for what it allowed to unfold not only in Nazi Germany but also in Rwanda and, for that matter, Sudan, the Killing Fields of Cambodia, Srebrenica, and the nearly two dozen other global locations where genocides have occurred since the Holocaust, then he has used the Holocaust in a productive and ethical way.

The comic path that has led us to the Rwanda moment may not seem outwardly as ethical, but it reveals an understanding on Lion's part of the productiveness of comedy used in a Bakhtinian sense. Bakhtin notes Renaissance laughter's "recognition of its positive, regenerating, creative meaning" (71). Lion has dragged his audience through the squalor of the gutter and rubbed our noses in the degraded lives and bodies of his sleazy ensemble in order not only to demonstrate mankind's culpability in allowing the Holocaust but also to force us to see and comprehend our own responsibility in allowing or preventing comparable contemporary atrocities. Lion constructs opportunities to laugh at the low, the scatological, and the sexual in *Sammy's Follies*, directing them toward creating a space in which the audience can begin to understand its own accountability as perpetrators/bystanders of genocide. This, in turn, provides the audience an opportunity to begin thinking creatively about its potential role in suppressing or even wiping out genocide.

With humor as a vital tool in its arsenal of condemnation, *Sammy's Follies* launches at its audience arrows that ask pointed questions: What would you have done? What *did* you do? What are you doing *right now*? Where and how will you take your stand when one people tries with

force to destroy without remorse another people in its entirety? The humor works in several ways. The play is not only a burlesque of a familiar theatre trope, that of the trial play, but it employs burlesque characters in the sense of the common American nineteenth and twentieth-century use of the word: strippers and comedians performing in naughty, well-worn stock comedy situations. Lion puts these characters and these situations to work in ways to which we are not accustomed, however, and it makes us lower our guard enough for Lion to surprise us into considering what it is we allow ourselves to be distracted by and to laugh at while states sponsor genocide. Ultimately, this willful ignorance on our part degrades us just as much as Eugene Lion degrades his drunks and wretches in *Sammy's Follies*.

Donald Margulies's *The Model Apartment*

The lowdown lushes and shock-meisters of *Sammy's Follies* consciously use memory as a sawed-off shotgun of illumination and truth, resurrecting Rudolf Höss and some of his victims as they remember his crimes against them in front of an audience that finds itself implemented in these crimes as well. In *The Model Apartment*, Donald Margulies writes not only of Holocaust victims and survivors but also of their damaged descendants, relatively new subjects for Holocaust drama in the 1980s (Isser 24). The family of *The Model Apartment* is quite tangibly haunted by the memory of its crushing losses during the Holocaust. Margulies explores the way memory has shaped the people they have become since the end of the War as well as the impact their memories have had on their troubled daughter. He paints this family with broadly comic strokes, shaded and heightened by clichéd Jewish stereotypical humor as well as by the absurdity of daughter Debby's hysteria. Through this trio of damaged people, Margulies asks questions

about the effects of the Holocaust not only on its survivors but also on the descendants of its survivors.

Donald Margulies is one of the most critically and commercially successful American playwrights of the 1990s and early 21st century. A self-proclaimed "baby-boomer born and raised in Brooklyn," Margulies grew up in a "middle-class, secular Jewish family" in a housing development for the middle class in Coney Island (Margulies "Interview"). A member of the first graduating class of the experimental John Dewey High School, Margulies graduated with a BFA in Visual Arts from Purchase College in 1977 before enrolling in the MFA program in Playwriting at Brooklyn College. He dropped out after two months and worked as a freelance graphic designer before joining The New York Writers Bloc, a peer-support group of writers founded by Jeffrey Sweet whose membership included revered American writers, comedians, and actors Jerry Stiller and Anne Meara. In 1980, Margulies went to work as a fulltime writer for Stiller and Meara's monthly HBO series *HBO Sneak Previews*, which ran until 1982. That year, Margulies marked his New York debut as a playwright with *Luna Park*, a one-act play about a family living in Coney Island during the early twentieth century. His major works include *The Model Apartment* (1988), *The Loman Family Picnic* (1989), *Sight Unseen* (1991), *Collected Stories* (1996), *Dinner with Friends* (2000), and *Time Stands Still* (2010). *Sight Unseen* and *Collected Stories* were both Pulitzer Prize finalists, and Margulies won the 2000 Pulitzer Prize for Drama for *Dinner with Friends.*

Actors John Lithgow and Maria Tucci and choreographer Elizabeth Streb, the judges for the 2014 PEN/Laura Pels International Foundation for Theater Award for American Playwright in Mid-Career, which Margulies received, characterized his work as exploring "the strains on human relationships wrought by ambition, self-doubt, the loss of integrity, the loss of love, the

passage of time, and the persistence of traumatic memory… shot through with sly literate humor" ("2014 PEN/Laura Pels"). Recurring themes in his work include sudden success for the struggling artist (*Brooklyn Boy*, *Collected Stories*, and *Sight Unseen*), middle age (*Brooklyn Boy* and *Dinner with Friends*), Jewishness (*Brooklyn Boy*, *Sight Unseen*, *The Loman Family Picnic*, and *The Model Apartment*), and the effect of the Holocaust on later generations (*Sight Unseen*, *The Loman Family Picnic*, and *The Model Apartment*). Margulies creates characters involved in intensely personal relationships – families, lovers, ex-lovers, mentors and disciples, reunited old friends – that we see at moments of crisis and change.

The Model Apartment opens with the arrival of Lola and Max, an East European couple in their 60s who have lived in the United States since the end of the Holocaust, arriving at the Florida condo development where they plan to retire, only to find that it is not yet ready for them and that they must spend a night or two in the development's model apartment while work on their new home is completed. We soon learn that the couple is not only leaving their old Brooklyn life behind but that they are also running from their daughter Debby, a severely troubled and highly energetic yet obese woman in her late 30s.[37] They have each, unbeknownst to the other, given her some cash and together have left Brooklyn ahead of their planned departure time, neither saying goodbye nor giving Debby their address. Before Lola and Max can spend even one night in the model apartment, Debby descends upon them with her manic energy and constant references to Nazis and the Holocaust, to which she relates her personal issues. Max and Lola are both Holocaust survivors; Lola was a prisoner at Bergen-Belsen while Max spent the war hiding in the Polish woods. All of Lola's family died during the Holocaust, as did Max's wife and daughter Deborah, for whom Debby is named. The three are joined by Neil, Debby's

[37] It is imperative that the actress playing Debby not actually be obese, as she must later remove a fat suit to play the thinner Deborah.

15-year-old, “mildly retarded,” African American lover. Lola reaches out to Neil, telling him the story of her friendship with Anne Frank at Bergen-Belsen, a story Debby can recite verbatim with her. As the family and Neil sleep, Max’s dead daughter Deborah – played by the actor playing Debby sans fat-suit – visits his dreams. The next day, the tension increases in the model apartment as Debby claims that she can never be free of the memory of Deborah, a ghost whose name she bears. The long-ago murdered Deborah’s presence in the play via Debby’s body may seem to uphold Claude Schumacher’s idea of the absence of presence – the actors onstage underline the fact of the inability of the Holocaust dead to tell their own stories (5). We might also look at this case as just the reverse – the presence of absence. The fact of Deborah's “goneness,” to use Vivian Patraka’s neologism describing the totality of the absence of the millions lost in the Holocaust, (4), is writ large here in Deborah’s spectral visits to Max and in the fact of Debby’s neuroses. Max arranges for Debby's removal via ambulance; Lola and Neil go with her, but Max refuses. As the play closes, he lies in the Florida sun dreaming once more of Deborah.

Robert Skloot called the play “an adult cartoon,” combining satire and stereotype with little regard for subtlety in a garish nightmare that is as much a critique of late twentieth-century American culture as it is a deeply depressing meditation on what it means to be a Holocaust survivor and the descendant of Holocaust survivors (*The Theatre of the Holocaust, Vol. 2,* 26). Max and Lola are unable to deal with their daughter’s issues, so she retreats into a dream world. Debby’s problems are unique to relatively few people in the world, so she faces them by intertwining her life with the lives of fictional television characters and real pop culture figures like Connie Francis. Her imaginings of herself in the camps and her deep sense of identification with Francis are simultaneously aggressively funny and profoundly troubling.

The play is not filled with jokes and bits, as, for example, *Sammy's Follies* is. Much of the humor comes from the absurdity of the model apartment, while more is a result of Debby's odd responses to the entire situation, from the apartment to her relationship with her parents. Margulies creates a great deal of the comic atmosphere, too, through use of general Jewish stereotypes like those found in a Philip Roth novel or a 1970s sitcom like *Rhoda* (1974-1978). Margulies writes Max and Lola with distinctly Eastern European rhythms, like those we might associate with Fanny Brice's character Baby Snooks or almost any Molly Picon character. Like those characters, Max and Lola sprinkle their speech liberally with Yiddish words and phrases. Brice and Picon and other popular Jewish artists like Mel Brooks and Woody Allen had conditioned audiences well before the 1980s to associate these rhythms with humor and to laugh at them automatically in a Bergsonian mechanical way. Other idiosyncrasies of this English/Eastern European/Yiddish patois that audiences will find familiar through exposure to them in popular films and television shows include overlapping dialogue, delivery shaded by an almost constant sense of irritation, and the frequent use of the one- or two-word sentence:

LOLA. Now which is the key?

MAX. Give me.

LOLA. He said the gold. They all look gold.

MAX. *Give* me.

LOLA. He gave us the wrong keys.

MAX. Let *me*. *(*LOLA *tries another key.)* You just did that one. Lola, please…

LOLA. *(over "Lola, please…")*: So many keys, Max, how do they expect us to know which is which?

MAX. *(over "…which is which?")*: Will you let *me*?!

LOLA. Take…. (209)

Until we meet Max and Lola's daughter Debby, we do not know what to make of their references to having left Brooklyn without having told her. Is she truly a monster, or are they? Debby, who arrives at the model apartment not long after her parents do, surprises them as they are having sex after having celebrated their new life with a bottle of wine. Bipolar and unable to separate her own life experiences from the experiences of her parents during the Holocaust, Debby's pronouncements and responses to her parents are frequently off the beam and surprisingly funny. While we may still feel uneasy with Max and Lola's decision to leave her without telling her, we do begin to understand their frustration with her and their feelings of helplessness quickly after her arrival. Even though we understand that she is in pain and extremely difficult, it is nonetheless difficult at times not to laugh at her quirky interjections and exclamations:

DEBBY. Sometimes I wish I could go away just so *I* could come back. Judy Garland. Every *day* for her was a comeback. (221)

In fact, the character of Debby has great potential for stealing the show, which can result in an unbalanced production, as may have been the case with the play's first production.

The Model Apartment premiered in 1988 at the Los Angeles Theatre Center with Chloe Webb (*Sid and Nancy*, *China Beach*) as Debby, and while Dan Sullivan's review of the show for the *Los Angeles Times* was a rave, he directed much of it toward Webb. Webb, perhaps best-known for her unfettered, bravura performance as the doomed punk groupie "Nauseating" Nancy Spungen in *Sid and Nancy* (1986) and for her recent unrestrained work as bipolar mother Monica Gallagher on the Showtime television series *Shameless* (2011-), seems a perfect choice for

Debby with her emotional outbursts and inability to control impulses. At the same time, Sullivan's effusive admiration of her performance to the near-total exclusion of much else in the production casts doubts as to the balance of the production. While Sullivan argues that "Margulies wants to set the viewer thinking about the way we deny the past even as we live it; about the way that we are attracted to a safe harbor even when we know it's a mirage…; about the way we punish our children for growing up exactly as we have programmed them to grow up; about the Holocaust; about schizophrenia…," he claims that – at least in this production – "all we can think about is Debby…. Debby is a play in herself: a play and a half, in Chloe Webb's portrayal. Webb cuts off her adult censor and jumps back into the joys and woes of being 7 years old." Only in a lone sentence at the end of the review does Sullivan question the dominance of Debby in this production:

> She (Director Roberta Levitow)… instructs Webb to let 'er rip, and she allows (Milton) Selzer and (Erica) Yohn to get as much fun and sympathy out of the parents as possible – more than they are given in the script. That's theatrically wise, if intellectually evasive. A tougher production of this play couldn't possibly be taken as a tribute to the victims of *Kristallnacht* [sic], as producer Bill Bushnell introduced it at Friday night's premiere.[38]

If Webb's Debby was out-sized, it is easy to see how her performance of an already out-sized character could have overshadowed those of the other actors. Debby has plenty of quirks and eccentricities on which an actor might build an outrageous performance. Defining herself

[38] To be fair, the anniversary of Kristallnacht had been only a few nights before the play's opening; there is nothing in the play itself to indicate that it is meant as a tribute to the victims of that event. The scheduling of the play around the time of the anniversary of Kristallnacht was more than likely purely coincidental.

through both pop culture and Holocaust tropes, Debby speaks a language of absurdity. When Lola tells her that she has nothing to offer her to eat, Debby replies:

> DEBBY. I ate on the road. Howard Johnson's. All the fried clams you can eat I ate. You got to watch out at Howard Johnson's. Ask Connie Francis. It's a front for the Nazis. (*LOLA sighs deeply*) She got raped by a Nazi dressed like a bellboy. I had a close call myself. This Nazi? He was sitting at the counter eating a pistachio sundae. Had a scar on his eye like someone tried to scratch it out. But very handsome. Like Pat Boone. I memorized his face so I could describe it to the police and they could send it to the highway patrol. Very smart, no? (*MAX shakes his head in frustration.*) He was gonna sterilize me. I saw shiny tools in his jeep. I got in my car. He followed me. I was gonna double-cross him and pull over and let him screw me in the backseat and kill him with one of his own scalpels just at the point of orgasm and save mankind, but I lost him in traffic. (*MAX looks to LOLA for corroboration; she shrugs and sighs deeply.*) You gotta watch out at Howard Johnson's. Poor Connie. What she went through! (221)

Connie Francis, American singer most popular in the late 1950s and early 1960s, did, indeed, suffer a rape at knifepoint in a Howard Johnson's hotel in 1974, though at the hands of an intruder who climbed in via the balcony of her room rather than by a bellboy. Debby's references to Connie Francis and to American singer Pat Boone, at the height of his popularity contemporaneously with Francis, establishes her frame for pop culture references as the 1960s, when she would have been a child. Of Italian heritage, Francis grew up in an Italian-Jewish

neighborhood in Newark, where she learned Yiddish. In 1961, she released the album *Connie Francis Sings Jewish Favorites*, which, Francis claimed, made her "like a member of the family to Jewish Americans" like Debby's family (Francis). Debby's melding of her own life with that of Francis is not particularly baffling; many people identify with pop stars who have figured prominently in their lives, especially when they receive little parental support, though Debby's fixation on Francis's rape is discomfiting. The speech also perhaps contains a veiled reference to Charles Manson, who would have been prominent in the news during Debbie's teen years.[39] What is more troubling is Debby's seeding of the story of her trip with Holocaust references. Nazis at Howard Johnson's? A Nazi responsible for the rape of Connie Francis? This speech occurs too early in the play for the audience to understand Debby's appropriation of the Holocaust as a way of highlighting her own problems. We do not know if she believes what she is saying or if she is making a series of bad jokes laced with sex and violence to make her father uncomfortable. When she mentions her new boyfriend Neil, she is anything but discreet as she describes their relationship to her parents, pulling no punches as she relishes his love of her excessive weight:

> DEBBY. When we fuck? Says it's like fucking all the oceans of the world. (223)

But she is quick to return to the Holocaust, and it becomes apparent that she has absorbed the Holocaust into her everyday conversation in the way she sees herself and her problems:

> LOLA. Where are we going to put you? There's no room.
>
> DEBBY. I'll stay on the floor.

[39] Manson and associates had an infamous hit list of celebrities who would die because of their adherence to the Establishment. Welsh singer Tom Jones was fated to have his throat slit at the moment of orgasm during sex with Manson crony Susan Atkins, similar to Debby's backseat fantasy.

LOLA. No…

DEBBY. I'll sleep on the floor, I don't care. I like sleeping on the floor. Like in the camps.

LOLA. Dear, I won't have you sleeping on the floor.

DEBBY. (*lying on the floor*) Ooo, comfy.

LOLA. Debby, get up.

DEBBY. Just like in the camps.

LOLA. Debby…

DEBBY. Mommy, lie down next to me, you'll see.

LOLA. Get up, you can't sleep on the floor. Max?

DEBBY. Mommy, lie down, I'll hold you. Don't be afraid.

LOLA. Oh, God, Max. Max. (223-224)

As Debby and Lola talk later that night, Debby again refers to the camps as if they are a part of her lived, phsyical experience:

DEBBY. The last time I visited the concentration camp, they turned it into a bungalow colony. (*LOLA sighs deeply, gets ready for bed; DEBBY eats out of the cereal box and guzzles milk.*) They put chintzy drapes on the barbed wire. Raisin cookies were in the ovens. The food, Mommy! Such portions! I was stuffed! None of that stale bread and soup shit! All the salad bar you can eat! Shrimp! Like at Beefsteak Charlie's. (*LOLA sees the mess DEBBY is making; utters a disapproving sound.*) Hugh Downs was Colonel Klink, the concentration camp counselor. And the Nazis' uniforms were in storage. In mothballs. They put on Bermuda shorts and

> V-neck T-shirts. They looked like Jewish fathers with numbers on their arms…. I wore a sash across my bathing suit. I was Miss America. Bess Myerson was Eva Braun. What a tour de force for Bess! We played bingo together, me and Bess. We won prizes. She won the coveted Oscar and I won the most adorable handbag made of Jewish hair…. Every night there was singing… by the campfire. We sang by the flames. Wood crackled. Sparks flew… like fireflies. We were in tune… all of us. Stars twinkled in time to the crickets. We all breathed together… in an out… and in an out and in and out… that was my favorite time: singing by the flames (232-233)

Once more, Debby's speech is peppered with pop culture references. Beefsteak Charlie's was a popular New York-based restaurant chain in the 1970s and 1980s, and Hugh Downs was a major presence in American television as a host, announcer, and newsman from the 1940s to the early twenty-first century.[40] The other historical and pop culture mentions are specifically Jewish and/or Holocaust-related. Eva Braun was the long-time companion of Adolf Hitler who married him on April 29, 1945 and committed suicide with him the next day. Improbably juxtaposed against her is Bess Myerson, the only Jewish woman to have ever won the crown of Miss America. Myerson won the competition in September 1945, mere days after the end of World War II. To many, she "represented the resurrection of the Jewish body – the journey from degradation to beauty" (Salkin). At the same time, Myerson's reign as Miss America was marked by substantial anti-Semitism – a few Miss America sponsors withdrew their support, and Myerson encountered several hotels that did not allow Jews on her year-long tour – all while she

[40] Since 1985, Downs has held the *Guinness Book of World Records* record for the most hours on network television (over 10,000).

lectured against racism and bigotry (Lepson). Myerson became a substantial presence on television news and talk shows in the 1950s and 1960s before entering New York politics in the 1970s and was regarded by many as an "almost iconic figure of American Jewish womanhood" (Nadell 392). Colonel Klink was the incompetent commandant of the wacky German POW camp of the popular American sitcom *Hogan's Heroes* (1965-1971). The other references are a mixture of death camp images (barbed wire, ovens, bread and soup, etc.) and kitschy references to stereotypes concerning Jewish American retirees (bungalow, salad bar, bingo, etc.).

