

Sue Vice

# Journeying into Uncertainty: Representations of Memory Loss in Kindertransport Fiction and Drama

In this essay, I ask why the image of memory loss, one that is often explicitly identified as dementia, appears in close association with contemporary representations of the Kindertransport. In doing so, I will explore the figure of the former *Kind*, or refugee child, in plays by Wendy Graf and Rose Lewenstein, as well as fiction by Linda Newbery.<sup>1</sup> Detailed readings of these works reveal a fictive ambivalence about forgetting on the part of individuals whose experience is firmly associated in the public mind with its opposite, that of remembrance in the form of memorial and educational practices. Although the *Kinder* are sometimes described as refugees or exiles rather than survivors, the Kindertransport initiative is central to “public narratives about the Holocaust,” notably so in Britain (Sharples 2012, 15). We might expect portrayals of dementia in this context to be symbolic expressions of anxiety at the impending end of the “era of the witness” (Wieviorka 2006). However, despite a focus on childhood disruption, each of the twenty-first century examples discussed here has a more consolatory effect than this suggests.

The presence of the image of dementia in the examples here contrasts with previous fictional versions of the Kindertransport experience, in which loss of memory is associated with suppression rather than disease, and its recovery with anguish rather than reassurance (Brookner 1988; Sebald 2001). This absence of consolation is also evident in an earlier text which this essay’s twenty-first-century examples recall in intertextual terms, Diane Samuels’s play *Kindertransport*, first staged in 1993. Dementia’s role as an organic state that entails forgetting acts in the more recent works to absolve the former *Kind* of responsibility for managing the memory of the past and to pass the mantle of its recall to the next generation. This entails an “optimistic” effect (Behrendt 2010, 400), with an emphasis on mollification and coming to terms with the past that might sit uncomfortably with the painful nature of what is remembered.

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<sup>1</sup> While a Kindertransport background is unmistakably present in Newbery’s *Sisterland* and alluded to in Lewenstein’s *Now This Is Not the End*, the former refugee Eva in Graf’s *Leipzig* has, rather, travelled directly from Germany to the United States – even though her story includes details so familiar from the Kindertransport experience that critics assumed this was the context for her protagonist’s history too.

Despite their transformation of an often-harrowing history into narratives with a positive tenor, the historical background to the Kindertransport and its contemporary standing is significant in these recent representations. The initiative brought 10,000 unaccompanied children, principally from Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia, to Britain just before the war, starting a month after the so-called Kristallnacht pogrom of 9/10 November 1938 and ending when war broke out nearly a year later. The trajectory of Kindertransport representations follows that of Holocaust literature more broadly, in the sense that the witness genres of testimony and poetry from the early post-war years (Gissing 1988; Mayer 1999) have been succeeded by the symbolic portrayals of fiction (Riggs 2011; Graham 2015), even if, as in the case of Alison Pick's novel *Far to Go* (2010), they are often still based on family history. Such a pattern can equally be seen in the careers of individual writers. The former Kindertransport refugees Lore Segal and Karen Gershon both published testimonial writing about their experience of relocation in the immediate post-war period, then turned more definitively to fiction in the following decades (Segal 1964, 2013; Gershon 1966, 1980). The works discussed in the present essay fall into a category that is even further removed from testimony and could be described as a historically based realism that draws on archetypal or mythic structures (see Krongold 2020). In such a genre, the by-now familiar details of a *Kind's* journey and life are adapted by writers without biographical connections to these events for broader symbolic or didactic purposes.

The increasingly significant and celebratory public memory of the Kindertransport, as shown by such events as the commemoration of the death of the British founder of the Czech initiative, Sir Nicholas Winton, in 2015 and the 80th anniversary conferences and exhibitions in London and Berlin in 2019, underlies the realist myths characterising its representation in the twenty-first century, which persist despite the revelation of more uncomfortable truths in recent historical reassessments (Craig-Norton 2019). The events of the Kindertransport are used in Britain to introduce schoolchildren to the topic of the Holocaust, in formal education as well as in museal spaces such as the National Holocaust Centre in Laxton, UK (Pearce 2018; Vice 2018). In these contexts, the fact of the children's leaving home to be saved is emphasised, while the backdrop of the murder of most of those who were left behind tends to be omitted (McDonald 2018). By contrast to the triumphal national narrative in Britain, the high personal cost of the Kindertransport is foregrounded in the texts analysed here. It is implied that such rupture and exile can be explicitly acknowledged only under the condition of dementia, as a state that makes plausible the fictional characters' state of memory loss. In these twenty-first-century examples, therefore, it seems that forgetting is the condition for remembering.