Though Debby may seem absurdly unbelievable, she is emblematic of many children of Holocaust survivors. According to Dr. Natan P.F. Kellermann, Chief Psychologist of AMCHA/Jerusalem,[41] some 400 papers about trauma transmission from Holocaust survivors to their children had been published by 1999 (3). Kellermann identifies four specific problem areas among this group:

> *(1) Self*. Impaired self-esteem with persistent identity problems, over-identification with parents' "victim/survivor" status… carrying the burden of being "replacements" for lost relatives….
>
> *(2) Cognition*. Catastrophic expectancy, fear of another Holocaust, preoccupation with death, stress upon exposure to stimuli which symbolizes the Holocaust, vicarious sharing of Holocaust experiences which dominates the inner world….
>
> *(3) Affectivity*. Annihilation anxiety, nightmares of persecution, frequent dysphoric moods connected to a feeling of loss and mourning. Unresolved

[41] "Amcha" is a Hebrew word meaning "your people." Jewish Holocaust survivors used the word to identify each other in the immediate aftermath of World War II throughout Europe. AMCHA/Jerusalem is a large provider of mental health and social services for Holocaust survivors and their descendants.

> conflicts around anger complicated by guilt. Increased vulnerability to stressful events….
>
> *(4) Interpersonal functioning*. Exaggerated family attachments and dependency… and difficulties in entering into intimate relationships and in handling interpersonal conflicts. (6-7)

Debby is batting a thousand; she is representative of all four problem areas identified by Kellermann. Unable to cope with her parents' departure, she has followed them down the East Coast without their knowledge and ambushed them in the model apartment, not respecting their choice to leave without telling her. Her "exaggerated" sense of dependency on her parents is only heightened by their desire to escape her. Later in the play, Max tries to convince Lola to run again:

> MAX. Come, we're going.
>
> LOLA. What?
>
> MAX. We're getting out of her [sic].[42]
>
> LOLA. Max…
>
> MAX. We can escape.
>
> LOLA. What are you talking "escape"?
>
> MAX. We have to do something, Lola, this'll never end. (250)

But Lola refuses. Not only does she like her new surroundings – despite being stuck in the model apartment rather than in her own new home – she simply is not as desperate to escape Debby as Max is. "She needs us," Lola says (250).

[42] Though I am convinced that "her" instead of "here" is a typographical error, it is a specific enough Freudian slip to make it worth repeating here.

It is difficult, perhaps, to appreciate just how funny Debby is out of context. She is admittedly difficult to endure. Daniel Sullivan compares her to the Jewish legend of the golem, the mute servant made from clay by the rabbi who must then disable it when it runs amok on the Sabbath. But the classic golem is a protector who defends the Jewish community from anti-Semitic attacks. Awakened from his torpid state by the magic of the word "Aemaeth," Hebrew for "truth," written on his forehead, the golem returns to dust when someone erases the first part of the word, leaving "maeth," meaning "he is dead." Other versions involve placing in the golem's mouth a word of blessing, which, when removed, will revert the golem to its lifeless state. Almost all the variations, in fact, involve sacred language that bestows life upon the clay; the removal or reversal of that language stops or destroys the golem (Dekel & Gurley, 242-243, 245, 248, 251-252). Margulies has created in Debby a golem who has the potential to kill its maker, as in a version described by Jakob Grimm in the early nineteenth century. Grimm's golem grows so large that its master must order it to bend over to tie his shoes so he can reach its forehead. As it does, its master erases the letter only to be crushed as the now huge and inanimate clay statue topples onto him (ctd. In Dekel & Gurley, 243). Debby mindlessly looms larger and larger over Max's psyche, threatening to crush him as the huge clay golem crushed the rabbi. But to the audience, at least, Debby, unlike the traditional golem, is funny, even as she is ghastly:

> DEBBY. I got a Red Cross lifesaving thing stitched to my bathing suit. I had to pass a test. I loved guarding life, in the sun, swimming, saving children. Best job in the whole (concentration) camp. I wore a whistle 'round my neck and I didn't hesitate to use it…. The Nazis thought I had spunk. (232)

The absurdity of the Nazis – whom Debby, of course, has never met – thinking that she had spunk provides a truly silly moment. And, of course, any American born within a few years either way of Debby who lived a similar pop culture experience will associate that moment with the oft-quoted "You've got spunk; I hate spunk" moment from the pilot episode of the popular and venerable *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* (1970-1977). Were it not for Debby's silliness, in fact, it might well be difficult for audiences to empathize with her. Her funny whimsicality gives us the room we need in which to think about the damage that has made her so unrelentingly abrasive, not the least of which is her status as a replacement child.

We first learn of Deborah, the first and "better" Debby, during Max's dream on the first night in the model apartment. The actress playing Debby sheds her fat-suit to appear as Deborah, the half-sister she never knew. Max says things to Deborah that he would never say to Debby:

> MAX. *Dvoyreh, hartzenyu mayns*… [My sweetheart.] (*A beat. DEBORAH comes out of the shadows for a moment; then, giggling, she recedes into the shadows again. MAX smiles.*) Uh! Okay. *Ot doh biztu. Bizt do, tokhter mayneh.* There you are! *Oy, mayn lebm! Zis kind!* [My sweet child.] I knew you'd be back. You tease me, you do, but *du koomst alehmol tzurik! Sar'a nakhess bizt du! Bizt mayn nahkess. Mayn teyer kind* […you always come back! What a pleasure you are! My darling child!]…. Let me just look at you. Look what a beauty you turned out! So pretty! So polite! So respectful! *Oy*, what a girl! My angel! (228)

Naming children born after the Holocaust for children who perished during that event was not uncommon for survivors. Not only was there a desire to memorialize the dead, but there was also often an unspoken expectation that the new child would not only carry the name but also stand in

as a replacement. The new child would thus carry a double-identity, her own and one comprising remembrances and expectations passed onto her from the parent. This created problems for many of these children, often leading "to a situation of multiple or dual identities coexisting simultaneously" (Brutin). Debby, probably like most children in a similar situation, is not up to the task of being an adequate Deborah. It seems that simply being Debby is struggle enough, and Debby refuses to take on the burden of replacing her murdered half-sister:

DEBBY. (*To MAX)* You don't like me, huh?

MAX looks at her as if it's the biggest understatement yet.

LOLA. Don't talk like that…. Of course he likes you. He loves you. We both love you.

DEBBY. (*Stalking MAX around the room*) What? I'm not svelte enough? Not pretty enough? Not smart enough?

LOLA. You're very smart…

DEBBY. I won a scholarship award in fourth grade. Just me and Carol Ann Wiener. She was my best friend. What do you want me to do, Daddy? Rip off my rolls? Tear off my skin?

MAX. Lola, I will not—

DEBBY. Starve myself to death? Would that make you happy? Huh? How could I possibly be as pretty as Deborah? Skin and bones. Stick my finger down my throat. Vomit rots your teeth. Mengele was my dentist. He was Mister Wizard. He put my teeth in Coca-Cola. They burned like acid. Mengele taught you brain surgery.

MAX. What Hitler didn't do to me, *you* are doing! (254)

Josef Mengele was the so-called "Angel of Death" of Auschwitz. One of several doctors at that camp, Mengele has become the most famous for his gruesome medical experiments and for his reported delight on the days when it was his turn to decide which Jews arriving on transports would immediately be chosen for the gas. Mengele was not a dentist; Debby may be conflating him with Dr. Christian Szell, the Nazi concentration camp dentist played by Laurence Olivier who tortures Dustin Hoffman with a dental probe in a harrowing scene from the popular 1976 film *Marathon Man*. Mr. Wizard, a much more benign figure, was a character created by Don Herbert who taught American children about technology and science on American television from 1951-1965, 1971-1972, and again from 1983-1990. Again, Debby is unable to assert an identity separate from the one she has created from the popular culture in which she has immersed herself nor from the concentration camp landscape from which her parents came. Max, unable after more than thirty years to reconcile himself with Deborah's death, is also unable to reconcile himself with his second daughter, even as she cries for his help. Incapable of either offering succor to Debby or of understanding his responsibility in the creation of the person she is, he lashes out in the worst way he can imagine – be equating her with Hitler, the man ultimately responsible for the murder of his first daughter. In Max's eyes, his troubled second daughter has proven such a poor replacement for her namesake – his beloved Deborah – that she is comparable to the Führer, and, in a sense, she has killed Deborah a second time.

But Max's brutal accusation is ineffectual before Debby's desperation:

> DEBBY. You made me, Daddy-O. You and Mengele and Frankenstein…! They're all inside me. All of them. Anne Frank. The Six Million. Bubbie and Zaydie and Hitler and Deborah. When my stomach talks, it's *them* talking. Telling me they're hungry. I eat for them so they won't be hungry.

Sometimes I don't know what I'm saying 'cause it's *them* talking…. Deborah talks to me. She tells me to do things. It all started with her, you know. You thought it was me. It's her fault. She was the life of the party, but the party died before I got here. I can sing! I can pass out pigs in the blanket! I can be a lampshade! I'M ALIVE! I CAN'T HELP IT IF I WASN'T EXTERMINATED!

MAX. (*singsong*) I'm not listening.

LOLA. Don't be sick, Debby… please…

DEBBY. I was in the woods with you, Daddy. Covered with the leaves. I remember things I never saw. I was gonna save you. Hiding from the Nazis… night after night… waiting for the Nazis to come. And you always had that picture… that picture you carried in your shoe all through the war. This little doll. This little broken doll. This little Deborah made you cry and cry. I NEVER HAD A CHANCE! YOU EVEN GAVE ME HER NAME! HOW COULD YOU GIVE ME HER NAME?! (254-255)

The Holocaust dominates Debby's psyche. It has made her who she is, regardless of whether she was there to experience it. The experience of it altered her parents' identities in very fundamental ways and consequently proved inescapable to Debby, even had she known to try to escape it as a young person.

We can place Debby in a line of real people who have experienced similar damage. In S. Hanala Stadner's 2006 comic memoir *My Parents Went Through the Holocaust and All I Got was this Lousy T-Shirt: A Near-Life Experience*, Stadner writes, "My parents survived Hitler. I survived my parents…. Going through the Holocaust made them cranky" (xv). Stadner, an

actress and writer, writes of her own experiences growing up as the daughter of Holocaust survivors in terms that reveal a real life not unlike Debby's fictional one in some key ways:

> I wasn't crammed in a boxcar headed for Auschwitz. I grew up in a bungalow in Canada watching *Captain Kangaroo* and eating Alpha-Bits. Yet, if you and I were to speak for five minutes, I'd work into the conversation that my parents are Holocaust survivors. I didn't go through the Holocaust; the Holocaust went through me. And it likes to talk about itself. I don't try to bring it up; it *comes* up. Like bad clams. Just the *sight* of a swastika gives me a hot flash. It's like swallowing horseradish. My education began in the crib. I didn't know from *The Cat in the Hat*. My bedtime stories were *The Aunt in the Camp*. The bogeyman under the bed wore a Nazi uniform and spoke German…. (xv)

In her book, Stadner writes of an escape into 1960s television, sitting in front of *Star Trek* and *Green Acres* and gorging herself on challah to fill up the empty spaces in her life. It is during an episode of the American sitcom *Hogan's Heroes* that Stadner has a moment of revelation:

> Ma walks by with the Windex. 'Yeah, if only da Germans ver so stupid! My sisters vould be alive!' She drops the observation, like you drop a Kleenex in the trash, and continues on shpritzing. I can't breathe…. Hot flash! Somewhere down the road from Hogan's kooky camp… is *Dachau*! (59)

We do not see Debby's moment of personal revelation, though the desperate accusation she hurls at Max – "I NEVER HAD A CHANCE! YOU EVEN GAVE ME HER NAME! HOW COULD YOU GIVE ME HER NAME?!" – is a clear indication that she knows where the problems began, even if Max refuses to see. Like Stadner, Debby has the Holocaust woven into her DNA,

but she has the added burden of having to be a replacement child. It ultimately proves too much for her.

Neil and Lola must physically pull Debby off Max. As the scene after this confrontation begins, we find Debby bound and gagged. Max strokes her hair and speaks to her in surprisingly gentle tones. This is perhaps a moment when the audience thinks that Max may express regret, but he instead professes his chilling intention to wash his hands of his daughter:

> MAX. Debby. *(Shrugs.)* I pour everything I got into you. Nothing works. Special schools, special doctors. Hospitals…. I never knew a person like you. You don't give up. You come after us no matter what. You're amazing! We don't sleep at night, worried what you might do. We live our *lives* worried what you might do. We gotta face the facts: You gotta help yourself….. It's time we go our separate ways I think…. How many good years we got left, your mother and me…? I'm a simple man, nothing special. I walked out of the woods. For what? So I could come to America? Sell sportswear in Flatbush? For this I walked out of the woods? Where are the children? Where are the grandchildren…? Sweetheart… *(Pause.)* Debby… *(A very deep sigh.)* Why can't we just shake hands, wish each other luck…. Am I so bad? I'm such a bad person? Such a bad father? *(An ambulance siren is heard approaching. A beat; Max shrugs)* All I want is a little peace. Is that so terrible? (257)

Perhaps at this moment the audience feels bad for ever having laughed at Debby's outlandish statements. That funniness helps us see Debby as a real person. She is not just one thing. She does not simply kvetch and wail; she is capable of humor, and she is capable of love. She, like

the "real-life" S. Hanala Stadner, can make a joke while she is drowning. But unlike Stadner's story, Debby's ends here. Unbeknownst to us, we have heard her speak her final words in the play before we see her restrained and silenced. The ambulance takes her away, ostensibly leaving Max to the peace he so fervently desires.

That peace, however, is in question as the play ends. Lola refuses to abandon her daughter, though Max tries to convince her to do so:

> LOLA. She *is* my child…. Who's responsible if not me?
>
> MAX. A trick of fate. I'm not responsible.
>
> LOLA. Max, I'm responsible and you're responsible, too. (258)

The scene ends with both parents at a stalemate. Lola is adamant about standing by her daughter, and Max is just as adamant about leaving her. In the final scene, Lola and Neil are with Debby, and Max is asleep on a chaise lounge on the deck, alone save for the apparition of Deborah, who delivers the last lines in the play:

> DEBORAH. …It's *Pesach* all the time, *Tateh*. I can't remember when it wasn't *Pesach*. I miss you all the time…. And I can't keep my eyes open, I've sipped too much wine, and I don't want to go to sleep hungry, but my eyes are closing, they're closing, and I don't want to fall asleep and miss the feast, I don't want to miss the feast…
>
> *(Fade to black.)* (260-261).

Max is content to live in a pre-Holocaust world where it is Passover and there is food and wine all the time with his first daughter, though he does not consider what she might actually be like had she lived to grow up. He sees her as an adult woman – a skinny Debby – but the personality she has is his construction. Max can only deal with a fantasy world he has created for himself.

The reality of what the Holocaust did to him and what it did to his second daughter through him is too difficult for him to confront.

Perhaps the funniest moment in the play comes at Lola's expense. To reach out to Neil, whom Max and Lola have only just met with the arrival of Debby at the model apartment, Lola tells him of her friend in Bergen-Belsen – Anne Frank. Her story breeds the contempt that comes with familiarity in Max and Debby. "Lola, *must* you?" Max sighs as Debby begins reciting key lines of the story with her mother (244). But as she continues, ostensibly to establish a connection with Neil, it becomes clear that Lola is really trying to make a connection with something that she sees as greater and more meaningful than the life that has accumulated around her during the decades she has spent passively with Max:

> LOLA. –I was alone. All alone in the world, and this girl, she was my friend. In the camp. Two people couldn't be closer. We helped each other get through each day and each night…. Me and my little friend Anna…. what stories she told…. You had a perfect picture in your head of everything she described. You knew what all the faces looked like, every member of her family, her cat, the boy she wanted to marry, Peter. "Anna, you tell wonderful stories," I told her.
>
> DEBBY. "You should be a writer."
>
> . LOLA. (*simultaneously*) "You should be a writer." And she told me,
>
> DEBBY. "I *am* a writer."
>
> LOLA. "I *am* a writer. As a matter of fact, I've written a whole book…. A kind of diary," she said. "And where *is* this diary of yours," I asked my

young friend. And she smiled. “You’ll see, one day you’ll see.” And I didn’t think of anything of it except her black eyes twinkled in such a way I can see them right now. And then I said to her, “Well, why don’t you keep a book *here*, in the camp?” And she said,

DEBBY. “Lola, what a good idea, I can’t thank you enough.” (246)

Lola does not know where Anne got the paper she used in the creation and maintenance of this alleged document; it is unlikely that there would have been paper for Anne to use at all. Only a handful of prisoners were able to keep diaries in the camps, and they were able to do so generally because of the relatively privileged positions they held, like those workers whose job it was to sort through incoming prisoners' belongings. Not all but most diaries we have left by Holocaust victims were hidden in ghettoes or in secret hiding places like that of the Franks in Amsterdam rather than in the camps. Lola's story is well-rehearsed, though, and afforded a frisson of authenticity because of Lola’s own time as a prisoner in Bergen-Belsen, the camp where Anne and her sister Margot died only a few weeks before the camp's – and Lola's – liberation. Desperate to make herself an even more vital part of history than she already is as a camp survivor, Lola continues:

DEBBY. (*prompting LOLA*) “I don’t care *what*…”

LOLA. “I don’t care *what* happens to me,” she said…. She kept on writing, right till the end. Sometimes she was too tired to keep her head up, but I held it for her so she could write. When she got too sick – typhus she had – too sick to hold even a matchstick to write with, *I* wrote for her, I took dictation from Anne Frank. (*A beat.*) As you can imagine, I was a

big character in the book. I was the hero-

DEBBY. (*correcting her*): Heroine.

LOLA. Heroine…. I gave Anna Frank the will to live, may she rest in peace.

(*A beat*)

DEBBY. When she died in my arms.

LOLA. When she died in my arms… she made me promise: "Hide my book, Lola…." I promised. And little Anna Frank smiled and closed her eyes, and she was gone, right in my arms. (247)

Of course, Lola is unable to keep the diary hidden; it burns with Bergen-Belsen.

Though Debby calls Lola out on her mythomania, she adheres passionately to her story, only to find in a scene-ending moment that she has told it this time for naught:

LOLA. And that, Neil, is the story of me and Anne Frank.

(*Long pause.*)

NEIL. Who? (248)

As sad as it may be that Lola's attempt to connect with Neil fails because of Neil's ignorance of whom Anne Frank was, Margulies constructs the story for laughs. Built differently, the story could certainly evoke a solemn response. Lola is a Bergen-Belsen survivor, and there were Bergen-Belsen survivors who did know Anne. It is possible that Lola might have known her, but Margulies makes it fairly clear that she did not. He has designed a scene whose inherent pathos rests uneasily underneath a stream of jokes and comic bits. Debby knows which story her mother is going to tell with a ridiculously small amount of context and only half-heartedly attempts to prevent her from telling it. When her effort fails, she keeps up a disrespectful but funny

commentary throughout the story, beginning in limerick-style – "There was a young girl from Belsen" (244). She even asks for popcorn as if they are to begin watching a movie (245) and helps her mother get back on track when she loses her place in the story (245-247) and recites certain lines from the story verbatim with her (244-248). She even riffs on a new line:

LOLA. Every day I lived in fear. I trusted no one. If only the Nazis didn't find it and piss all over it…

DEBBY. That's new. (248)

This moment is funny not only because of Debby's surprise but also because we know by this point in the play that using scatological language like the word "piss" is out of character for the matronly Lola. The unexpectedness of it adds to the humor. As Lola's story grows ever and ever more self-aggrandizing, it snowballs and snowballs until Lola's last line hangs on the edge of a precipice waiting for Neil's response to give Lola's self-esteem a giant, if only temporary, lift. His response, however, so suddenly and unexpectedly brings Lola's story to a halt that the laughs that have grown throughout the story must now bring the lights down and end the scene.

As Robert Skloot notes, the speech is likely to upset or even offend those who insist on strictly adhering to Holocaust facts, but facts are not important here. Margulies is not using Anne Frank to make a statement about the facts of the Holocaust. Rather, he is using Anne to make a point about Lola and, perhaps, about survivors like her. Since coming to America, Lola's life has been one of "disappointment, abandonment, and unimaginable grief" (Skloot *The Theatre Vol. 2*, 27). Did she expect more from life after having survived the Holocaust? Were the disappointment of a husband obsessed with a dead daughter from his first wife and the frustration of raising a disturbed daughter less than she had hoped she might have to make up for the horrors of Bergen-Belsen? This speech, or "aria," as Skloot calls it (27), allows Margulies to

question Lola's right to these expectations while simultaneously allowing the audience to empathize with her without being sucked into a scene in which her grief is displayed in a way that pulls us too far into her sorrow to be able to think about it critically.

The play's set, the model apartment itself, offers us not only the play's central metaphor but also several opportunities for laughs. Model apartments come with a sense of comic eeriness, looking simultaneously inhabited and untouched. The visual humor embedded in the set design begins to become explicit when Max and Lola discover that none of the appliances work and becomes fully realized when Neil begins breaking the set. Though Debby, ignorant to the fact that the apartment is a model, refers to "Such luxury" as she takes in her parents' new surroundings (219), Margulies undermines the idea of luxury when Neil breaks two candlesticks from their previously permanently attached places. Marx's fears that he will have to compensate the condo board for damages done to the model apartment are amusing, but the humor of the situation does not prevent the audience from realizing what the fragility of the model apartment is telling us – the life that Lola and Max have built may look normal unless we look too closely. When we do that, what we had thought of as solid begins to crack and break apart.

The Model Apartment is a far cry from the "typical" Holocaust drama focusing on individuals, those that take on, as Elinor Fuchs has noted, "the conventions of melodrama or family drama, dramatic patterns that in their familiarity, including the familiar focus on the individual, offering subtle reassurance to the spectator" (xii). Margulies turns those conventions upside down, offering no reassurance in *The Model Apartment*. This family, who perhaps does deserve a perfect, pristine life after the deprivations it has suffered due to the Holocaust, has built for itself a life of clean, shiny surfaces that break apart upon close inspection. Max's comic efforts to keep Neil from tearing the model apartment apart highlight the fact that he is the

member of the family least equipped to deal with a life stripped of artifice. The gentle laughter that has accompanied Max's uncomfortable moments helps the audience look on him with affection and understanding rather than with contempt when he rejects his living daughter in favor of the memory of the one who died so many years before.

The play's New York premiere did not happen until 1995, though Joseph Papp had read and optioned the play for the Public Theatre soon after producing Margulies's *Found a Peanut* in 1984. Papp put the play on hold, however, leading Margulies to ask for the return of the rights after Papp had held onto the play for over two years, only to go through a similar situation with Circle Repertory Company (Grode). Primary Stages would ultimately be the first New York company to produce the work, directed by Obie award-winning director Lisa Peterson. Ben Brantley of *The New York Times* gave this production a good review, calling attention to its "diabolical ingenuity and rueful tenderness" ("Retired Couple Haunted by the Past"). The 2001 Long Wharf Theatre production in New Haven fared less well, with Markland Taylor of *Variety* complaining that "the Holocaust is too big a subject, about which so much of greater consequence has been written, for it to be addressed by such a small, limping play." The play returned to New York in 2013, playing Off-Broadway at 59E59 Theaters. Once again, Ben Brantley championed the play, calling it a "masterwork" and comparing some of Max and Lola's stereotypically Jewish exchanges to similar ones penned by Neil Simon. "But one of the many virtues of *The Model Apartment*," Brantley writes, "is its way of tracing an easy comic stereotype back to its very uneasy roots. Max and Lola aren't just suspicious by nature; life has taught them, harshly, to be so" ("It's True: There Be Dragons").

Taylor's criticism could read as a reflexive dismissal simply because this play does not address the Holocaust with a certain gravitas, but this seems an unnecessary limitation on the

forms that Holocaust drama can take. More intriguing is Brantley's suggestion that Max and Lola are representative of a specific comic stereotype of suspicious, oblivious Jewish parents so popular in American pop culture in the latter half of the twentieth century in television shows like *Seinfeld*. If we can trace the origin of that stereotype to Holocaust survivors having children and growing old in a world so different from their old world – and a world that had at one time resisted hearing their stories – then dismissing it now takes on the accumulations of decades of ridicule of those who fall within the parameters of that stereotype along with the heartbreak of the survivors from their damaged, permanently altered lives. Their stories, as small and ridiculous as some of them may seem, deserve to be told. Skloot has observed that comedy sometimes functions as a comment on the tragedy in Holocaust plays (*The Darkness* 43). In *The Model Apartment*, the comedy tells us that the Holocaust has continued to reverberate in insidious and varied ways – some ridiculous – in the lives of its victims since its supposed end. Both Lola's comic desperation and Max's curmudgeonly obstinacy are behaviors directly resulting from their Holocaust experiences. Debby's often hilarious outbursts result from the crippling experience of having been named for her dead sister and for being profoundly incapable of living up to her memory. Neil's humorous ignorance of the Holocaust perhaps represents the rest of the world, moving farther and farther away from knowing or even caring about the Holocaust. Max, Lola, and Debby can only turn toward each other or turn inward when trying resolve their problems. Their inability to do that and to understand each other despite the utter interconnectedness of their problems becomes funny, except, of course, to them.

While much of the description of *The Model Apartment* thus far may seem to describe a realistic situation, the playwright himself describes his play as non-realistic, saying, "That Debby would find her parents displaced in the model apartment and that Neil would successfully follow

her there defies credulity. It's the stuff of nightmares" (Margulies email). The model apartment frames this nightmare in a freakish, simultaneously real and unreal dreamscape. The laughter of the audience only serves to increase the outlandish effect, creating a grotesque variation of a standard family sitcom, only one in which no pat resolution will arrive before the credits roll. Margulies never allows his audience to sink into the numbing conventions of standard melodrama.

The characters of *The Model Apartment*, however, seem, for the most part, realistic. Debby is the most extravagantly drawn, but never to the point where an audience would be unable to believe that a person with Debby's problems and behavior could not exist. This is what makes the comedy in this play work – despite the outrageousness of some of the situations and character utterances, Margulies has drawn people so richly human that the audience is able to empathize with them completely. We may laugh at the absurdity of their behaviors and dialogue, but we never laugh at what caused them. In the end, that we have been drawn toward these characters through laughter makes us hope that they can be saved.

Both *The Model Apartment* and *Sammy's Follies* manipulate Holocaust memory, putting it into service for different ends. In *Sammy's Follies*, Eugene Lion's broken troupers awaken memory by stepping inside it and reenacting it to show us our culpability in genocides and t0 direct our attention toward a contemporary genocide we have chosen to ignore. In *The Model Apartment*, Donald Margulies's characters are unable to manipulate memory quite as well; they buckle and break under the weight of it. Similarly, the comedy in each play works differently. In Lion's play, the razor-sharp comedy acts as a time bomb; our laughter will come back to us and explode in our faces when we realize what it is of which we are being accused. In Margulies's play, the laughter asks us into a seemingly stereotypical Jewish family where he reveals the

magnitude of their problems and then traces them to their source, showing us how they ripple forward into the lives of their descendants and into history. The memories of Max, Lola, and Debby become part of the collected memory of the Holocaust, joining the memories of the Dead whom the performers of *Sammy's Follies* resurrect.

These collected fictional memories posit that there is no collective memory that can contain the truth about the Holocaust. There is a multiplicity of memories; some are obviously complementary while some seem to contradict each other outright. Only by complicating and displacing any accepted monolithic, collective – and by extension, streamlined – narrative or any monolithic, collective, critically approved means of representing that narrative can we get at the truth of the Holocaust. Not only is there more than one way to understand it, but it is impossible to understand it by only knowing it in one way. Just as Robert Skloot wrote of a multiplicity of Annes in response to Cynthia Ozick's question regarding the ownership of Anne Frank's story and the meanings people create from it, so is there a multiplicity of Holocausts. Only through explorations of diverse memories and approaches and through the different ways – including laughter – through which people know the Holocast can we arrive at the many truths of it.

CHAPTER 4

In Old Bavaria: The American Musical Theatre and the Holocaust in *Cabaret* and *The Producers*

The musical or musical comedy, as it is often called, is generally regarded as the United States' greatest contribution to world theatre, evolving into one of the most popular and beloved international theatrical forms since its assumption of the form as we know it today in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Though some deride the form as trivial fluff, the musical has proved itself capable of intelligently and movingly addressing serious topics at least since the premiere of Jerome Kern and Oscar Hammerstein II's 1927 musical *Show Boat*, which dealt with racial prejudice and passing during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and opened the door for musicals exploring everything from labor unions (*The Cradle Will Rock*, 1937) and teenage gangs (*West Side Story*, 1957) to presidential assassins (*Assassins*, 1990) and HIV/AIDS (*Rent*, 1996). Though some people do still refer to the musical as "musical comedy," that term seems inappropriate for describing a musical as serious as *Next to Normal*, the 2009 Pulitzer Prize-winning musical exploration of the effect of a woman's bipolar disorder on her suburban family, or the Obie Award-winning *Floyd Collins*, the 1996 musical biography of the cave explorer whose slow death became a national media event when he became trapped while exploring Mammoth Cave in 1925. Given the right creative team, the musical form can handle serious topics as well as it can handle froth.

Many musicals since *Show Boat* have addressed racism, including *South Pacific* (1949) and *Ragtime* (1996), and some have focused explicitly on anti-Semitism (*Parade*, 1998). The

Holocaust and subsequent Israeli nationalism certainly loomed largely over the creation of *Milk and Honey* (1961) and *Fiddler on the Roof* (1964), but few musicals have dealt directly with the Holocaust. *Yours, Anne* is a small, modest musical about Anne Frank that ran only a short time Off-Broadway in 1985 but has had an unexpected afterlife in regional and community theatre, while *Imagine This*, about a family of performers in the Warsaw ghetto, bombed during its London run in 2008, receiving generally poor reviews, including *The Guardian*'s lacerating description of the family performing "Vegas-style floor shows on their way to extermination" (Wolf). At least two prominent musicals, however, have dealt with the Holocaust via their connections with the Third Reich, and both are among the most popular works of the American theatre.

Cabaret opened in 1966 on Broadway, where it ran for 1,165 performances before spawning a critically and commercially successful film and numerous international productions, including three Broadway revivals, one of which ran for 2,377 performances, and several London revivals after the first London production in 1968. *Cabaret* is set in Berlin in 1931, two years before the appointment of Adolph Hitler to the chancellorship of Germany but well after the 1919 formation of the radical right wing German Workers' Party, which became the National Socialist German Workers' (Nazi) Party in 1920. The Nazis had been using violence to intimidate political opponents since the 1920s, as reflected in several scenes in the 1972 film version of *Cabaret*. The two young main characters are non-Jewish and Anglo, existing in fluctuating degrees of awareness about the disintegrating political climate of Berlin. The original stage version and subsequent stage revivals also contain a subplot involving an older couple, one member of which is Jewish and one who is not, embarking upon an increasingly dangerous romantic relationship. In the film version, Bob Fosse replaces the older couple with a younger,

much more glamorous pair, one Jewish and another also Jewish but masquerading as Gentile. This couple of secondary couples places the growing problem of the Third Reich's mistreatment of Jews center stage directly in front of Sally Bowles and lover, known variously as Chris or Brian, and in front of the audience as well.

Mel Brooks's *The Producers* has gone through several incarnations as well, though not nearly as many as *Cabaret*. The material originally appeared as a non-musical feature film – Mel Brooks's first as both writer and director in 1967 - before Brooks adapted it himself as a stage musical in 2001. Though the film would go on to become a comedy classic, coming in 11th on the American Film Institute's list of the 100 funniest film comedies in American history ("AFI's 100 Years"), its original reviews were mixed. The Broadway musical, on the other hand, met with instant critical and commercial success, running for 2,502 performances and winning a record-breaking twelve Tony Awards. The musical was then adapted into another film – this one a musical – which met with only moderate critical and commercial success. *The Producers* is set well after the Holocaust, but its famous central joke turns the audience's gaze toward the Führer himself and makes him into the singing, dancing, and mincing centerpiece of what the musical's two leads hope will be the worst play in Broadway history, the musical-within-the-musical *Springtime for Hitler*. *Springtime for Hitler*, of course, becomes just as popular as *The Producers*, the musical in which it resides.

Many argue that the musical itself is a theatrical form too insubstantial through which to frame explorations of Holocaust issues, and the explicitness of *Cabaret* and *The Producers* as not only musicals but musical comedies further complicates the issue of the appropriateness of the form for examining this event. Perhaps the sheer popularity of these two musicals makes the issue of their appropriateness irrelevant, or perhaps that popularity demands an examination of

their appropriateness. The question of whether the humor in these musicals – sometimes dry, sometimes ridiculous, and sometimes even farcical – and a large popular audience's embrace of it indicates a large-scale dismissal of the momentousness of the Holocaust and its victims' suffering is a crucial one for Holocaust scholars and critics. Even if we can reject that issue as untrue, however, the enormous popularity of both musicals demands an analysis of them as two of the most popular – if not the most popular period – theatre pieces examining issues related to the Holocaust.

Kander & Ebb's *Cabaret*

Millions – if not billions – of people have seen *Cabaret* in one of its many forms since it first played the Broadhurst Theatre in New York City in 1966. Between its original run and three subsequent revivals, it has played over 4000 performances on the Broadway stage alone. Over 25 million people saw the film in the United States during its initial 1972 release. Add to this the huge number of international professional productions of the play in addition to the even larger number of community theatre and college productions, and *Cabaret* may well be the piece in this study seen by the most people all over the world.

Cabaret began its life in the form of two memoirs thinly disguised as novellas by British author Christopher Isherwood regarding the years he spent as an expatriate in Berlin during the formation and expansion of the Third Reich. The two novellas, *Mr. Norris Changes Trains* (1935) and *Goodbye to Berlin* (1939), first appeared together in their more well-known form, *The Berlin Stories*, in 1945. *The Berlin Stories* would go on to land on *Time*'s 2005 list of the 100 greatest English-language novels published since 1923 and would also inspire American playwright John Van Druten to adapt it for the stage as the play *I Am a Camera* in 1951

(Lacayo). Van Druten, author of the enormously popular but slight Broadway plays *Voice of the Turtle* (1943), *I Remember Mama* (1944), and *Bell, Book and Candle* (1950) created an equally slight vehicle based on the character of Sally Bowles, a vivacious English singer of mediocre talent who had taken center stage in only one episode of *The Berlin Stories* but became the focus of *I Am a Camera*. Critical reception for *I Am a Camera* was mixed, with *New York Herald Tribune* theatre critic Walter Kerr famously quipping, "Me no Leica" (qtd. in "Walter Kerr"). Van Druten skirted the issues of the rise of Nazism and Isherwood's homosexuality, both of which had played prominently in episodes of *The Berlin Stories*, and minimized the darker notes in Sally's character that Isherwood had fleshed out more fully in the novel. The play is perhaps best known now as a stage of development between *The Berlin Stories* and *Cabaret* and as a star vehicle for the prominent mid-twentieth-century stage actress Julie Harris, who received the Tony Award for Best Performance by an Actress in a Leading Role in a Play in 1952 for *I Am a Camera* and whose quirky performance was preserved in the otherwise pallid 1956 film version.

By the time the creative team of Hal Prince, John Kander, Fred Ebb, and Joe Masteroff began working in earnest in 1963 on the musical that would eventually become *Cabaret*, the idea of musicalizing *I Am a Camera* or its source material *The Berlin Stories* had been kicked about New York for several years. Lyricist Sheldon Harnick (*She Loves Me, Fiddler on the Roof*) had toyed briefly with the idea before discarding it as something that could only work as a play (Garebian 14-15). By the time Broadway producer and director Hal Prince began thinking of staging a musical based on the Isherwood material, British composer and lyricist Sandy Wilson, whose successful musical pastiche of 1920s musicals *The Boy Friend* (1953) had introduced Julie Andrews to the Broadway stage in 1954, had written the greater part of the book, lyrics, and music for a musical based on the material as commissioned by Broadway producer David Black

(Garebian 15-16). This musical would have reunited Wilson and Andrews, for whom he was writing the role of Sally and who was interested in the role (Prince 125). Prince, however, found himself drawn to the darker materials in Isherwood's work, seeing parallels between the persecution of European Jews during the Third Reich and the violence and racism directed toward African Americans in the United States in the 1960s (Garebian 15-16). It was not the exact historical circumstances that Prince saw as being reproduced in contemporary culture but, rather, the questionable morality of the decision of bystanders whose decision not to intervene allows evil to flourish (A. Solomon 111). Prince rejected Wilson's score, which concentrated solely on the Sally Bowles story and sounded, to Prince's ears, too near the frothy Roaring 20s score of *The Boy Friend* (Garebian 15-16). Prince secured the rights to both the Isherwood and the Van Druten material and began working with playwright Joe Masteroff, who had written the book for the Prince-directed, modestly successful 1963 Broadway musical *She Loves Me*, and John Kander and Fred Ebb, who had written the music and lyrics, respectively, for the Prince-produced Broadway flop *Flora, The Red Menace* in 1965, to develop the musical.

Masteroff and Prince began working on what would become *Cabaret* in 1963, with Kander and Ebb joining them only after the closing of *Flora, The Red Menace* in July 1965. Despite closing after only eighty-seven performances on Broadway, *Flora* had garnered excellent reviews for its score and performers, one of whom was a nineteen-year-old Liza Minnelli, who won the Tony Award for Best Performance by an Actress in a Leading Role in a Musical for her work in *Flora* and who would eventually become permanently associated with *Cabaret* because of her performance as Sally in the 1972 film. Kander and Ebb had wanted Minnelli for Sally on Broadway, but Prince overruled them because she was not British and

because “she sang too well” to play an English singer who is not even headlining at the tawdry Kit Kat Klub in Berlin where she performs (Prince 126).