## 1 Suppressed memory: Diane Samuels, *Kindertransport* (1992)

One of the best-known literary versions of this refugee experience is Diane Samuels's play, simply called *Kindertransport*, first performed in Britain in 1993 and in the United States a year later. Its plot underlies several of those mentioned here, whether overtly or implicitly, in challenging the notion of the *Kinderttransport* as simply a rescue story with a happy ending. In Samuels's play, we learn that the Jewish child Eva Schlesinger travelled from Hamburg to Britain in 1939 where she was adopted by Lil, a kindly mother figure. In her eagerness to fit in to her new British surroundings, Eva changed her name to Evelyn and her birth date to that of her arrival in the new country. The audience learns that Evelyn was baptised and, in later life, hid her Jewish ancestry from her daughter Faith, who discovers it during the action of the play.

The setting of *Kindertransport* is the attic of Evelyn's London house, yet it opens on a scene from the past, as Eva's mother, Helga, is getting her daughter ready to leave Germany for Britain in 1939. This is a staging not just of Evelyn's past but of its role in her memory. We see in theatrical terms that the protagonist is haunted by the history she has hidden, in the form of the child Eva and adult Evelyn appearing on stage together, as the stage directions make plain. The past is shown, as Samuels (1995, vii) puts it, not "to explain how things are now, but as a part of the inner life of the present." This psychological perception is enacted as Helga in 1939 teaches her daughter to thread a needle, the staging allowing two temporal zones to coexist:

HELGA: You have to be able to manage on your own.

EVA: Why? [. . .]

HELGA: See. You don't need me. It's good.

*The door opens. EVELYN enters. (2)*

The adult Evelyn walks through the door onto this scene from her own past, construed by her in the present, just as it was at the time, as one of abandonment. Evelyn's "inner child," in Eric Berne's phrase (1961, 199), is still fully present. Later, we learn that Evelyn's parents were deported to Auschwitz but her mother survived, yet when they are reunited after six years apart, her daughter cannot acknowledge her. Thus, the observation by the real-life former *Kind* Edward Mendelsohn, included in the published script's prefatory collection of personal accounts, that neither he nor his parents "were able to find in each other the hoped-for

image we had built up during our period of separation” (Samuels 1995, xv), is acted out:

EVA: I wish you had died.

HELGA: I wish you had lived. (86)

These expressionist utterances originate in the characters’ psyches, rather than constituting naturalistic dialogue, serving to remind the audience that the “primitive” (Klein 1975, 8) responses of childhood have lived on in Evelyn’s mind. This is a syndrome that the conceit of dementia’s medically necessitated reversions to the past in the later examples makes manifest.

There is no dementia in Samuels’s play. Evelyn and the other characters frequently use the verb ‘forget’ but in the sense of a deliberate act of putting aside or concealment. In the examples that follow, the opposite is the case, and forgetting due to neurological changes in the brain releases a hidden history. However, as the persistence of a repudiated past in *Kindertransport* suggests, the ground is established for dementia’s appearance in the later works as the vehicle for the return of the repressed (see also Krüger-Fürhoff in the present volume). Other aspects of the play are influential in this way, including a focus on hiding and rediscovering a suppressed Jewish ancestry, the haunting of the present by a lost or rejected German parent, the figure of a daughter or granddaughter who tries to unearth the history’s true details and the inheritance of tainted “structures of feeling” (Sierz 2015) over generations, including emotions of fear and withholding passed on from mother to child.