Prince and Masteroff agreed from the beginning of their collaboration on *Cabaret* that the traditional musical comedy structure was not equipped to tell a story like the one Isherwood had told in *The Berlin Stories*, and Kander and Ebb were in accord when they joined the project. Isherwood’s original work had a loose, non-narrative structure that would not be well-served by the standard Broadway musical with forward-moving plot and songs growing out of characters’ excesses of emotions punctuated by happy choruses of high-kicking dancers. In 1965, Prince travelled to Russia to see a theatrical adaptation of John Reed’s *Ten Days that Shook the World* at Moscow’s Taganka Theatre (Prince 127-128):

> The Taganka was conventional in that there was the stage, the proscenium, the orchestra pit, the auditorium… However, there were technical devices which knocked me out. An apron built over the orchestra pit into which searchlights were sunk. These lights, slanted over the heads of the audience to the last row of the balcony, when lighted, instead of blinding, became a curtain of light behind which the scenery was changed. Paintings on the wall spoke, inanimate objects animated, disembodied hands, feet, and faces washed across the stage. There were puppets and projections, front and rear, and the source and colors of light were all a surprise. All of it made possible by the use of black velour drapes instead of painted canvas. (Prince 129).

Thinking of *Cabaret* in these terms allowed Prince not only to think of the set and staging but also of the structure of the musical itself in a new and different way. Also instrumental in helping Prince conceptualize his vision for *Cabaret* was the Russian-born American scenic designer

Boris Aronson, who had designed the original Broadway productions of *The Diary of Anne Frank* and *Fiddler on the Roof*, and, coincidentally enough, that of *I Am a Camera* in 1955. The creators envisioned two distinct worlds in the musical: one set in the boardinghouse where four of the five main characters live and one set in the cabaret where Sally Bowles works. The boardinghouse would show Sally, Clifford Bradshaw, Herr Schultz, and the boardinghouse's owner Fraulein Schneider living their "real" lives as the threat of Nazism grows around them. The cabaret would show Sally and the bizarre Master of Ceremonies with the other cabaret singers and dancers performing on the stage of the Kit Kat Klub. Alisa Solomon argues that this physical demarcation between nightclub and boardinghouse "also emphasized the falseness of the separation between the political and private realms" (111). Much of Kander and Ebb's work, from *Flora the Red Menace* in 1965 to *The Scottsboro Boys* in 2010, would explore this false separation by placing their characters in the crosshairs of history and ultimately raising questions – perhaps most explicitly in *Chicago* (1976) – not only about how we live through history but how we perform as ourselves for and during historical moments. The boardinghouse songs would arise from the characters' own responses to their world while the cabaret songs would serve as diegetic comments on what was happening in the boardinghouse and in the streets of Berlin. Ultimately, the stage of New York City's Broadhurst Theatre would be the Kit Kat Klub itself, with the Klub having its own raised stage atop the Broadhurst stage. The boardinghouse scenes would play on drawing room or bedroom sets that rolled in on wagons, an effect that perhaps made the cabaret world with its bizarre, flashy inhabitants and chilling commentary the major and permanent presence while making the "real-life" boardinghouse scenes seem transient and less substantial than the cabaret scenes. Aronson also included an iron staircase upon which chorus members could stand and observe action in which they were not directly involved, a

staging technique used later in Sobol's *Ghetto*. Prince saw these observers as the German population (Ilson 145) watching impassively as the horrors of the Third Reich unfolded before them.

Aronson's master-stroke, however, was a trapezoidal mirror suspended over center stage, reflecting the audience and the onstage action back to the audience, making the audience, in effect, characters in the play. During the production's opening number, "Wilkommen," the mirror ascended to the flies. The mirror reappeared during Sally's performance of "Cabaret" near the end of the production and stayed through the reprise of "Wilkommen," which ends the show (Blades 233). Like the chorus members on the staircase, the audience saw itself impassively – sometimes laughing, sometimes perhaps applauding, but never intervening. Randy Clark argues that this technique constituted an instance of Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt*, preventing the audience from identifying too personally with the characters and action in order to reinforce the musical's function as a social corrective (58).

The mirror, which was a surprise to Prince during the unveiling of the design after months of discussing it with Aronson, had developed as a result of Prince's earlier statement to Aronson that his main reason for doing the musical was to show the audience that what had happened in Berlin some thirty years before could happen in the States during the 1960s as backlash toward the Civil Rights Movement (Ilson 145). Prince was so committed to this idea that he "went so far in one draft of the show to end it with a film of the march on Selma and the Little Rock riots, but that was a godawful idea" (Prince qtd. in Ilson 137). Bob Fosse used a form of the mirror in the film version of *Cabaret* during the opening and closing credits, showing the film audience reflections of the Kit Kat Klub's audience, garishly made up and oblivious to the world outside the cabaret.

The basic plot of *Cabaret* is simple – a young American writer arrives in Berlin on December 31, 1929, to work on a novel while teaching English lessons to make a living. He befriends an amiable German man named Ernst Ludwig who recommends a cheap boardinghouse for Cliff's stay. The boardinghouse, owned and operated by the charming Fraulein Schneider, is also home to Herr Schultz, a Jewish fruit vendor who begins a romance with Fraulein Schneider during the play, and Fraulein Kost, an opportunistic prostitute of whom Fraulein Schneider disapproves. Cliff spends his New Year's Eve at the seedy Kit Kat Klub, where he meets English singer Sally Bowles, who notices him sitting alone and introduces herself to him. Sally will soon show up at Cliff's door with her suitcase and move in with him, uninvited but unopposed. Her promised short stay turns into a long one. Soon, Sally reveals to Cliff that she is pregnant, a problem for which neither is emotionally or financially prepared. Because of the pregnancy, Sally quits her job at the Kit Kat Klub. To make extra money, Cliff begins going on excursions outside the country and picking up briefcases that he delivers to Ernst. Meanwhile, Fraulein Kost catches Herr Schultz leaving Fraulein Schneider's room late at night. To save Fraulein Schneider's reputation, Herr Schultz lies to Fraulein Kost, telling her that he and Fraulein Schneider are engaged to be married. As soon as Fraulein Kost leaves, however, the two decide to make the engagement legitimate. Later, he hosts an engagement party at his fruit shop, to which Ernst arrives wearing a swastika. When he discovers that Herr Schultz is Jewish, he warns Fraulein Schneider that she should end the engagement. He then joins Fraulein Kost and all the other guests except for Sally, Cliff, Fraulein Schneider, and Herr Schultz in a Nazi anthem.

As Act Two beings, Fraulein Schneider is expressing her worries to Herr Schultz that she could lose her boardinghouse license if she marries him. As he is trying to calm her, someone

throws a brick through his window. Meanwhile, Cliff, having quit working for Ernst, is looking for a new job. As Cliff and Sally argue about money, Fraulein Schneider enters to return their wedding gift; she has ended her engagement to Herr Schultz. Sally considers returning to the Kit Kat Klub, while Cliff offers to take her to America. He leaves to buy train tickets out of Berlin, but Sally, rather than waiting for him to return, leaves to sell her fur coat to pay for an abortion. She returns to the stage of the Kit Kat Klub. After a final confrontation between Cliff and Sally in the Klub, Cliff leaves Sally and Berlin, reliving a montage of moments. Bracketing the play at the beginning and end and also inserted between many of the boardinghouse scenes are musical numbers performed at the Kit Kat Klub, usually by its leering, sinister Emcee or by Sally, that comment on the action and on the political climate of 1930.

Despite the serious theme and a plot that, on the surface, seems rather bleak, much of *Cabaret*'s message is delivered via humor, especially through its musical numbers. Some of the dialogue is funny, particularly that written for Sally. Much of the humor in the stage version, especially that of the original 1966 production, comes courtesy of the character of Herr Schultz, a role written explicitly for veteran first-generation Romanian-American Jewish comedian and character actor Jack Gilford (Masterhoff qtd. in Garebian 69). Gilford had begun a career as a mimic and comedian in the Borscht Belt and in Manhattan cabarets and nightclubs in the 1930s, becoming particularly associated with Café Society, the U.S.A.'s first integrated nightclub, where he worked as an emcee. Gilford was also a victim of the 1950s Hollywood blacklist due to his activism for integration and labor unions. Though able to work steadily in the theatre, his film career had suffered until he became a major Broadway star at the age of 55 in the original 1963 production of *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*. As the Jewish fruit vendor Herr Schultz, Gilford brought to the stage not only a comedy style shaped by vaudeville and

Yiddish theatre but also a deep sense of compassionate humanity and a presence publicly stamped with Jewishness and his status as the victim of the destructive hegemonic forces of McCarthyism. Using Marvin Carlson's theory of ghosting, the idea that actors carry associations with previous characters to every new role, Henry Bial argues that the audience's recognition of Gilford as an artist who publicly lived his Jewishness marked him with a difference or otherness missing from Ron Rifkin's performance as Herr Schultz in the 1998 revival (67). With a film and television career as a character actor dating back to the mid 1960's, Rifkin was familiar to audiences by face if not by name, but he did not enjoy the level of fame in 1998 that Jack Gilford possessed in 1966. Furthermore, though Rifkin, like Gilford and Herr Schultz, is Jewish, he had never based his career on his Jewishness as Gilford had while playing the Borscht Belt. Consequently, Gilford's "ghosts," the Jewishness that audiences associated with him from many past roles, marked him as Other to 1966 audiences in a way that the relative lack of audience knowledge of Rifkin could not have marked him in 1998.

Herr Schultz sings two duets with Fraulein Schneider: the touching waltz "Married," which describes marriage as a world-changing cure for despair, and the comic "It Couldn't Please Me More," the couple's courtship song. Neither Gilford nor the famous Austrian singer and actor Lotte Lenya, who played Fraulein Schneider in the original Broadway production, were fine singers in a traditional sense, but both had first-rate, strong character voices. Lenya had been a cabaret performer in Germany during the 1920s and early 1930s and was the widow of composer Kurt Weill, whose collaborations with Bertolt Brecht originated in Germany during the Weimar Era. Lenya thus brought an air of authenticity to the cast. As was the case with Gilford and Schultz, the creators had created the role of Fraulein Schneider expressly for Lenya. Schultz and Schneider serve a vital function in the musical, which the casting of Gilford and

Lenya reinforced. In traditional musical theatre terms, they provide the secondary couple – often comic – who serve as subplot to the main couple. Schultz and Schneider serve this comic function, but they also serve the necessary purpose in *Cabaret* of showing the audience characters who would be completely unable to escape the rising tide of Nazism. According to Joe Masteroff, "the main reason we wanted that story was because neither of the leads, Clifford and Sally, were German. No matter what happened, they could pick up and go. We needed to show the people who couldn't leave" (qtd. in Bial 66). Schultz and Schneider gave the show stakes.

In "It Couldn't Please Me More," Schultz gives Schneider a pineapple, an expensive gift in Germany in 1930. An overwhelmed Fraulein Schneider compares the pineapple to other romantic gifts, claiming that even diamonds and pearls would not please her as much as the fruit does. Schultz responds:

> If, in your emotion
>
> You began to sway,
>
> Went to get some air,
>
> Or grabbed a chair
>
> To keep from fainting dead away,
>
> It couldn't please me more
>
> Than to see you cling
>
> To the pineapple I bring. (Ebb 50-51)

The silliness of the lyric along with Herr Schultz's inherent sweetness create a comic moment that serves as one of several throughout his appearances in the play that endear him to the audience as well as to Fraulein Schneider:

FRAULEIN SCHNEIDER. How am I to thank you?

HERR SCHULTZ. Kindly let it pass.

FRAULEIN SCHNEIDER. Would you like a slice?

HERR SCHULTZ. That might be nice,

But frankly, it would give me gas

FRAULEIN SCHNEIDER. Then we shall leave it here –

Not to eat, but see.

BOTH. A pineapple

FRAULEIN SCHNEIDER. For me!

HERR SCHULTZ. From me! (Ebb 51-52)

Herr Schultz's funny, quirky lines also have the effect of softening the congenial but tough Fraulein Schneider, who tells him – with great sincerity and meaning as delivered by Lenya on the original cast album – "You overwhelm me" (Ebb 52).

The instruments, too, establish a gentle, comic tone in the song. Don Walker's orchestrations for the original Broadway production, also used in the original London production and in the 1987 Broadway revival, provide amusing accompaniment for the singers. A comic descending trombone flourish punctuates the word "gas." A tinny, muted trumpet provides

humorous counterpoint to Fraulein Schneider's first verse; when Herr Schultz assumes control of the verse, the trumpet changes to a corny, romantic violin. Whenever either character sings the word "pineapple," the orchestra plays a loud flourish with Hawaiian strings. During the last verse when Schneider and Schultz sing together, both trumpet and violin give way to these Hawaiian strings as the couple unite under the power of the pineapple.

Later, Herr Schultz's sense of humor assumes a more ethnic tone at the engagement party he hosts for himself and Fraulein Schneider at his fruit shop. Not only are all the boardinghouse residents present, but Fraulein Kost has brought three of her clients, sailors to whom she refers as "cousins." Sally has also invited the dancers and orchestra from the Kit Kat Klub, as well as Ernst, who arrives from a Nazi party meeting with a swastika armband on his overcoat. The old-fashioned and slightly drunk Herr Schultz, disturbed by the sight of two Kit Kat boys dancing together and likely bothered by Ernst's swastika, stops the dancing and announces he will entertain the guests, whereupon he sings "Meeskite," the story of an ugly boy who eventually finds and marries a woman who is a greater *meeskite* than he.[43] Together, they produce a gorgeous child. The song is a sweet, funny confection with a moral; Herr Schultz sings to the guests, that "Though you're not a beauty it is nevertheless quite true/There may be beautiful things in you" (Ebb 81). Again, the gentle humor in the song acts as it does in "It Couldn't Please Me More" to endear Herr Schultz to the audience. Schultz is a good egg, and he shows us a "good sense of humor" as Paul Lewis describes the humor of "someone who laughs readily and often, not only to someone who creates humor easily, but also to someone whose creation and appreciation of humor is mediated by humanity" (55). He is a true mensch, a man of decency and

[43] *Meeskite* is a Yiddish word for an ugly person.

honor, and his innate goodness stands in stark relief to the Nazi Ernst, who warns Fraulein Schneider not to marry the Jewish grocer:

ERNST. …For you own welfare.

CLIFF. What about Herr Schultz's welfare?

ERNST. He is not a German.

F. SCHNEIDER. But he was born here!

ERNST. He is not a German. Good evening. (82)

Fraulein Kost stops him before he leaves, however, singing "Tomorrow Belongs to Me," an anthem of nostalgic and ultimately frightening nationalism that eventually Ernst and then the rest of the party with the exceptions of Herr Schultz, Fraulein Schneider, Cliff, and Sally will join in singing:

> *FRAULEIN SCHNEIDER and CLIFF watching the singers with great concern – HERR SCHULTZ and SALLY laughing, unaware of what is happening. As the EMCEE descends the stairs the fruit shop vanishes. The people against the stage freeze against a black background. The EMCEE slowly crosses the stage – looking at everyone. Then he turns to the audience. He shrugs, he smiles, and exits.* (84)

The shrug of the Emcee, who had been watching the scene unobserved from the top of a spiral staircase, could mean many things; perhaps he does not know what will come next, or perhaps he does not care. That he shares the shrug and a smile with the audience seems to indicate, however, that he is asking the audience, who sees itself reflected in the onstage mirrors as it sees the characters, what it will do. Near the play's end, Herr Schultz and Cliff exchange goodbyes as Cliff announces that he is leaving for America while Schultz has taken a room in another

boardinghouse to make life easier for Schneider. Cliff encourages Herr Schultz to go to America, too, because of the growing problems for Jews in Germany, but Schultz refuses, saying, "But it will pass – I promise you!... I *know* I am right! Because I understand the Germans.... After all, what am *I*? A German" (108). The audience knows that it will not pass and that his understanding of the Germans will not save him.

"Meeskite" was so completely owned by Jack Gilford that subsequent productions have generally cut it. According to Fred Ebb, Gilford was in the room with Kander and Ebb during the song's composition, creating "Meeskite" in collaboration:

> Working that closely with a performer, we can hear the way he speaks and sings, and we can see his facial expressions. We knew what he could do with the song physically, like lifting back the covers to look at the newborn baby and saying she was gorgeous. We knew how funny he could make that moment. It's telling that the number had to be religiously cut after Jack stopped performing it. (qtd. in Kander et. al. 68)

John Kander claims it was so "Gilfordesque… no one could make it happen" (68). The number was even cut from the 1998 Broadway revival, for which Ron Rifkin won the Tony for Best Featured Actor in a Musical for his performance as Herr Schultz.[44] Despite the loss of the number, however, Rifkin gave a warm, winning performance, and he was followed during the long run of the show by actors of a certain age known for their warm presences, including Tom Bosley, Hal Linden, and Tony Roberts. Significantly, however, as Henry Bial points out, the excision of "Meeskite" removes the only Yiddish word in the show (65), thus removing an important marker of difference and Jewishness from Herr Schultz. Despite the notoriety of Sally

[44] In 1967, Jack Gilford had been nominated for the same role in the Leading Actor category.

Bowles, it is the relationship between Schultz and Schneider that serves as the heart of the stage versions of *Cabaret*. Through the warmth they show each other as well as that they show to Sally and Cliff, they give the audience characters for whom to root when we find it difficult to care much for Sally and her self-involvement and Cliff and his ineffectiveness. It is the humor of the doomed Herr Schultz that is in largely responsible for endearing the older couple to the audience.

It is Sally Bowles rather than Herr Schultz, however, who bears the comic burden in the 1972 Bob Fosse film version of *Cabaret*, becoming onscreen a much greater humorous figure than she is in the original Masteroff script. Fosse cut the Schneider/Shultz romance, choosing instead to add to the screenplay from the original Isherwood source material the story of the young, beautiful and wealthy Jewish Natalia Landauer and her suitor, the dashing Fritz Wepper, who pretends to be gentile until his love for Natalia forces him to confess to being a Jew. Jay Presson Allen, who had written the screenplays for Alfred Hitchcock's *Marnie* (1964) and *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1969) was hired to write the screenplay but did not initially please Fosse (Garebian 136), the legendary Broadway director and choreographer whose single previous directorial film credit had been the poorly received *Sweet Charity* (1969). Credited on the film as "Research Consultant," Hugh Wheeler, who would later receive Tony Awards for Best Book of a Musical for *A Little Night Music* (1973), *Candide* (1974), and *Sweeney Todd, The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* (1979), was brought in to improve the screenplay, and he – under the urging of ABC Pictures – transplanted Sally to the U.S. and Cliff – now Brian – to England (Gerabian 139). This change would make way for the casting of Liza Minnelli as Sally.

Minnelli was not yet the international star that *Cabaret* would make her, though she was far from obscure. She had made many appearances on television in sitcoms, game shows and variety shows – including her famous appearances on her mother's television show in 1963 –

throughout the 1960s and had received an Academy Award nomination for Best Actress in a Leading Role in 1969 for her performance in *The Sterile Cuckoo*. She would receive that award for her performance in *Cabaret*. She had made her Off-Broadway debut at the age of seventeen in the 1963 Off-Broadway revival of the 1941 musical *Take Me Along*, for which she won a Theatre World Award, given to performers for their Off-Broadway or Broadway debut. Just two years later, she landed the titular role in the original Hal Prince Broadway production of Kander and Ebb's *Flora the Red Menace*, for which she won the Tony Award for Best Actress in a Musical. When the time came to cast the role of Sally in the original production of *Cabaret*, Kander and Ebb wanted to use their former leading lady again, but Prince, director as well as producer of the show, refused to cast her this time, citing her Americanness and her substantial talents as a singer as stumbling blocks. He still maintains that her singing talent is a flaw in the film, despite her winning an Academy Award, a BAFTA, and a Golden Globe for the performance (Ilson 142):

> It's a dilemma built into the casting for that role," Prince said. "Sally shouldn't sing well, but *Cabaret* is a musical…. It becomes instead a matter of performance – acting: can you believe, despite her excellent voice, that she's a dilettante pretending to be a nightclub diseuse? For my taste, good as Lisa Minnelli was in the film, her singing was too contemporary, too Las Vegas presentation. (qtd. in Hirsch xii)

Bob Fosse, however, disregarded the notion that Sally was stuck in Berlin because of a lack of talent and cast the powerhouse Minnelli "on the basis of her kooky persona in several movies and for her strong singing talent" (Garebian 141-142). According to musical theatre historian Kurt Gänzl, "Liza Minnelli's American Sally Bowles performs her on-stage numbers with a

sophisticated vigour that would have got her out of the Kit-Kat Klub into a job at the Folies-Bergères in a flash" (qtd. in Garebian 133).

It would be difficult to overestimate Minnelli's contributions to the film. Styling herself after Louise Brooks with a bob that Joel Grey helped her dye and cut into a point in front without Fosse's permission (Minnelli qtd. in Miller), Minnelli created in her Sally a larger-than-life flapper who took all the air out of every room she entered. Like her mother, actor and singer Judy Garland, Minnelli possesses impeccable comic timing and a knack for wry self-deprecation that barely hides an essential longing for the adoration of an audience. She channeled these qualities into Sally Bowles, creating a character whose need for approval and deep-seated insecurity about herself as a person but never as a singer were more likely to keep her in a third-rate nightclub in Berlin than a lack of talent would.

Christopher Isherwood had based the character of Sally Bowles on a real person, just as he had based the narrator of *The Berlin Stories* who would later become Cliff and then Brian on himself. The real person who served as the basis for Sally was Jean Ross, a hopeful actress when Isherwood knew her in Berlin but eventually a journalist and political activist, working against the war in Vietnam and the proliferation of nuclear weapons (Caudwell). Isherwood's friend, the poet Stephen Spender, who also appeared in Isherwood's work as the fictionalized character Stephen Savage (Mizejewski 45), corroborated his friend's picture of Jean Ross via Sally Bowles, saying "that everything Sally says in the story is what I remember her actually saying (whether I was present or not)" (qtd. in Mizejewski 45). Ross did not share the view of herself that the men in her Berlin life seemed to have of her, however, claiming that "Chris's story was quite, quite different from what really happened. But we were all utterly against the bourgeois standards of our parents' generation" (qtd. in Mizejewski 43). Like Isherwood and Spender,

many journalists rewrote Ross's story to fit their own agendas to see her primarily as a sexual object:

> They say they want to know about Berlin in the Thirties. But they don't want to know about the unemployment or the poverty or the Nazis marching through the streets – all they want to know is how many men I went to bed with. Really, darling, how on earth can anyone be interested in that? (Ross ctd. in Caudwell)

Indeed, all the versions of Sally Bowles's story from *The Berlin Stories* to *I am a Camera* to *Cabaret* place the burden of seriously responding to the growing Nazi threat squarely on the shoulders of their ostensible protagonist – the male narrator. However, none of the iterations of the central narrator has been able to make us feel much one way or the other about him, though Michael York comes closest with his passionate performance of Brian. It is always Sally about whom we care, and it is her pretensions, insecurities and sense of humor that enable us to care.

The humor Sally provides in the film generally arises in one of two ways: either from her sarcastic responses to other characters' remarks or from her constant efforts to appear more sophisticated and jaded than she is. She also has a seemingly inexhaustible supply of energy, which is by turns amusing and exasperating. When Brian, the film's version of Cliff,[45] arrives in Berlin and seeks out Fraulein Schneider's boardinghouse at the suggestion of Ernst, who is merely a fellow train passenger in the film, he meets Sally, who, unlike the Sally of the stage version, is already a resident of the boardinghouse. As she notices him staring at her green fingernails, she smiles happily and wiggles her fingers at him, saying, "Divinely decadent!" She tells Brian that she has sent Fraulein Schneider out to do some grocery shopping:

[45] Christopher in *The Berlin Stories* and *I Am a Camera*

SALLY. I'm destitute, but I can't possibly grind the poor like old Schneiderkins… Jew them down over the price of eggs, which I practically live on when I'm broke. My name's Sally. (*Offers him her hand*) Sally Bowles.

BRIAN. (*Taking her hand quite formally*) I'm Brian Roberts.

SALLY. Have you a cigarette, Brian, darling? I'm desperate.

Quickly, BRIAN produces a package. SALLY takes one and from her kimono pocket brings forth a ridiculously long cigarette holder. She smiles delightedly at BRIAN. (Allen 6)

But as Brian will tell Sally later, "You're about as fatale as an after-dinner mint!" (Allen 151).

Nonetheless, Sally works hard to play the role of vamp, not only with Cliff/Brian but also onstage at the Kit Kat Klub. In the stage version, Sally's first number is the coy "Don't Tell Mama," backed by a chorus of women. Sally confesses in the song that though her mama thinks she is "living in a convent – a secluded little convent in the southern part of France," she is actually "working in a nightclub in a pair of lacy pants" (Ebb 18). Sally is explicitly a naughty girl in this number, mirroring her childishness outside the Kit Kat Klub, a childishness she would like to think she has outgrown. In the 1966 Broadway production and in many subsequent revivals, Sally was dressed in a schoolgirl outfit (Garebian 29), though the recent 2014 Broadway revival with Michelle Williams featured Sally and the Kit Kat girls in camisoles, chemises, knickers, and other lingerie items, clothing worn to make one the "object of sexual desire" (Wood 11). Perhaps the camisoles miss the joke. The 1966 Sally is a naïf playing at being naughty, while the schoolgirl uniform, "as psycho-sexually resonant as the black motorcycle jacket or nurse's uniform" (qtd. in George 37), is generally the attire of girls on the

verge of womanhood and is often fetishized for sex play. The use of the uniform in "Don't Tell Mama" cleverly and amusingly parallels Sally's position as the girl on the brink who can still pretend that she is unaware of her sexuality while simultaneously making a display of it. The use of the lingerie in the 2014 revival makes Sally unable to play disingenuous in the number; she is no schoolgirl.

In the original stage musical, Sally had two solos: "Don't Tell Mama" and the titular song, the former describing the sexually precocious girl she is when the musical begins and the latter describing the sophisticated party girl she hopes to become. The film's production team replaced "Don't Tell Mama" with two new numbers: the aforementioned "Mein Herr" and the yearning ballad "Maybe this Time." If "Mein Herr" steers us away from the coy girlish sexuality of "Don't Tell Mama" into a more obviously self-aware and calculated sexual realm, "Maybe this Time" serves to remind us that despite the self-consciously harder exterior of the film Sally, she is still vulnerable and in love with the idea of being in love. Scenes of Sally singing the song at the Kit Kat Klub are quick-cut with scenes of Brian and Sally together in the giddy throes of love. As Randy Clark points out, the Kit Kat Klub audience for this number is quite small compared to those for the other numbers with "only a few shadowy guests… at the borders of the room" (56). When the stage of the Kit Kat Klub plays host to naughty, sexual songs and mud wrestling, the crowd is loud and raucous and present; when Sally sings plaintively of love in the same space, she is largely alone.

"Don't Tell Mama" also marks the first meeting of Sally and Cliff in the stage version. Daunted by the sight of his Remington typewriter, Cliff leaves the boardinghouse to soak up Berlin and finds his way to the Kit Kat Klub. Sally notices him during "Don't Tell Mama" and sings most of it directly to him. When the number is finished, she exits the stage and enters the

main floor of the nightclub, calling Cliff from one of the phones placed on every table. Delighted by his English, Sally eventually slips away from her date to join Cliff. During their first conversation, Sally works hard to sell herself as a woman of the world. “You musn’t ever ask me questions,” she tells him (25), and later she asks, “I say – am I shocking you – talking like this?” (26). He is not shocked, and she likes it (26). The number is replaced in the film by “Mein Herr.” This song eschews all gestures toward schoolgirl naughtiness and features Sally in a snug black leotard, sheer black stockings, and a black bowler hat in the style of Marlene Dietrich, who had been a cabaret singer herself in Weimar Germany, singing a regret-free goodbye to the latest in what sounds like a long line of men. This Sally is sophisticated and all grown up, at least when she is performing.

Sally’s final song, the show’s 11 o’clock number, is the title song for both stage musical and film – “Cabaret.” Though often performed outside the context of the musical as a paean to an unexamined life of hedonism, “Cabaret” performs a different function inside the show. Sally sings the song onstage at the Kit Kat Klub:

> What good is sitting alone in your room?
>
> Come, hear the music play!
>
> Life is a cabaret, old chum!
>
> Come to the cabaret! (Ebb 105)

A reading of the text suggests that any joy implied in the lyrics is forced on Sally’s part, though this is not always clear in performance. Immediately before the number, Sally has had an abortion. In the film version, this trauma is compounded by Brian’s departure alone for England. The stage version’s Cliff will leave after the number, but Sally has already decided that she will

stay in Berlin. According to Hal Prince, the musical's original Sally, British actress Jill Haworth, forgot her audience and broke down into tears (Prince 131), though her performance on the original cast album sounds positively cheerful.[46] Minnelli performs the number in her Sally's typical bravura style, without so much as a hint that she is undergoing extreme personal turmoil. Jane Horrocks, who played Sally in the 1992 London production, directed by Sam Mendes and later revised and remounted on Broadway with Natasha Richardson in 1998, practically shouts the song with her body clenched tightly as if she is the living embodiment of anger. Richardson, on the other hand, arrives on the stage of the Kit Kat Klub to sing the number disheveled and distraught with great smudges of mascara underneath her eyes, as is she had cried it off. She seems confused at first and quite obviously reminds herself to smile as the song begins**.** As she begins the second verse, she seems belligerent, and her admonition to "put down the knitting, the book and the broom" seems more like a demand than a suggestion. She temporarily pulls herself together and sings with good cheer but begins to drift into melancholy as she begins the Elsie section of the song. Her connection to this section seems more authentic somehow; she is not simply singing a nightclub song. Perhaps she is remembering a real Elsie, or perhaps she sees herself in these lines:

> I used to have this girlfriend known as Elsie
>
> With whom I shared four sordid rooms in Chelsea.
>
> She wasn't what you'd call "a blushing flower."
>
> As a matter of fact, she rented by the hour.

[46] Critics soundly drubbed Haworth's performance, with Walter Kerr of *The New York Times* calling her "a damaging presence, worth no more to the show than her weight in mascara."

The day she died, the neighbors came to snicker,

"Well that's what comes from too much pills and liquor."

But when I saw her laid out like a queen

She was the happiest corpse I'd ever seen.

Richardson pauses before the word "corpse" and returns to singing in a breathy voice with her eyes directed above the audience as if she is seeing what she is describing. As she remembers Elsie's words, she is wistful and strangely jubilant as she reminds herself that life is a cabaret:

I think of Elsie to this very day.

I remember how she'd turn to me and say,

"What good is sitting alone in your room?

Come. Hear the music play.

Life is a cabaret, old chum.

Come to the cabaret.

Put down the knitting, the book and the broom.

Time for a holiday.

Life is a cabaret, old chum!

Come to the cabaret!"

As she finishes Elsie's words and begins singing her own again, she becomes defiant, bellowing that one day she, too, will make a happy corpse:

And as for me – as for me –

I made my mind up back in Chelsea

When I go, I'm going like Elsie!

Richardson performs the final verse like an assault, proclaiming that life is nothing more than a cabaret. She has lost Cliff and her unborn baby, but she loves a cabaret.

Not only does sexuality become the focus of the film Fosse's via moving Sally and Brian to the foreground, but it also becomes more transgressive via Brian's bisexuality, only mentioned indirectly by Isherwood and not addressed at all by Van Druten or the creative team behind the original 1966 production. Brian's sexuality complicates his relationship with Sally when they both become involved with Max, a wealthy libertine who seduces both of them with gifts and his considerable charm. There is a moment at Max's country estate in which Fosse titillates the audience with the notion that the spiritual ménage à trois the three have may become physical, but, ultimately, Brian extricates himself from their three-way embrace and passes out on a sofa while Sally and Max retire to a bedroom. Later, Max will sleep with Brian before abandoning his friends for Argentina, leaving them a bit of money, which they compare to a prostitute's fee. According to Geoffrey Block, Brian's bitter declaration to Sally during a serious row that he, too, has slept with Max, "sent shock waves to screen audiences of the time" (166). Sally, too, is shocked, and her astonishment and anger at this moment is a further sign of her naivete and hypocrisy. She is unwilling to examine her own behavior, choosing instead to harangue Brian for his. Soon, Sally will learn that she is pregnant and is unsure if Max or Brian is the father. Despite the prominence of this sexually charged relationship, the undercurrent of menace emanating from the rise of the Third Reich still manages to permeate the film. From the Kit Kat

Klub and the streets of Berlin to the German countryside, both Nazis and Nazi regalia serve as constant reminders that this setting is becoming more of a deathtrap from scene to scene.

It is odd that Sally has picked Berlin as the place from which to launch her career. The Berlin cabaret scene had thrived during the late 1920s, presumably when Sally had arrived. With her poor German skills, Sally might have had an easier time of it had she stayed in England and tried for a career in the music hall. Perhaps she has been drawn to Berlin because she had heard of its decadence. Austrian writer Stefan Zweig referred to the city during this time as "Babel" where "amid the general collapse of values, a kind of insanity took hold of precisely those middle-class circles which had hitherto been unshakeable in their order" (qtd. in Llewellyn et. al.). Sally comes from one of these "middle-class circles" in England. Fosse's film Sally would claim an ambassador who largely ignores her as a father in the 1972 film version, but the 1966 stage version makes no mention of her family. It does, however, give a hint at the middle-class mindset from which Sally is running and to which she is so reluctant to return with Cliff. When she receives a letter from her school chum Sybil in England, she tells Cliff, "She's just a mad girl I used to go to school with! We were utterly wild—smoking cigarettes and not wearing bloomers! Our parents predicted we'd both come to a bad end—and the truth is—*she did*…. She met this absolutely dreary boy and fell hopelessly in love with him and married him and now they have two children" (59). Sally would rather live penniless in Berlin and pretend to believe in the lie that she will someday be a star than endure the constraints of the pre-planned middle-class life back in England. Her pretensions by turns madden Cliff /Brian and endear her to him. When the film Sally tries to seduce Brian,

> SALLY. It's just so hard for Americans to tell with Englishmen. Whether they're queer or just well-bred.

BRIAN. *(a rather thin smile)* The conditions do occasionally overlap.

SALLY. Well, just for the record… are you put off by all female bodies, or just mine? Is my body ghastly to you?

BRIAN. *(can't help smiling)* You know your body's beautiful, Sally.

SALLY. *(quickly opens the robe to examine herself critically)* Do you really think so, darling? It does have a certain style. *(takes Brian's hand, puts it on her stomach)* Very flat here and not much hips… rather boyish, actually…

BRIAN. *(retrieves his hand. He is quite shaken but determined not to show it.)* This is an extremely banal seduction scene, Sally. You'll forgive me if I don't play it.

Though Brian is aggravated and embarrassed by Sally's transparent comparison of her body to a man's to seduce him, he ultimately laughs, as he almost always does with her, and they end the scene promising to keep sex out of their friendship, a promise they, of course, break, leading to the demise of their romance.

Sally's and Brian's relationship is not the only thing that sex ultimately kills in the film. To marry and bed the wealthy Natalia, Fritz reveals that he is Jewish. Nazis murder Natalia's dog because of her family's Jewishness, and we know that unless Fritz and Natalia leave Germany very soon, they will likely die at the hands of Nazis, too. And, of course, Sally aborts her child, driving her back to the stage of the Kit Kat Klub and Brian away from Germany and Sally once and for all. At least Fritz and Natalia get a happy ending within the confines of the film, but as Mitchell Morris suggests, "the fatal complication of sexual orientation, as embodied in their

(Sally and Brian) triangular affair with Max, is too much for the narrative" (Morris 150). Though portraying Isherwood's sexuality via Brian was an honest and refreshing choice in 1972 that the 1966 stage version as well as the play and film *I am a Camera* had refused to make, Brian still winds up unhappy, and we can draw a direct line from his affair with Max to that unhappiness.

The most sexually transgressive character of all, however, the Emcee, managed to escape unhappiness in earlier versions of the show, finally succumbing under the weight of his difference in the 1998 revival. Though Herr Schultz supplies much of the humor in the stage version of *Cabaret* and Sally delivers a great deal of it in the film, both play and film feature the wicked humor of the Emcee. Originated on stage by Joel Grey and played by him again in the film, the Master of Ceremonies is more of a function come to life than a flesh and blood character. He has no name other than his title, and if he has an inner life, he does not make it known to the audience. Occasionally he appears outside the Kit Kat Klub to comment on the action unseen by the rest of the cast. However, even his smirking and leering in these scenes tell us little about him as a person.

In both the original Broadway production and the film, the Emcee serves not only as the master of ceremonies but as a performer in the Kit Kat Klub as well, introducing the acts and performing in some of them. Dressed in a tuxedo in both the original production and the film, he is, according to the original stage directions, "a bizarre little figure – much lipstick, much rouge, patent-leather hair parted in the middle" (Masteroff 3). His appearance was inspired by an emcee in Stuttgart Prince saw when stationed there in 1951 – "a dwarf Emcee, hair parted in the middle, and lacquered down with brilliantine, his mouth made into a bright red cupid's bow… wore heavy false eyelashes and sang, danced, goosed, tickled, and pawed four lumpen Valkyre [sic]" (Prince 126). The Stuttgart emcee informed not only the physical appearance of the *Cabaret*

Emcee but also his personality and function. Prince saw him as "playing to empty laughter in an empty house" (37):

> He'd lost the war, his self-respect. He carried his money around in bushel baskets. With National Socialism he found his strength, misdirected and despotic, feeding off his moral corruption. (Prince 127)

According to Prince, Grey, who had been in show business since childhood, "recognized the gaucheries, the hollow laughter, the courage and vulnerability of a performer in a sputtering spotlight" (56). Grey's performance would win him the Tony Award for Best Featured Actor in a Musical and, later, the Academy Award for Best Actor in a Supporting Role when he recreated his performance in the film.