## 2 Retrieved memory: Wendy Graf, *Leipzig* (2006)

The influence of *Kindertransport* on the new generation of realist myths of dementia is apparent in Wendy Graf’s play *Leipzig*, first performed in Los Angeles in 2006. *Leipzig* follows a dramatic pattern very close to that of Samuels’s play, although Graf has not cited it as a forebear. Even the play’s title seems responsive to the earlier work: while *Kindertransport* emphasises the transition from one mode of life in Germany to another in Britain, the naming of *Leipzig* after the eponymous city draws attention to the protagonist’s originary location and her wish to return there at the end of her life.

The central character in *Leipzig* is now living in Boston, and she, like the character in the earlier play, is also called Eva. She too has hidden the Jewish refugee element of her German past from her daughter Helen and has brought

her only child up as a Catholic. The Eva of *Leipzig* pretends that her former governess Bridget, the adoptive American parent who is the counterpart to Samuels's character Lil, is her biological mother. But the new element in this case is that the ageing Eva in Graf's play has begun to suffer from dementia. As Eva's memory loss worsens, it prompts her to wish explicitly to recall the past, as she declares to her daughter Helen:

EVA: I don't want to forget about it. All my life everyone told me to forget. I tried to push it down, bury it, rub it out, but it was always there, every day . . . always with me.

(Graf 2006a, 16)

This contrasts with Samuels's play, where Evelyn's memories are, rather, the unwelcome signs of an inability to suppress the past. Nonetheless, as in *Kindertransport*, Eva's present in *Leipzig* is peopled by the spectres of her now-dead German family. They appear on stage in the form of a memory-scape, by means of which we learn that Eva in this case has also interpreted being sent away from home as a rejection, and we hear her plead with her father, "Please, Vati, please [. . .] let me stay!" (43). The parents address their daughter in the present, so that the voice of her long-dead mother is more real to Eva than that of her own daughter Helen, as is evident in a late scene set in a nursing home:

MUTTI: Tell her you want some pie.

EVA: I . . . pie.

*Helen is visibly happy.*

HELEN: Yes, pie! Of course you remember pie! (75)

The script notes to *Leipzig* claim that, just as in Samuels's *Kindertransport*, "Throughout the play, past and present intertwine and often collide, emotionally and physically" (Graf 2006b, 2), so that, although the dialogue is almost entirely in English, we are given to imagine that Eva communicates with the characters of her past in German. The collision of temporal zones is evident in a scene where the child Eva plays in a park in Germany with her parents. In the present, Helen, who knows nothing of her mother's history, and her father, George, although he shares his wife's secret, interpret Eva's behaviour simply as evidence of dementia's unmotivated confusions, as the stage directions reveal:

We hear faint park music again. No one hears it except for Eva [and the audience]. She listens for a moment, hums along with it. Helen and George look at her strangely, then exchange glances. Mutti appears in a dim light and calls to Eva. (Graf 2006a, 10)

This scene dramatises the fact that Eva's German family are "all newly alive in her disintegrating memory" (Citron 2006), while showing again the benefits of a theatrical representation of memory's palimpsestic qualities. The stage directions for Graf's play convey the potential for lighting and music to "parenthesize" the different temporal layers of disordered recall, while the characters of the past are made visible or vanish through "scrimms or other illusions" that take place outside "the realistic exits of the stage" (Graf 2006a, 2).

All the works discussed here draw on a pattern of mnemonic objects, including jewellery, photographs, letters and food, and some of those in *Leipzig* seem to signify not only the refugee child's past but also the play's intertextual memory. Graf's Eva is given by her mother "a gold and pearl Jewish star" (Graf 2006a, 16), sewn into the hem of her dress, whereas in Samuels's play, Evelyn is given a star of unadorned gold, hidden in the heel of her shoe. This detail sums up the difference between the plays: in *Leipzig*, it is Helen who is intrigued to find Eva's carefully preserved star in the present, while in *Kindertransport*, Evelyn remembers selling hers after the war, claiming to her adoptive mother that she would never wear it. While Graf's play represents the recuperation of lost memory and of the protagonist's Jewish faith, the mode of Samuels's is one of renewed suppression and failure. Following this difference, in Graf's *Leipzig*, the painful past of the *Kindertransport* experience is transformed into reclamation and heroism. Despite her dementia, Eva is able to reflect upon her own condition:

EVA: I can't remember some things that just happened, or sometimes even what word to say, but then, out of nowhere, I remember something from so long ago. (39)