The Emcee seems to have grown nastier throughout each iteration of *Cabaret* while his sexuality has grown more overt. While Linda Mizejewski argues that Prince's Grey presented the 1966 Emcee with an ambiguous sense of camp (166), Mitchell Morris sees Fosse's Grey as :

> in many ways the center of sexual trouble in the musical… identifiably queer in the most inclusive sense, with his makeup and apparel recalling the epicene nineteenth-century figure of the Dandy, now grown further decayed in the hothouse of the criminal world; he is vividly nasty in his disloyalty to everything except vice – avarice and lust in particular; nothing and no one receives his respect, except when he must bow to official power, his performance style is a wonder of brittle artifice, such that there is no character outside the mannerisms of his performance….his traits also mesh uncomfortably with those commonly imputed to homosexuals in Cold War America" (152-153).

Though I cannot speak with any certainty as to what Grey's 1966 performance was like, I have seen his 1972 film performance many times. He is heavily made up, it is true, with his Cupid's bow of an upper lip and his spidery false eyelashes making a case for transgressive, androgynous qualities, but his performance seems to me voraciously sexual while being strangely sexless at the same time. He bounds about the stage of the Kit Kat Klub with "brittle artifice," to be sure, as if each gesture and expression has been calculated for effect. There is no sincerity; he is a cypher whose every move has been learned and crafted to invoke a specific response. Sometimes that response is laughter and sometimes a shudder of revulsion, but there is no allure. Even when he simulates sex acts on the stage of the club, he seems a bit inhuman.

At the same time, the Emcee gets the funniest numbers in the film. One of those numbers is "Two Ladies," a paean to polyamory that he performs with two of the Kit Kat girls. The three have a happy living arrangement but are perfectly willing to open it up to other potential partners:

EMCEE. We switch partners daily

To play as we please.

LADIES. Twosies beat onesies,

EMCEE. But nothing beats threes.

I sleep in the middle.

FIRST LADY. I'm left.

SECOND LADY. And I'm right.

EMCEE. But there's room on the bottom if you drop in one night.

(Ebb 45)

The song is positioned in the stage version between the scene in which Sally moves in with Cliff and the scene in which Herr Schultz presents Fraulein Schneider with the pineapple. In his otherwise informative and insightful chronicle of the making of *Cabaret,* Keith Garebian rather puritanically sees the song as expressing "the impulses toward perversion that were shamelessly satisfied by hordes of young people who considered it a disgrace to be suspected of virginity or chastity" (78**)** though he does not make it clear if he means the young people of Berlin in the 1920s or those of the U.S. in the 1960s, the time of the musical's construction. Either way, it seems a rather prudish, unhelpful observation. However, as I will discuss later, Garebian is far from being the only critic or artist, for that matter, to point a judgmental finger at the cabaret culture of Weimar. Garebian also notes that the number is a successful extension of "Perfectly Marvelous," the song through which Sally and Cliff decide to live together, commenting on the permissiveness of their living situation, a situation that seems quite tame by twenty-first century standards.

In the film version, "Two Ladies" works explicitly on a diegetic level to comment on the growing ménage à trois of Sally, Brian, and Max, "challenging the ordered heterosexuality" of the romances between Sally/Brian and Fritz/Natalia (Mizejewski 199). The Emcee's verbal introduction of the song over the first few bars of music plays under a shot of the three riding through the country in Max's car, smoking and drinking champagne. The film then cuts to the stage of the Kit Kat Klub, where the Emcee in his tux and tails performs the song with two women dressed in a parody of stereotypical German folk clothing and sporting blonde, braided hair. When the song reaches the instrumental section, the three cavort under a large bedsheet with their leering heads popping out at random. Their interactions under the sheet seem to

become more and more chaotic as a strobe light flashes above them while they chase each other from and back under the sheet, with the Emcee emerging with no pants. The strobe also illuminates the audience in short bursts to show them laughing hysterically at the sexual antics onstage. When the strobe ends, the three remain under the sheet with various appendages poking out, catching their breath as the music slows back down and the energy of the strobe session dissipates into afterglow. When they finally emerge, the Emcee invites a patron, well-dressed in feathers and pearls, to join them onstage and make the threesome a foursome. The Emcee tugs at her arms while she demurs, ultimately falling into her lap while the audience roars. The number ends with the two ladies bent over at the waist and the Emcee on the floor emerging from the tunnel their spread legs make. The accompaniment to the song is primarily the tinny sound of an oboe accompanied by a jaunty snare drum with a muted trumpet taking the lead during the strobe scene, giving the song a comic Tin Pan Alley feel.

Perhaps the funniest number in *Cabaret* and certainly the one that has been at the center of the most controversy is "If You Could See Her," the Emcee's love song to a gorilla. Onstage, the number occurs near the top of Act 2 immediately after the scene in which Fraulein Schneider visits Herr Schultz at his fruit shop and expresses her doubts about their engagement. The original stage directions indicate that the Emcee enters holding hands with a "really rather attractive" gorilla who wears a skirt and carries a handbag (Masteroff 92). As the two dance, the Emcee tries to convince the audience that if they could see her as he does, they would understand why he loves her. The gorilla costume alone is silly fun, and the absurdity of the lyrics when sung about a gorilla dancing in a dress is extremely funny:

EMCEE. How can I speak of her virtues?
I don't know where to begin:

She's clever, she's smart, she reads music,

She doesn't smoke or drink gin like I do. (Ebb 92)

The song comes to a shocking conclusion, however, as the Emcee makes the subtext of his song clear:

EMCEE. I understand your objection,

I grant you the problem's not small.

But if you could see her through my eyes,

She wouldn't look Jewish at all. (93)

Surely, the audience who has laughed at the absurd spectacle of the song up until this point will suddenly find itself uncomfortable with having been dropped full-stop at this virulently anti-Semitic moment. According to Garebian, the song is "a wonderful parody of forbidden romance between Jews and Aryans" to the Kit Kat Klub patrons, but "an alarmingly contemptuous Nazi mockery" to the theatre patrons (35). The number functions to remind the audience that its impassivity and unwillingness to critically question what is placed before it has consequences. The song's effectiveness lies in the casual way Grey and gorilla perform the musically light and frothy soft-shoe number with its equally light and frothy waltz dance break, leaving the audience unsuspecting of the brutal surprise of the final line.

Many viewers in 1966, however, either did not understand or did not appreciate the importance and seriousness of the joke. During out-of-town tryouts for *Cabaret*, some audience members did understand and appreciate the final line of the song in the context of the show, but others objected vehemently to it (Block 173-174). According to Prince, many audience members on both sides of the issue stayed in the theatre after the final Broadway preview to argue about it. After introducing himself to them and staying to listen, Hal Prince excised the line and asked

Fred Ebb to replace it, thereby, as Prince himself has said, "emasculating the song" (Prince 137). Ebb replaced it with "She wouldn't look *meeskite* at all," a reference to Herr Shultz's Act One song (Block 173-174). This line is included in the original cast recording. Occasionally during the original run of the show, Joel Grey would say the original line, later claiming it slipped out accidentally (Block 174). Ebb would accuse Prince of pandering to the public for years, but Prince maintains that he was right to change the line in to keep the show alive (Prince 137). In the 1972 film, the music stops for Grey to malevolently whisper the restored final line before the band plays a brassy exit line. According to Ebb, Fosse stopped the music for the line not for the malevolent effect it produces but because he wanted the option of easily changing "Jewish" back to "meeskite" if the former caused backlash (Garebian 86).

Geoffrey Block sees "If You Could See Her" as *Cabaret*'s "most direct musical manifestation of the cabaret as metaphor for the decadence and impoverishment of the German psyche that would soon allow and perpetrate crimes against Jewish humanity" (175). While this seems true at first glance and certainly as performed by Grey, the number is potentially multivalent. Garebian tells us that Brent Carver screamed the line in "boiling rage" in a prominent 1987 Toronto production (176), but Garebian does not make it clear at whom Carver's Emcee was raging. Was he ridiculing his own appeal for tolerance? Was he screaming in hatred of Jews, or was he screaming out of anger toward the Nazis? All these choices are valid, but perhaps Carver, whose performance was well-received (176), was mining the ambivalence of the Emcee in to force the audience to void itself of its own ambivalence and examine the laughter it had expended during the song as well as the embarrassment it felt at Carver's cry.

Perhaps the most powerful song in *Cabaret* is not one of its comic songs and does not arise from a comic situation, but it is so central to the work that neglecting to discuss it would

give an incomplete picture of the musical. In the stage version, “Tomorrow Belongs to Me” brings a chilling curtain down to the end of Act One and is, arguably, the most memorable scene of the film. In the play, Fraulein Kost begins the song to convince Ernst, who is offended to learn that Herr Schultz is Jewish, to stay at Fraulein Schneider and Schultz’s engagement party. The second verse of the anthem directs our gaze explicitly to German nationalism:

FRAULEIN KOST. The branch of the linden is leafy and green,
The Rhine gives its gold to the sea.
But somewhere a glory awaits unseen,
Tomorrow belongs to me. (Ebb 83)

Ernst does stay, and he joins her in song. By the end of the number all the party-goers except for Herr Schultz, Fraulein Schneider, Brian and Sally have joined. Herr Schultz and Sally ignore the song because they are talking and laughing together away from the group, but Fraulein Schneider and Brian are fully aware of the implications of the song. The voices and drums have swollen to such a crescendo that what began as a bucolic ode to meadows and forests in waltz time has become a strident call to arms:

Now Fatherland, Fatherland show us the sign
Your children have waited to see.
The morning will come when the world is mine.
Tomorrow belongs to me! (Ebb 84).

Even as we are either swept into the wave of bellicosity or repulsed by it, *Cabaret* forces us out of our emotional state and into a moment of Brechtian contemplation as the Emcee appears apart from the action. The original stage directions indicate that then the party-goers freeze while the Emcee walks among them, looking at everyone before turning to the audience and shrugging,

smiling and exiting (84). Does he shrug because he does not care what is happening or because he is baffled by it? Does he smile to assure us or to implicate us? Only the actor playing the role can answer the question, but the moment very purposefully takes the audience out of its moment of emotional reaction.

"Tomorrow Belongs to Me" becomes perhaps even more effective and frightening in Bob Fosse's film due to the number's change in locale and aura of authenticity as well as to the film's camera and editing techniques. During Sally and Brian's jaunt through the country with Max, we see the two men drinking and exchanging meaningful glances at a *biergarten* while Sally sleeps in the car. As the two talk, a blonde youth begins the song in a high, clear, almost angelic voice. As the crowd gives him its attention, the camera travels from his head down his torso, revealing that he is dressed in the brown uniform of the Hitler Youth, complete with a swastika on a band around his left arm. Soon, the waitstaff and customers begin standing one by one or in small groups to join him in song. By the end, everyone in the crowded *biergarten* is standing and singing with the boy with the exceptions of Brian, Max, and one elderly man who is obviously uncomfortable with the proceedings:

> …the camera lingers on the face of a puzzled old man as his countrymen – all younger than he – shoot to their feet in a rousing chorus of a Nazi anthem. The music swells, the old man glances surreptitiously at those standing around him – finding it difficult to understand or believe their fervor – and the effect is devastating. (Blades 231)

Is he Jewish, or is he simply a man who sees and fears where his fellow Germans are headed? Near the end of the song, the boy puts on his hat and raises his right arm in the Nazi salute. As Brian and Max enter Max's car while the song continues, Brian asks, "Do you still think you can

control them?" Max merely shrugs. Fosse then cross-cuts to the Emcee back in the Kit Kit Klub lifting his head to nod and give a satisfied smirk directly into the camera.

According to Keith Garebian, audience members of the original production found the song so authentic that many believed it was an actual Nazi anthem, with at least one man claiming to have known the song as a child (83). Its stylistic differences from the piece's other songs are obvious; listeners of any of the cast albums of various productions or of the film soundtrack are likely to feel jarred when the song begins if they are unfamiliar with the show, but that is, of course, the song's function. It places the characters we have come to know in the cabaret and the boardinghouse directly in the context of the Third Reich. Notably in the film, however, Sally is asleep in Max's car during the song. In the stage musical, we see Sally talking and laughing about something unrelated during the song; she chooses not to pay attention. In the film, Sally remains in the car sleeping while Brian and Max drink in the *biergarten*. Fosse's reason is obvious; by excluding Sally from the scene, he can easily establish the attraction between Brian and Max. Though there is still ample evidence in the film to suggest that Sally is willfully ignoring the implications of the rise of the Nazi party, the decision to remove her from the scene also removes her from having to make the choice to ignore or digest the most obvious and sobering evocation of Nazi fervor that the film offers.

Linda Mizejewski notes that the staging of the song at Schneider and Schultz's engagement party in the original stage production "points to the understanding of German-fascism-as-show-biz that structures the text: politics is articulated as the phenomenon of spectators being willing to join the show" (176). This echoes not only in the giant crowds of Leni Riefenstahl's spectators and the battalions of ordinary men of Christopher Browning's police units but also, Mizejewski says, in the production numbers of Broadway musicals (176). The Hot

Box Girls join Miss Adelaide to sing of ill treatment by their men in *Guys and Dolls*, the dock workers join Joe to sing of the travail of life for black men on the Mississippi River in *Show Boat*, and a host of other numbers from a host of other shows provide numerous examples of the crowd joining in to back the one to whom they have conceded their individual voices. The creators of *Cabaret* quote fascist and Broadway aesthetics simultaneously, thereby demonstrating the relatively innocuous and entertaining tactics that can be applied in the creation of fascist spectacle. When the spectacle freezes into a tableau, Mizejewski argues, *Cabaret* explicitly forces us to consider the moment in terms of fascist iconography as the Emcee walks through the frozen figures, drawing our gaze through his as he considers the picture they create (176). We become aware of the seeming strangeness of conflating the big Broadway musical Act One closing number with fascist spectacle as well as the inherent rightness of viewing the latter as comprising the show biz tricks of the former.

Fosse likewise positions the song as a direct echo of totalitarianism propaganda in the film, employing tried and true techniques borrowed from Riefenstahl and others:

> The song is deliberately, embarrassingly simple-minded… The youth who begins the song is impossibly blonde and pretty, in the chastely prurient mode taken from Nazi or Soviet propaganda posters…. the line of the melody is constantly broken up into single pitches, creating a "notey" aggressiveness. His body is carefully posed, and framed to look natural in the most artificial way. The song is a lie…. The song is a lie that works. (Morris 153)

The 1972 and later viewing contexts of the film insures a general awareness of the Nazi regime and its symbols – the blonde Hitler youth, the swastika, the crowd's patriotic fervor. Because of this known context, Fosse is able to establish in only three minutes a framework of dread and

inevitability that will encage the rest of the film and through which all of the characters will soon have to negotiate. The historical implications of that loaded pre-Holocaust moment in the film burdens the post-Holocaust audience with the weight of history, thereby increasing the moral weight of the story. This is not the first moment of the film during which Fosse makes the audience aware of the specter of fascism. Earlier in the film, we have seen the manager of the Kit Kat Klub beaten for throwing a Hitler Youth out of the bar, and we have seen the grisly sight of Natalia Landauer's murdered dog. Max, Sally, and Brian, in fact, must wait in traffic before passing a trio of Nazis standing over a bloodied corpse covered by a tallit in the street before leaving the city for their country frolics. What makes "Tomorrow Belongs to Me" even more chilling than those bloodier scenes is its crowd effect. The prior incidents occur in relative isolation and are perpetrated by a limited number of people. "Tomorrow Belongs to Me" makes it clear that *volk* of Germany are of the accord that they are the Third Reich.

Much of the power of "Tomorrow Belongs to Me" derives from Fosse's use of the camera with his cinematographer, Geoffrey Unsworth, who won an Academy Award for his work on the film. A stage director can coordinate the movement on stage with the actors and work with the designers to draw the audience's focus to specific places, but the audience may still cast its gaze elsewhere on the stage with its largely panoramic view. Film directors can use the camera to draw the audience's focus to the smallest and most specific of points by simply not showing anything else but that point. For example, director Mike Nichols famously directed the audience to look at Benjamin Braddock across Mrs. Robinson's half-stockinged leg by cutting off the rest of her body with the left side of the frame in *The Graduate* (1967). In *Un Chien Andalou* (1929), Luis Buñuel replaced the face of a woman who has a razor held to her eye with a cloud passing over the moon only to move the cloud away to reveal the eye in closeup being

sliced by the razor. Not only do the eye and the area immediately around it fill the frame, but the speed of the cut from cloud over moon to eye is so quick that the audience does not have enough time to look away. In "Tomorrow Belongs to Me," the reveal of the swastika on the boy's upper arm after the slow pan of the camera down his torso is a punch in the throat after the song's sweet, sentimental opening. Fosse and Unsworth give us closeups of individuals watching and listening to the youth with varying degrees of longing. They direct our eye to a horse-drawn cart surrounded by tall green grass; this short shot reminds that we are in the countryside. The camera then cuts swiftly from individual to individual jumping to their feet to join the boy in song. The first few are all young. Then the camera gives us wider shots of the crowd with individuals popping up in various places. We see the bewildered old man as the young woman next to him jumps to her feet with fervor. The camera continues cutting quickly through close shots of individuals of all ages now jumping to their feet to sing. As the oom-pah-pah of the bass drum joins the waltz, the cuts become quicker, and the faces become more impassioned. The camera only gives us a full view of the crowd at the end of the song as Max and Brian depart. Even then, the *biergarten*'s trees hide many of the people in the crowd. Suddenly, the film cuts to the smirking face of the Emcee looking directly into the camera before cutting just as suddenly back to the *biergarten.* As the camera pulls back to reveal the green countryside, the *biergarten* becomes smaller, though the volume of the crowd does not diminish. The meaning that this combination of song and camera produces is clear – this is the new sound of Germany.

Though Fosse and Unsworth employ several cinematographic techniques to tell their story, their use of cross-cutting is one of the most effective producers of meaning in the film. Except for "Tomorrow Belongs to Me," Fosse cut all of the songs from the stage production that occur outside of the cabaret, leaving only the songs performed inside the Kit Kat Klub. To mark

the purpose of these songs clearly as commentary on the main plot, Fosse and Unsworth effectively juxtapose the cabaret numbers against the outside world with quick, often disorienting back and forth cuts. “Wilkommen” opens the film by cutting from the Emcee singing onstage at the Kit Kat Klub to Brian arriving in Berlin by train and back again while “Maybe this Time” cuts back and forth from Sally singing to a sparse crowd at the cabaret to scenes of her growing romance with Brian. “Two Ladies” plays scenes of the Emcee and performers onstage against scenes of Sally, Brian, and Max, emphasizing the Emcee’s opening lines that “Berlin makes strange bedfellows these days.” A mud wrestling match at the club cuts faster and faster with dizzying effect from the performers onstage to the nearly hysterical audience to the Hitler youth boy passing out literature to audience members while the manager frowns. This leads to the performance of a traditional German clapping dance juxtaposed against clips of the manager being beaten by Nazis outside the club. This cross-cutting technique is the stylistic choice that most closely parallels Hal Prince’s vision of the original stage production as having two distinct physical worlds, the cabaret and the boardinghouse, that commented on each other.