Eva's retrievals do not include her parents, since their having died in Treblinka leaves her freer than Samuels's Eva to mourn and indeed to venerate them. In this sense, the audience witnesses a conflict between the play's efforts to represent a traumatised subjectivity yet conclude with the "messages of hope and resilience" (Oulton 2017) fitting both to its North American context and to conventional dramatic form. Ironically, given its entailing debilitation and suffering as well as the return of distressing memories of historical violence and loss, it is the presence of dementia that resolves this thematic conflict by allowing the protagonist to forget some of the painful aspects of the past. It does so by cancelling out Eva's inability to love – her confession of having been unable to "reach" her daughter is overridden by her declaration that "I love you, Helen. I want to tell you that, while I still remember" (Graf 2006a, 44) – and by presenting a dramatic version of postmemory's intergenerational transfer of memory, similar to that in *Kindertransport* in being acted out by the refugee's daughter. Yet the affective outcome is once more symptomatically at odds in each case: while Faith, in Samuels's play, conducts her investigations and aims to find her

German roots against her mother's wishes, Helen in Graf's play does so to supplement Eva's failing memory and to plan a longed-for return visit to the city of her mother's birth.

Graf describes the genesis of her play in encountering the stories of former child refugees from Germany now living in the United States. She had initially planned to write a play simply about survivors but was unable to do so. When a relative developed Alzheimer's, the encounter with dementia meant that, as the playwright puts it, "A light went off in my head. The refugees, the Kindertransport children, the hidden survivors . . . What if someone had a secret they tried their whole life to forget, and now they were desperate to remember, before it was too late? Thus the birth of *Leipzig*" (Graf 2006b). This comment is significant in relation to all the examples mentioned here. It implies that dementia was welcomed by Graf as an apparently innovative pretext for showing the return of the suppressed past, in the case of her character Eva, as the result of a deliberate choice on her part as well as involuntary recall. Such a scenario is, as Graf's comment about the shift from survivor to refugee implies, more likely in the case of the former *Kind*, for developmental as well as historical reasons.

Eva is a subject with agency over her own memory throughout Graf's fictional version of dementia. Rather than the disruptive survival of a mother changed beyond recognition, as we encounter it in *Kindertransport*, in *Leipzig* the deaths of all Eva's family members are offset by the heroism of her brother Erich, who was killed as a member of the camp resistance at Sachsenhausen. In an image of memory retrieved, Helen's father, George, finds a letter sent to Eva in 1942 on the occasion of Erich's death, even preserving his voice so that it is heard in the present: "I must do something. I must fight back!" (Graf 2006a, 73). Thus, this play about a suppressed legacy of historical atrocity nonetheless ends on the triumphant image of Helen embracing her mother, "making sure she hears and understands," to declare that "[Erich] was a hero. A great hero. We come from this, Mom [. . .] This is who we come from!" (84).

### **3 Third-generation memory: Rose Lewenstein, *Now This Is Not the End* (2015)**

The denouement of *Leipzig* offers a consolatory version of the bleak British story of Samuels's play, giving dementia a redemptive role and implying for good measure that armed resistance is the only valorised response in the Holocaust years (Epstein 2008, 286). The generic and structural pressures to resolve in positive terms even material of this comfortless kind are evident in another

British play about a former refugee, which likewise ends positively, suggesting that the explanation for the difference from *Kindertransport* lies in the symbolic weight given to the image of dementia in each case.

Rose Lewenstein's play *Now This Is Not the End* was first staged in London in 2015. Its action takes place in London and Berlin and, like the earlier plays, is set in an attic full of boxes and suitcases being packed for a journey. This is a visual correlative for both time frames, that is, the departure of a child, once more called Eva, from Germany to Britain in the past, set against her granddaughter Rosie's reluctance in the present to leave Berlin, where she is studying German. As the stage directions in Graf's *Leipzig* emphasise, such a scenario conveys "the jumble" (Graf 2006a) of the former refugee's mind, with its burden of remembrance and concealments.

However, in Lewenstein's play the realm of the past is not staged, by contrast to Samuels's and Graf's. The limiting of the visible action to the twenty-first-century present and making Eva's Berlin history and her lost family simply the subject of dialogue is motivated by the fact that in this case it is the millennial Rosie who is the play's central character. Eva's history gains significance through its features emerging in relation to her granddaughter's life, although it is not lived experience for Rosie. Rosie's "ear for German" (Lewenstein 2015, 9) implies the existence of a "genetic signature" (Sierz 2015), rather than a full historical knowledge, to link the younger woman with the country that she, in a version of her grandmother's history, does not want to leave. To convey their affinity, one absent from Eva's relationship with her daughter Susan, the play opens with the grandmother's disembodied voice calling from her nursing home to leave a garbled voicemail message for Rosie at her Berlin apartment:

EVA: Rosie, are you there? . . . I want to know what it is you would like for your birthday. Is it Easter soon or Christmas? . . . There's a man who comes to dig up the flowers . . . I told him it's too late. They'll all be dead in ten years.

Well. Why shouldn't I have Christmas if I want to? (Lewenstein 2015, 5)

We gain a sense here of Eva's memory loss and love for her granddaughter, as well as a hint, in her formal English and defensive remark about Christmas, at a particular refugee history. Even the apparently mysterious description of the gardener emerges from a subjectivity that perceives atrocity and death in the everyday. In a more complete utterance from three years earlier that occurs later in the play, we learn that it is not plants but Holocaust survivors of whom Eva claims, "Well, they say they'll all be dead in ten years" (25). In this way, the recorded message not only sets the scene for the action to follow but constitutes an auditory version of the legacy that Eva has passed on to Rosie.

In *Now This Is Not the End*, the occluded history of violence and expulsion is shown, as it is in the other plays, through its inherited effects, in particular Susan's feeling unloved by her mother and overprotectiveness in turn for her daughter. It is also a plot device in the form of the search on Susan's part for a lost cassette tape of her mother talking about her past. This tape is a counterpart to the voicemail message, revealing that even technology of this kind is an unreliable substitute for living survivor memory, as Eva says: "There'll come a point where nobody can remember" (Lewenstein 2015, 69). Her story can be heard only by means of a flashback to the moment of its recording in 2004, since in the play's present moment of 2015 the onstage destruction of the tape when it is eventually found conveys the equal fragility of Eva's memory.

In the context of Eva's dementia, its factual credentials bolstered by such details as our learning that she has been prescribed the experimental drug Reminyl, the recall of her German past is fragmentary or involuntary. These factors make the presence of the disease in Lewenstein's play less central and yet more compelling than in Graf's. Eva's refrain that she lived in Berlin's Essener Strasse, in "the house with the blue door . . . except that it isn't blue any more" (Lewenstein 2015, 20, 66), sounds like childhood nostalgia, by contrast to the "deep memory" (Friedlander 1992, 41) of unassimilable loss that suddenly irrupts into a conversation with Susan about moving house:

SUSAN: Have you written down the new address? . . .

EVA *shakes her head in bemusement.*

EVA: I can't understand it.

SUSAN: What?

EVA: I can't understand why they killed my father. (Lewenstein 2015, 60)

It is not a coincidence that the intrusion of the genocidal past takes place when the apparently everyday topic of conversation is that of relocation, in this play where the characters question whether *Heimat*, or 'home,' exists as a location or in one's mind. Rosie's claim that her grandmother's German history is "in my blood" (80) contrasts with the sardonic observation by Eva's second husband, Arnold, himself a former *Kind*, that London is not home but simply "where we ended up" (55). Eva's dementia casts an ambivalent light even on what seems to be the fondly remembered address of her Berlin childhood. The "blue door" constitutes a spatial image of memory as a portal onto the past, yet its being repainted suggests that it is no longer recognisable as home and that she has been shut out.