As Terri J. Gordon notes, however, this technique as used by Fosse not only allows him to use the cabaret as a running commentary on the film’s plot and a critical comment on Nazism but also as a running indictment of Weimar culture (445). On the one hand, it seems almost laughable to think of the womanizing Bob Fosse with his highly sexualized choreography launching a complaint against decadence, but on the other, the cross-cutting techniques of the film clearly make a connection between the laughter and sexual behavior of the cabaret denizens and the growing violence and authoritarianism of the world outside it. Gordon writes:

> On a figurative level, sexual depravity becomes the primary metaphor for political depravity, representing both violent political aggression and the lure of spectacular politics. On a literal level, the film seems to draw a causal relationship between decadence and fascism, suggesting that Weimar culture allowed, through indifference, neglect or complicity, the development of a politically oppressive regime. (446)

Obviously, to attribute the rise of Nazism solely or even mainly to the "sexual depravity" or frivolity of the Weimar culture would be simple-minded. The cabaret, or *kabarett*, as Weimar Germany knew it, was a site of resistance to the rise of fascism. Though allusions to transgressive sexuality did become common onstage with the loosening of censorship laws after World War I, so, too, did political criticism via stand-up comedy and songs. *Kabarett* would eventually die out when the Nazi party came to power in 1933, but the liminal space between the election of Hitler and the full-scale enforcement of the Nazi regime is the historical moment that *Cabaret* addresses. At this time, Jewish cabaret artist Fritz Grünbaum was still criticizing national socialism onstage in Vienna, and Claire Waldoff was still singing queer songs onstage in Berlin. Until 1933 when their writing was banned, Kurt Tucholsky and Klaus Mann contributed political writing to *kabarett* artists.[47] Besides, there were many historical reasons for the rise of Nazism that had nothing to do with Weimar sexuality. Hitler did not own the idea of German exceptionalism; it dated back at least to the early nineteenth century and the work of

[47] Grünbaum died in Dachau in 1941, but the lesbian Waldoff survived the War, dying in 1951. The Jewish Tucholsky, whose works had been banned and whose citizenship had been revoked, committed suicide with an overdose of sleeping pills at his home in Sweden in 1935. The son of Thomas Mann, Klaus Mann was homosexual and Jewish through his mother. He was stripped of German citizenship in 1934 and moved to the U.S. in 1937, where he served with the U.S. Army and died from an overdose of sleeping pills in 1949 in Cannes. Whether his death was an accident or suicide could not be determined with certainty.

Johann Gottlieb Fichte, who stressed the idea of German purity during the Napoleonic occupation and whose work influenced Hitler (Ryback 91). Nor was anti-Semitism new. Theories about the superiority of the mythical "Aryan" race dated back to the nineteenth century and had been further inflamed in Germany with the 1912 publication of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, a anti-Semitic document forged in Russia that convinced many of its readers that there was an international conspiracy of powerful Jews who were working to rule the world **(**Kershaw 588**)**. Germany was also suffering from a severe economic depression, which many Germans blamed on excessive international demands for financial reparations after World War I, demands that had been manipulated by international Jewry ("Antisemitism in History"). Both the original stage version of *Cabaret* and Fosse's film version point to the effects of anti-Semitism on the culture through the pairings of Fraulein Schneider and Herr Schultz in the former and Fritz and Natalia in the latter, though neither explore the roots of German anti-Semitism or its place in Weimar politics. Similarly, both pieces show us a product of German exceptionalism through "Tomorrow Belongs to Me" but do not explore it as a cause of the political upheaval of the time. Neither explore the German economic depression. We are conscious of Sally as living in poverty, but we also see her spending carelessly, so we do not attribute her financial circumstances to the national economy. Fosse's linkage of permissiveness and sexuality to the rise of Nazism, then, while cinematically effective, does not hold up under scrutiny. Perhaps Fosse was attempting to comment on the era during which he made the film – the era that simultaneously hosted the Sexual Revolution and the Vietnam War. While there was no causal link between them, there is at least the potential for criticizing the former for ignoring the latter.

Though *Cabaret* has appeared in production all over the world since its original 1966 production, including the first London production in 1968 with Judi Dench as Sally and the 1987

Broadway revival with Joel Grey recreating his performance of the Emcee, the first major changes to the piece after the 1972 film would not occur until the 1990s. In 1993, Sam Mendes, who would later win an Academy Award for directing the 1999 film *American Beauty*, mounted a production of *Cabaret* at London's Donmar Warehouse. Starring Jane Horrocks as Sally and Alan Cumming as the Emcee, this production included many script changes with the involvement of Joe Masteroff. First, the cabaret encompassed the entire stage, including the boardinghouse, allowing a greater porosity between the two environments and allowing the Emcee free reign to walk throughout the action, sometimes acting almost as a *kuroko* from kabuki theatre, unseen in this case by the boardinghouse characters but not by the audience. He drops the brick through Schultz's shop window, for example (Masteroff 1999, 86), indicating Nazi ruffians outside. He also sings "I Don't Care Much," a song that had been cut from the original 1966 production, while Sally is deciding whether to stay in Berlin or leave for a bourgeois life with Cliff:

EMCEE. So if you kiss me,
If we touch,
Warning's fair,
I don't care
Very much. (Ebb 1999, 91)

Not only does the song explicitly convey the creators' theme of bystanderism but it also comments on an updated Sally whose original naivete has morphed into a cynicism fueled by her use of cocaine (Masteroff 1999, 34). This revival also gave audiences a Cliff who is openly bisexual (Masteroff 1999, 33-34) and having a fling with Bobby, one of the new cabaret boys (Masteroff 1999, 20). In this production, the Kit Kat Klub was even more charged with the

potential for transgression: boys with girls, boys with boys, girls with girls, and the Emcee with all of them. This revival also gave us lesser singer than Liza Minnelli in the form of the late Natasha Richardson but whose performance was widely lauded, as was that of Cummings. They each won Tonys for Best Leading Performances in a Musical for 1998.

Perhaps the revival's most significant change, however, was its ending, which left no doubt as to the direction of the characters' histories. The final section begins as it did in the original 1966 production:

> EMCEE. *(spoken)* Meine Damen und Herren – Mesdames et Messieurs – Ladies and Gentlemen. Where are your troubles now? Forgotten? I told you so. We have no troubles here. Here life is beautiful – the girls are beautiful… Even the orchestra is beautiful.

At this point in the original script, the orchestra reappears as Schultz, Schneider, and Sally step forward, each repeating lines that they have said earlier and that encapsulate each of their philosophies toward the growing Nazi threat. Sally sings a snatch of "Cabaret," and everyone except the Emcee disappears. He sings the final lines of "Wilkommen" and disappears, too, leaving the audience to face itself in the mirror. Masteroff changed the final moments quite markedly, however, for this revival. After saying, "Even the orchestra is beautiful," the Emcee is not joined by the orchestra:

> *(The bandstand is now empty as the music continues. SCHNEIDER, SCHULTZ, KOST, and ERNST come down the stairs and form a line US and slowly move DS. As they turn and walk US, the door wall and brick wall behind the band fly out to*

reveal the COMPANY. The set disappears. We are in a white space.)

EMCEE. Auf wiedersehen!

A bientôt.

(*The EMCEE slowly takes off his coat. He is wearing the clothes of a concentration camp prisoner. Drum roll. Cymbal crash. Blackout.*) (Masterhoff & Ebb 1999, 99)

This ending was only slightly revised from the Donmar production, which had left the orchestra onstage. In both productions, the Emcee's camp uniform was adorned with a yellow star and a pink triangle, indicating his Jewishness and transgressive sexuality, while the rest of the company "lined up like prisoners awaiting execution in an empty, blindingly white space" (Bial 65).[48] This simple but deeply meaningful adjustment generates several layers of meaning. None of the prior major productions of *Cabaret* had used the Emcee as anything other than a device, instead allowing him to function as a running commentary on the human follies of the other characters and on the historical developments happening outside of the cabaret. When he removes his shiny black overcoat to reveal the camp badges, however, the audience suddenly sees him as a gay Jew who has little chance of surviving the camps. Mendes did not leave the audience with a visual confirmation of its complicity with a hanging mirror; instead, he reminded it that there are historically inevitable high stakes at play for the characters onstage. The odds that Schultz and now the Emcee would survive to 1945 if they were real people are practically

[48] Though the stage directions in the 1998 script only refer to the white space as such, at least one critic, Linda K Brengle, has compared this "white space" to a gas chamber (153).

nil. However, there still is more to consider. If the Emcee has sneered at the romance between Schultz and Schneider while smirking at the rise of the Nazis, are we now to see him as having been blasé about his own impending doom? If so, then Mendes is tilling morally ambiguous ground. The human impulse to blame victims is as ubiquitous as it is intellectually and morally unsustainable. However, if Mendes's point is to remind us that the claim that life is a cabaret fails in the face of the human cost of the Holocaust, then his positioning of the Emcee as a victim is successful. Linda Sunshine, writing in the introduction to the 1999 illustrated hardback version of the 1998 revival script, says, "at the end of the performance, the audience is shocked silent, often for several minutes, before they began to applaud" (14). I can attest that an audience with which I saw a production of this version of the show at a professional theatre in Memphis in 1999 reacted similarly, sitting in that perplexing "stunned silence" to which Claude Schumacher referred, "wanting to know more although convinced that no knowledge can ever cure him of his perplexity" (8).

This is a far cry from the Fosse version, and Fosse himself denied that he was interested in Weimar politics, saying, "You know, the political aspect of it is being over-emphasized. The most important part of it is the love story" (qtd in Mizejewski 236). It is flabbergasting to think that anyone would create a story set in this era that is simply a "love story," and perhaps Fosse was being disingenuous. After all, he claimed in the same interview that "what was going on in the cabaret was a reflection of what was to come in Germany" (236). Mendes's production contained no such ambiguity, instead telling the audience exactly what its evening in the theatre had been about.

Mendes's revival also distinguished itself from its forebears by bringing the audience into the action. The show, a Theatre Roundabout production, opened at Henry Miller's Theatre[49] before moving to Studio 54, which became the Roundabout venue in 1998. *Cabaret* played the bulk of its run in the latter. Set designer Robert Brill designed an approximately 16-square-foot thrust that broke the line of the proscenium. Though this was the main playing space, action was staged throughout the space, particularly with the Emcee, who left the thrust stage to interact with the audience. At Henry Miller's Theatre, Brill also placed tables for audience members in the front hall mezzanine. When the show moved to Studio 54, Brill made further changes:

> We re-terraced the entire orchestra level for table seating, and then created pairs of theatre seats in the mezzanine that shared a custom arm rest/drink holder with table lamps. To add variety, we featured seating at banquettes mid-orchestra, as well as bar stool/counter seating under the curved scenic catwalks HL/HR and at the rear of the orchestra and balcony. (Brill)

According to Brill, the purpose of the obliteration of the line between the proscenium and the audience, or at least the blurring of that line, was "to create an environment that immersed the audience in the Klub and world of the piece." This might make one wonder if the audience became immersed enough in the environment to imagine itself alongside the Emcee at the play's end. Did Mendes's ending erase the audience's sense of itself as bystanders and instead allow them to see themselves as victims? And, if so, might this have compromised the original creative intent of forcing the audience to see itself as being in some way responsible for genocide?

The multiplicity of past and potential artistic interpretations of *Cabaret* has generated more popular and academic criticism and discussion than any other piece under scrutiny in this

[49] Now the Stephen Sondheim Theatre

study with many of these discussions noting its implications beyond the temporal boundaries of the Holocaust. Alisa Solomon claimed that in the 1960s, *Cabaret* provided "one of America's newest and, it has turned out, enduring and often troubling ways of responding to the Holocaust: making an analogy of it. As the counterculture swelled and the antiwar movement escalated, the Holocaust became the rhetorical limit case of unaccountable evil…" (113). This is reminiscent of Tony Kushner's statement that if we call the Holocaust a "standard of evil," then we must be willing to apply it as such (McLeod 78). While Hal Prince may have intended to use the Weimar era as a comment on American racial issues of the 1960s and Bob Fosse may have intended some comment on the Sexual Revolution and American involvement in Vietnam, *Cabaret* nonetheless functions most effectively as a comment on the events leading up to the Holocaust and, consequently, on the genocides that have followed it. There was certainly no lack of "unaccountable evil" in the form of genocide and other forms of violence against entire ethnicities and cultures next to which to position the Holocaust in the decades following the original Hal Prince production. Within the first decade of the opening of that production and only three years after the release of the film, the Cambodian Massacre would begin in 1975. In just four years, the Khmer Rouge murdered between 1.5 million and 3 million Cambodians, burying them in the Killing Fields (Frey 83). By the time of the Mendes revival on Broadway in 1998, the world would have experienced and, for the most part, ignored genocides in Guatemala, East Timor, Somalia, Iraq, Burundi, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Rwanda (Frey).

While *Cabaret* concerns itself with the time before the Holocaust rather than with that event itself, I nonetheless call it an important work in Holocaust theatre, or "Theatre of the Holocaust," as Robert Skloot calls it, (*Theatre of the Holocaust, Volume 1*, 14) because of its exploration of the bystanderism that would make the Holocaust possible and because of its

explicit look at characters that would become victims of it. It certainly exhibits the five objectives that Skloot identified as essential concerns of playwrights of Theatre of the Holocaust (14). First, it pays homage to the victims via its loving construction of Herr Schultz and of the development and dissolution of his relationship with Fraulein Schneider. Next, it places the audience in the historical fact of the end of the Weimar era and the rise of Nazism and, then, forces an emotional response to that time by showing the characters negotiate their lives there. It also forces the audience to consider the moral question of bystanderism and its own responsibility to actively work against being bystanders through its various uses of mirrors and audience interactions in different productions and through its direct questioning via Fraulein Schneider's song "What Would You Do?" Finally, it teaches us that each of us is responsible for the whole of humanity; if we stand by and do nothing in the face of Auschwitz or the Killing Fields or ISIL, then we are accomplices to murder. The answer to Cain's question was always "yes."

Whether works like *Cabaret* have any visceral effect on the consciousness of their viewers is a difficult question to answer. One possible weakness in its effectiveness may lie in its historical placement well before the beginning not only of the Holocaust but also before Hitler's appointment as Chancellor of Germany and the Reichstag Fire, both in 1933, also the year when Nazi Germany passed its first anti-Jewish laws. Kristallnacht was still eight years away at the end of *Cabaret*, and the Holocaust itself, when the Nazis began their systematic mass murder of Jews, was eleven years away. In his essay historicizing *Cabaret*, Geoffrey Block argues that the number parodying Nazi goose-stepping "seems both too provocative and arguably premature for a cabaret sketch in 1929–1930 (in the musical) or 1931 (the year designated in the film)" (171). It is perhaps not as far-fetched as one might think, then, that Schultz still has faith in his fellow

Germans and that Sally can remain oblivious to the growing problems outside the Kit Kat Klub. Henry Bial is probably correct, therefore, in his assertion that *Cabaret* works so well because its creators avoided the task of dealing in concrete terms with the Holocaust itself, focusing instead on the characters' inability to anticipate in any accurate terms what is coming for them. "*Cabaret* is not about depicting the unthinkable," Bial contends, "it is about depicting our inability to think the unthinkable" (63). By avoiding the issue of how to deal concretely with the events of the Holocaust, the creators of *Cabaret* have enabled audiences to think about the social factors at play that led to the Holocaust and about the critically important issue of bystanderism. The musical form and the humor of the piece serve sometimes to aid in and sometimes to upset the digestion of these ideas. Onstage, the self-deprecating humor of Herr Schultz humanizes a figure who has the huge task of standing in for all the Jews of Europe while the by turns self-deprecating and self-aggrandizing humor of Sally Bowles helps us see a lost girl in search of adoration in the film where we might otherwise see a selfish bore. In all versions of *Cabaret*, the dark, biting wit of the Emcee makes us laugh when we know we should not, which in turn forces us to examine how we behave in the face of dire events affecting the lives and welfare of groups of minorities to which we do not belong. In at least one version of the show, this same quality tells us that we are seeing a character who is doomed. The overall effect of the humor in *Cabaret*, then, is to help us see not only the humanity of the Other, but the humanity, or lack thereof, in ourselves as well.

Mel Brooks and *The Producers*

"We got the wrong play, the wrong cast, the wrong director. What could go right?"

-The Producers

What may well be the most infamous piece in this study is *The Producers*, Mel Brooks's tale of the unexpected and unwelcome success of a Broadway musical of staggering bad taste – *Springtime for Hitler*. Brooks created the first incarnation of *The Producers* in the form of a 1967 motion picture and began working on a musical stage version of it in the late 1990s. That musical opened on Broadway in 2001 and ran for six years, winning a record 12 Tony awards and spawning a slew of international productions and a film adaptation in 2005. However, *The Producers* did not always inspire the reverence that it had achieved by the beginning of the 21st century. Despite winning the Oscar for Best Original Screenplay at the 1968 Academy Awards ceremony, the film's original release inspired mixed reviews and was not a box office hit. Though it has gained a cult following and risen in the estimation of film critics, historians, and viewers since then, it is nonetheless in its form as a stage musical that *The Producers* garnered the most attention at the time of its debut. The success of the piece, at least in its 1967 and 2001 iterations, forces us to ask if there is an ethical cost to using farce in connection to the Holocaust. *The Producers* is set in the late 1950s and features no characters with a direct relationship to the Holocaust, but its centerpiece is the staggeringly tacky *Springtime for Hitler,* performed in part in both film versions and the stage production of *The Producers*. Is the joke of *Springtime for Hitler* made at the expense of victims of the Holocaust? Does our laughter at it somehow dismiss the dead? And could anyone in the world besides Mel Brooks have pulled it off?

Born in 1926 in Brooklyn, Mel Brooks was a descendant of German Jews on his father's side and Russian Jews on his mother's. When Brooks was only two years old, his father died, an

event to which he attributes much of the anger that he would learn to channel as comedy, saying, "It left a brushstroke of depression that never really left" (qtd. in Trachtenberg). He grew up in poverty with four brothers supported by a mother whom Brooks called "a saint" (qtd. in Trachtenberg). According to Brooks, he grew up aware that Hitler was a "bad guy" but did not really understand the scope of the problem until he saw the death camps himself while in Europe during World War II (Trachtenberg). His relationship with his own Jewishness had always been purely secular:

> There's a bit of a myth about me and Jews. I was never religious but always terribly Jewish. (chuckles) I don't know. I would say socially, societally… I was always very Jewish. I like being Jewish (qtd. in Trachtenberg).

His Jewishness would become a significant part of his work, with his biographer Maurice Yacowar referring to his oeuvre as a "comic exploration of the Jew's pathos" (14).

Some years after returning to the United States after the War, Brooks began working for Sid Caesar, whom he had known since high school and who would soon become one of the major stars and architects of the new entertainment medium of television. Initially paying Brooks out of his own pocket for jokes on the set of the 1949 series *The Admiral Broadway Review*, Caesar kept Brooks on in an unofficial capacity when that series became the groundbreaking *Your Show of Shows* in 1950 (Yacowar 18-19). For the show's second season, Brooks was hired as a full-fledged member of the writing staff, a crew that also included Neil Simon, Selma Diamond, Michael Stewart, Joseph Stein, and Carl Reiner, who was also a performer on the series and who would become a longtime collaborator with Brooks. While at *Your Show of Shows*, Brooks developed what Yacowar calls his "characteristic tone. He turned a simple, candid deflating perspective upon large, pretentious characters and situations" (36). We can see

this in his takedown of the Broadway establishment in *The Producers* as well as in his film parodies like *Blazing Saddles* and *High Anxiety*, which lovingly but pointedly ridicule familiar Hollywood film tropes and, by extension, Hollywood itself.

Well before Brooks began making motion pictures parodying other motion pictures and motion picture genres, he created shorter parodies for *Your Show of Shows*, not only perfecting his ability to employ and manipulate the generic qualities of the form but also honing his philosophies on comedy. One of his central beliefs is that the performer play against the urge to consciously try to be funny: "Never, never try to be funny! The actors must be serious. Only the situation must be absurd. Funny is in the writing, not in the performing. And another thing, the more serious the situation, the funnier the comedy can be. The greatest comedy plays against the greatest tragedy" (qtd. in Yacowar viii). Thus, Gene Wilder's hysterics when Leo Bloom panics over the need for his blue security blanket in *The Producers* is as wildly funny as it is because the actor as character means it so deeply.

Every incarnation of the piece depends upon ludicrous situation piling upon ludicrous situation ad infinitum while single-minded, obsessed characters negotiate their ways through them. What made the original film and the stage musical work was the impassioned energy resulting from the utter commitment to the stakes in the film. Everyone in each cast seem to believe profoundly in the situations in which he found himself, a quality that seemed lacking in the 2005 film adaptation of the musical. The situations are more than simple snowballing action sequences, however, though those are often part of the piece. Brooks has points to make, though he himself is often disingenuous about what they may be. On the one hand, he says, "behind the laughs there's an examination of good and bad, of greed, rottenness, pettiness. It's important for me to have a philosophical base, even though I may disguise it" (Yacowar 2); on the other, he

says, “I don’t think in terms of results at all. I think: what next insanity can I shock the world with” (2). As Yacowar argues, a Brooks film parody is “a fight back, a corrective, an awakener” (8). In *Blazing Saddles*, the Black cowboy, so often missing from the traditional narrative, becomes the hero. In *Young Frankenstein*, the monster at long last finds love. In *The Producers*, Hitler is the buffoon. Perhaps more importantly and certainly more successfully in the last piece, Brooks exposes the showbiz trappings of fascism and then shows us how eager the audience is to buy into them.

The outrageous situation in the film *The Producers* develops when accountant Leo Bloom shows up to do the books of theatre producer Max Bialystock, whom Leo catches romancing an elderly woman to get her to invest in his next show. While working, Leo mentions in passing that a show that flops could potentially make more money for its producer than a hit show if the producer raises more money than he needs. After convincing Leo that the plan could make them both rich, Max continues romancing elderly ladies, selling them over 1000 percent of the show, which is the worst, most tasteless script they could find – *Springtime for Hitler: A Gay Romp with Adolf and Eva at Berchtesgaden*. After securing the ineptest director in town, they mount the show on Broadway only to see to their dismay the show become a major hit. After their plan is exposed, they are sent to prison where they recreate the scheme with a prison musical. The plot of the musical version of *The Producers* is essentially the same until Leo and Ulla, the pair’s Swedish secretary, run away with the money to Brazil. Leo’s conscience convinces him to return to the U.S., however, where he stands trial with Max. The two go to prison, and the musical ends as the film does.

The climax of each incarnation of *The Producers* is the production of *Springtime for Hitler*. The segment opens with a dancing chorus dressed in lederhosen and other traditional

German folk apparel singing of how Germany needs someone to restore it to "glory." When they ask who their savior could be, they gesture to center stage where a curtain parts to reveal a sparkling staircase lined with women dressed in costume pieces adorned with signifiers of German culture: pretzels, beer steins, Wagnerian Valkyrie headpieces, etc. Much like performers from Florenz Ziegfeld's Broadway spectacles of the early 20th century, the statuesque women parade down the stairs while a tenor dressed in the uniform of a German stormtrooper sings the title song. Following this promenade, a group of stormtroopers enter for a dance break interrupted by comic lines like "I was born in Düsseldorf and that is why they call me Rolf" and the infamous "Don't be stupid; be a smarty! Come and join the Nazi party!"[50] The male dancers are joined by female stormtroopers in short pants who soon create a Rockette-style kick-line. All the dancers then join to form a swastika that revolves in the style of Busby-Berkeley constructions. Shots of these travesties of familiar musical tropes are intercut with shots of the audience sitting aghast with mouths hanging open while Franz Liebkind, the show's author and a devout Nazi who only wants to rehabilitate the Fürher's name, smiles in glee at the onstage spectacle. We also see audience members walk out while Max and Leo congratulate themselves on what is sure to be a failure. As the number ends, the otherwise silent audience members turn to beat the one applauding audience member with their programs.

Everything changes, however, when the chorus number ends and Hitler takes the stage. In the original film, Max and Leo find their Hitler in the form of Lorenzo St. DuBois. DuBois, whose initials are "L.S.D.," is a flower child, or at least he is Mel Brooks's idea of a flower child. Dick Shawn, the actor who played L.S.D., would have been in his early 40s when filming *The Producers*, and he looked it. Furthermore, his costume seems to conflate the Beat

[50] The latter line is recording of Mel Brooks lip-synched by one of the stormtroopers.

Generation with the Flower Power era and also features a Campbell's soup can hanging on a chain around his neck, an obvious allusion to Andy Warhol, who was a part of neither movement. The setting of *The Producers* in the late 1950s make the allusions to Flower Power and Warhol even more confusing. L.S.D. shows up at the Hitler audition accidentally, and Max knows immediately that he is so wrong for the role that he is further guarantee of a flop. L.S.D. plays Hitler as himself – he is petulant and childish, and he speaks in the patois of a young person as drawn by an adult who really has no idea what that would sound like. The audience left behind begins to laugh, and those who have exited to the lobby begin to trickle back into the auditorium. The only audience member not amused by L.S.D.'s performance is Liebkind, who, enraged by the audience's laughter, brings down the curtain and harangues them from the stage, whereupon someone behind the curtain knocks him out. The audience thinks this is all part of the show and eats it up, and their word of mouth makes it a hit.

If we see the audience for *Springtime for Hitler* as the conventional bourgeoisie Broadway audience of the 1950s and 1960s, then, we might also see L.S.D. as a critique of the liberal youth movements of the 1950s and 1960s. By using a flower child/Beatnik as the object of the most ridicule in the film, Kirsten Fermaglich argues, Brooks was "expressing a critique of the counterculture that was common to many liberal, middle-aged men and women of the era: the counterculture was a proto-fascist movement" (63). Presumably, Fermaglich refers to the intransigence that can develop on either side of the American political spectrum and believes that the liberals of the previous generation saw an ironic rigidity in the new counter culture movement that rejected totally those who did not agree with it. Brooks, therefore, encapsulates the cultural fear of two distinct strands of potential fascism in one ridiculous character, using that character to reduce the threat of both Hitler and the 1960s American counter culture.

Brooks avoids the conflation of Hitler and the counter-culture movement in 2001 by creating a completely different Hitler for the musical. He also moves the setting forward about 10 years to the late 1960s. In this version, Franz Liebkind, whose surname translates into English as "love child," as if he were Hitler's bastard child searching for legitimacy for himself and his father, becomes *Springtime*'s Hitler when his frustration at the inept actors auditioning for the role leads him to demonstrate to them how to perform the very silly and funny "Haben Sie gehört das Deutsche band?" His performance instantly wins him the role, but on opening night, he breaks his leg immediately after being told to do so for good luck. Only the flamboyant director Roger de Bris knows the role well enough to step in. De Bris, whose surname is both a word for the Jewish circumcision ritual and a synonym for trash, is a walking collection of ridiculous and potentially offensive stereotypes of gay men in the original film as well as in the musical and its subsequent film. Played hilariously by Christopher Hewitt in 1967 and by Gary Beach in a Tony-Award-winning performance in 2001 and 2005, De Bris is mass of neuroses attended by his constant companion Carmen Ghia and his uber-gay artistic staff. Beach consciously channeled Judy Garland in his performance as Hitler, a performance he recreated at the 2009 Kennedy Center Honors, where Brooks was honored for his contributions to the arts in the United States. Beach simpers and lisps and flutters his wrists with every movement he makes, but as offensive as these stereotypes are, they somehow become less important than the power and hilarity of the performance while we are viewing it. When stepping away from the performance and thinking critically about the it and the "update" of Hitler from Beat artist to gay theatre artist, however, it becomes difficult to stomach. In his review of the musical in *The New Republic*, Robert Brustein dismisses concerns about the depiction of De Bris and his artistic crew as archaic gay caricatures as trivial, saying, "some gays may find this kind of send-up insulting in the hands of an outsider;

but it really is no different from the kind of bitchy humor gays often turn on themselves" (27). Mr. Brustein has a habit, however, of not expanding his interest in civil liberties and civility beyond his group of white liberal heterosexual males, as evidenced in his public arguments with August Wilson regarding the need for Black theatres and his recent dismissal of the #MeToo movement, when he sniped that the "witches" of 17th-century America are now "doing the hunting" (Shanahan). While it might be easy to dismiss Brustein's statement as the opinion of a man attempting to justify his own or his culture's dismissal of the concerns of gay people (or Black people or women, for that matter), the fact remains that Brooks made gays the butt of the joke in the 2001 incarnation of the show and that audiences – even gay audiences – showed up in droves and loved it.

One thing that perhaps makes the piece so accessible is that it does not ever refer directly to the Holocaust or even, as Fermaglich points, to Jews (66), something that Brooks himself has said he is unable to do (*The Last Laugh*). Instead, Fermaglich argues, he uses the symbols of the Third Reich to criticize "the tastelessness, shallowness, and even immorality of American middle-class life" (66). In other words, he does not ridicule Hitler as much as he ridicules America's desire to live a vapid life free from critical thinking, and he uses the ease and even eagerness with which we embrace a ridiculous Hitler to prove it. All that is missing is our propensity to tell those directly affected by the joke to "get over it."

This is not to say that Brooks is ambivalent about the Holocaust or German's role in it:

> Me? Not like the Germans? Why should I not like Germans? Just because they're arrogant and have fat necks and do anything they're told so long as it's cruel, and killed millions of Jews in concentration camps and made soap out of their bodies

> and lamp shades out of their skins? Is that any reason to hate their fucking guts? (qtd. in Yacowar 17)

There is no ambivalence here; clearly, Brooks takes great delight in his takedown of Hitler. He argues that any statement he might try to make about Hitler in a serious way would be lost in a sea of similar arguments but that *Springtime for Hitler* makes his statement stand out from the rest, claiming that "you can bring down totalitarian governments faster by using ridicule than you can with invective" (qtd. in Yacowar 81). We must remember, though, that both Charlie Chaplin and Bertolt Brecht tried to do just that while the Nazi government was actually functioning in *The Great Dictator* (1940) and *The Resisitible Rise of Arturo Ui* (1941), respectively, and both failed. In this respect, *The Producers* winds up being little more than a revenge fantasy, but there is something deeply satisfying in indulging revenge fantasies.

Critics disagree as to the extent that the American public had assimilated the Holocaust by the release of the film in 1967. As mentioned earlier in this dissertation, Holocaust awareness as we know it now was slow to develop in the U.S. Though there was discussion of the event throughout the late 1940s and 1950s, the discourse was filtered through existing paradigms; there was little to no understanding of the Holocaust as a singularity (Baron 62). Instead, people saw the persecution of the Jews by the Nazis as "war casualties and crimes" (Baron 63). Despite the attempts of the State Department and Office of War Information (OWI) to silence news of Germany's plans and efforts to exterminate the Jews, information about the systemic torture and murder under the Third Reich had begun to trickle out as early as 1942 (Baron 63). In 1944, *Life* magazine ran a pictorial article about the death camp of Majdanek in Poland after that camp's liberation. That same year, the War Refugee Board (WRB), against the wishes of the State Department and OWI, released information about the gassing at Auschwitz. With the liberation

of all the German death camps in 1945, news of the murders of millions of Jews reached the States. Soon after that, the international press covered the Nuremberg Trials closely. Throughout the 1950s, pioneering histories and investigations began to appear in print, though they would compete in the public consciousness with the Cold War. Scholars are divided as to the magnitude of the effect these works had on the public at the time (Baron 66-67), but most agree that the well-documented, televised Eichmann trial of 1962 was a watershed moment in the history of Holocaust awareness in the U.S. Yacowar argues that in 1967 Brooks "assails the assimilation of the Holocaust" (73). Citing the audition sequence in which dozens of potential Hitlers take the stage to audition for the lead in *Springtime*, he contends that the abundance of singing and dancing Führers is an indication of society's assimilation and consequent reduction of him (73). Thane Rosenbaum disagrees, however, asserting that the fact that the audience stayed away from the film during its original release is testament to the shock that the world was still experiencing due to learning about the Holocaust (4). By 2001, however, audiences had grown inured to shock (4) and had perhaps even acquired a touch of Holocaust fatigue; fewer had trouble laughing at *Springtime*. Fermaglich contends that the reception of *The Producers* in 2001 indicates that "many American Jews, now comfortably ensconced in the American middle class, embraced the outrageous premise of the play as a signal of their triumph over Nazism" (60). While it is clear that we have grown accustomed to Holocaust imagery in an artistic context, however, I think that it remains difficult to ascertain the extent to which this familiarity has bred a sense of triviality into these images. That an audience can laugh at a burlesque of Hitler is not a reliable indication that the same audience takes lightly the historical facts of the Holocaust.

It becomes problematic, however, if the audience is unaware of those historical facts, and despite the preponderance of required Holocaust units in American middle and high school

history classes, the level of awareness of what actually occurred seems to be low. Beth Bonstetter, a professor in the Mass Communications department of Adams University in Colorado, wrote in 2011 that she had shown the original film version of *The Producers* to a class and asked them what was being critiqued. They said that nothing was being critiqued and that *Springtime for Hitler* was there strictly for "shock value" (18). Bonstetter notes that if the point is missed, then *Springtime* becomes ineffective at best and virulently anti-Semitic at worst. Instead of taking a stand against prejudice, then, it can wind up furthering it.

When considering the success of *The Producers*, particularly in its 2001 incarnation, we can see that the success of *Springtime for Hitler* is both a meta-comment and prediction. Eventually, the success of *Springtime* becomes reality in the success of *The Producers.* It is as if Brooks knew that eventually, audiences would "grow weary of the pieties surrounding the Holocaust" (Rosenbaum 2). If those pieties have grown calcified, leaving the Holocaust as a sacred cow untouchable and, therefore, impenetrable, then we are right to have grown weary of them and to interrogate the discourse surrounding the event in different ways. Rosenbaum argues that Brooks "knew that one day art, commerce and atrocity would conspire to diminish the crimes of the Nazis by turning them into money-making entertainment" (4). As he goes on to note, however, "the Nazis meant business" (4). This is indisputable; nothing can make the Nazis less than they were, not even a well-fired salvo of snark from a Jewish boy from Brooklyn. Does his takedown of Nazis help us face our fear of them? Maurice Yacowar thinks so:

> For Brooks, comedy and man's sense of his insecure existence are not separate concerns. Indeed much of his comedy confronts the various forms of human dread. In raising man's nightmares, Brooks's comedy helps us to face, not to

> forget, our sources of anxiety and terror. It is healthier and more responsible to joke about the Holocaust than to forget it. (49)

I would think it matters greatly, however, to those at whom the joke is aimed.

In 2001, *The New Republic* referred to Brooks as "the man who buried Hitler" in the headline of Robert Brustein's review of the premiere of *The Producers* on Broadway. Brustein places Brooks in a line of Hitler satirizers with Chaplin and Brecht. What he fails to note, however, is the significant fact that Chaplin and Brecht created their satires before the world knew of the atrocities committed against the Jews. If Brooks is to "bury" Hitler – and I assume this means something along the lines of reducing him to insignificance – he is going to have to do more than make him sing and dance. Both those who have decried Brooks for minimizing the Holocaust by making Hitler a fool and those who have celebrated his "burial" of Hitler are equally wrong. A revenge fantasy is just that. The facts of Hitler and the Holocaust do not change because we can laugh at the absurdity of *Springtime for Hitler*. Nor does *The Producers* offer us "catharsis through laughter," as Katherine Baber claims. These critics all give the piece more power than it has. Cynthia Ozick calls it a "burlesque," claiming that "it intends nothing more serious than a giggle" ("In Defense"). I find that I have travelled from being uncomfortable with some of Ozick's criticisms at the beginning of this work to agreeing with her in some cases. She is much closer to the truth here than Brustein and Baber. Brooks and audiences may take some small satisfaction from giggling at Hitler, but this does not minimize the horrible significance of that which he wrought.

CONCLUSION

When I began working on this piece, I was deeply concerned that an aversion to using comedy to explore Holocaust themes on the part of critics might bury thoughtful, worthy plays and films before the public could see them, but, of course, that does not really happen. The public cares very little for what most critics, whether scholarly critics or simple newspaper reviewers, have to say. What has prevented more Holocaust comedies from being created and produced has much more to do with vision and nerve, I think. Most writers are either understandably unable to see comic potential in an exploration of the Holocaust or are reluctant to share what comic vision they may have. When even award-winning, popular works like *Life is Beautiful* are savaged by some critics despite its great depth and beauty just for having the temerity to be a comedy, then only the very brave or the very foolhardy will be willing to take the risk of offering their Holocaust comedy up for mass consumption. ,

The obvious next step in this work is to include film and television and, perhaps, stand-up comedy. Pearle Fernstein has made a recent and thoughtful – and funny! – contribution to this field of study via her 2016 documentary *The Last Laugh*, examining humor and the Holocaust as well as attitudes toward it through discussions with comedians and Holocaust survivors about what they find funny in relation to the Holocaust and how they reveal it. None of them find the Holocaust itself funny. Generally, their humor satirizes outsiders' (i.e. gentiles') attitudes toward the Holocaust or, in the case of survivors, grows out of a grim coping mechanism that helped them live through and after Auschwitz. In terms of scripted comic works outside of stand-up, it is, perhaps unsurprisingly, from television that the most problematic comic works connected to the Holocaust have come. With its fast pace and its primary function as an intermediary between consumer and advertiser, television must develop work that appeals across a wide range of

viewers of varying levels of sophistication who ingest their entertainment between commercial breaks. While the growth of cable and internet television has certainly changed this and will continue to do so, the examples of Holocaust-related humor that television has given us thus far – primarily *Hogan's Heroes*; *'Allo! 'Allo!*; and the jaw-droppingly terrible *Heil Honey I'm Home!* – are the works that make the best arguments in support of those critics who solely on principle disapprove of using humor to examine the Holocaust. Film, however, like theatre, provides the opportunity for more carefully constructed work developed over a longer period of time and edited into a thoughtful piece. The aforementioned *Life is Beautiful*, as well as the devastating *Train of Hope* and the wicked *Seven Beauties* and *Inglourious Basterds*, like the plays and films in this study, make comments on the Holocaust and our relationship to it that give us insight that is worth considering. To reject these works before the fact simply because they use humor to do so is to close oneself off from the potential to consider intelligent, deeply felt meditations on the darkest period of the 20th century and on man's inhumanity to man.

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