The recital of Eva's history that we finally hear clarifies the details of her past, although it also undermines the impression of traumatically fragmented recall given by the isolated details of paternal death and childhood home as they emerge in the context of her dementia. Yet *Now This Is Not the End* is structured thus to cast retroactive light on the family relations we have already witnessed in the play's present, when Eva can no longer articulate her history as she did to Susan twelve years earlier. In this way, the play's form avoids either the heroic teleology of Graf's *Leipzig* or a dementia-led decline into silence and death. Eva's recounting her story also makes clear the play's intertextual debt to Diane Samuels's work, one again hinted at by her name. The influence of *Kindertransport* is further implied by the exaggeration of factual details that seems to be borrowed from the earlier play. Thus, we hear that, as in Samuels's play, Eva's Jewish father was killed but her mother survived the war, in this instance not by chance but through the protection afforded to a non-Jewish woman. In Lewenstein's play, Eva's being sent to Britain from Germany by her grandparents while her mother was in prison was experienced by the nine-year-old child as a rejection. However, her account of their words – "I did hear my grandfather say to [my grandmother], 'she won't be our responsibility any more,' and I wondered what that meant" – shows the accuracy of such an assessment in this case. In the scenario of failing to bond with a yearned-for mother after separation, it is not the child but the adult who instigates a final breach. While Evelyn in *Kindertransport* chooses not to join her mother on board a ship to the United States, in Lewenstein's play it is the child Eva who is abandoned, as she recounts to Susan:

EVA: I thought we were leaving on the boat together. . . . But she decided to stay and by the time she came to find me it was  
       well she was  
       she seemed like a foreigner

The term "foreigner," used here rather than "stranger," suggests that, for Eva, even in one's country of birth it is possible to feel "cut off from everything you know," in emotional terms that prefigure and compound the cultural rupture to come (Lewenstein 2015, 67). These versions of the scenarios from *Kindertransport* make their equivalents in Lewenstein's play more fitting to its concern with "the survivor/descendant paradox" (Bosanquet 2015) and the passing of a history on to the third generation. Eva complains, "Everybody told us to forget about it. Now we're all dying and everybody wants us to remember," her dementia acting as a defence against such a demand, since, as Susan recognises, it allows her mother deliberately to avoid certain subjects: "And Mum can't remember [. . .]. Or won't remember" (Lewenstein 2015, 51). In this play, dementia's role is to both

make Eva crucial to the plot yet place her in the background, since she is about to be superseded by later generations.

The play concludes with a return to an earlier discussion of the undefinable nature of the German term *Heimat*, with Rosie's verdict that it is "untranslatable, apparently" (Lewenstein 2015, 82) an acknowledgement of the legacy of loss. The play's title supports such a sense, in its ambivalent riposte to Eva's fear of the survivor generation's vanishing. It seems to reimagine the legacy of war in its title's citation of Winston Churchill's 1942 speech after the defeat of Rommel's forces in Alamein: "Now this is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning" (quoted in Healey 2015). In this instance, it is the end of the first generation of survivors that is mourned and celebrated in these words.

## 4 Fictionalising the former *Kind* with dementia: Linda Newbery, *Sisterland* (2003)

Linda Newbery's 2003 novel *Sisterland* is the only text discussed here to acknowledge explicitly its origins in the earlier work whose influence hangs over all those mentioned in this essay, as we read in its prefatory material: "My thanks are due to Diane Samuels, whose play *Kindertransport* has stayed vividly in my mind since I saw it at the Palace Theatre in Watford seven years ago" (371). Thus, the transformation of suppression in Samuels's play to dementia in Newbery's novel stands out among the other details that have been altered or added for the sake of the novel's didactic focus on a range of other concerns in keeping with its appeal to a young adult readership, including present-day racism, homophobia, the Israel-Palestine conflict, parental infidelity and sibling rivalry. Indeed, in a review, Diane Samuels argues that the novel's dual time frame, divided between the refugee child Sarah in the past and the present-day setting, overloads the narrative so that the *Kindertransport* "journey of young Sarah increasingly becomes a distraction from the contemporary narrative" (Samuels 2003). The dementia plot itself has a dual role, as central to the need for the teenager Hilly to investigate the occluded past but also offering a general lesson for young readers about responding to that state in older relatives.

In *Sisterland*, the focus is, like that in Lewenstein's play, on the third generation, in the form of Hilly Craig, whose grandmother Heidi Richardson has been diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. Hilly investigates the concealed history of her grandmother, who, as the granddaughter discovers, was born into a German Jewish family as Sarah Reubens, sent on a *Kindertransport* to Britain and,

like Evelyn in Samuels's play, took on a different, "happy" name (Newbery 2003, 260) and date of birth to mark this new identity. Heidi's family, including her daughter Rose, have always believed the cover story of her being orphaned in the Allied bombing of Cologne and coming to Britain after the war, one that expunges the Jewish element of pre-war flight. Hilly's quest is encouraged by Heidi's dementia causing her to relive the details of her true past, as is evident when police visit the house and grandmother says to granddaughter:

"Bad men came," Heidigran insisted.

"What bad men? Did you have burglars, Gran? At home in Banbury?" . . .

"They took my daddy away. . . . He didn't even come to the station. Never said goodbye! They smashed things and threw them out on the street!" (183)

Concealed openly in this dialogue, and later spelt out for good measure (172, 225), is the historical detail of the "bad men" of the SS and the so-called Kristallnacht pogroms, along with memories of the Kindertransport journey and its starting off at a "station." The crucial element of Samuels's *Kindertransport*, that being sent away as a child is still felt like an abandonment, is retained in Heidi's perception of her father's failure to "say goodbye."

In Newbery's novel, Hilly herself has a mnemonic function, since her physical resemblance to her grandmother's estranged sister Rachel prompts Heidi to let slip the details of a concealed past. Hilly's investigations include not only unearthing memorial objects, such as photographs and a tape-recorded interview with her grandmother, but even locating Heidi's sister in Israel. This is a literalised novelistic version of the spectral family figures who haunt the theatrical *mise-en-scène* in Samuels's and Graf's plays. In *Sisterland*, Rachel echoes Helga's words in *Kindertransport* to Evelyn about the death of her daughter's former self, in a letter to Hilly about Heidi: "Perhaps Sarah Reubens is still there inside her? Perhaps she remembers that once we were sisters?" (Newbery 2003, 333). The retrieval of long-lost relatives is a device in other fiction about Holocaust survivors with dementia (Vice 2019), conveying in bodily form a fantasy of what Hilly calls "reconciliation" with the past (Newbery 2003, 368). Heidi's memory loss gives urgency to these acts of reparation in *Sisterland*, allowing the atrocious past to become known in the last moments of the survivor's life. As Hilly marvels as she travels to meet Rachel in Israel, "I might never have known the truth" (2) had she not caught her grandmother in the nick of time. Indeed, in a letter she writes on the aeroplane to her boyfriend Rashid, Hilly claims that her grandmother is "slipping away from her self so fast now that I'm not sure how much of her will be left when I get back" (367). Psychological and narrative necessity coalesce here, as Heidi's dementia-related decline also signals the end of her role in the novel's plot. Having passed on her history,

despite a resistance to do so that contrasts with that of Eva in Graf's *Leipzig*, Heidi can safely be succeeded by the next generations, as the image of Hilly mid-air en route to meet her long-lost family suggests.

## 5 Conclusion

In the works discussed here, the dementia that exists in a former child refugee's present is shown to be preceded by a lifetime of concealing that history. It is as if only memory loss can unlock the past in the face of such a suppression (Butler 2006, 185). What emerges in the context of the protagonists' dementia is not a generalised recall of earlier years but historical secrets. Thus, in Graf's *Leipzig*, we witness an exchange between Eva's daughter Helen and her husband George that highlights the irony of willed forgetting being followed by its counterpart of involuntary recollection. George accuses Helen of upsetting her mother by "open[ing] the door" to "all this old stuff":

GEORGE: I've worked too long and hard to help her forget.

HELEN: Yeah, well, funny thing. Now it's all she remembers. (Graf 2006a, 71)

As this dialogue suggests, the memory loss of dementia affects only the events of the present, offering by contrast a sudden return to the concealed past along with the abandonment of secrecy.

We might wonder why the trope of dementia has been introduced into these works, when each would have functioned, as indeed does Samuels's play *Kindertransport*, as striking returns to a disavowed past without it. The reason seems to be that dementia makes the retrieval of a traumatic history unintended and therefore less threatening for characters or readers than would be a reasoned reckoning with the past. By contrast, in W. G. Sebald's novel *Austerlitz*, the eponymous protagonist's belated summoning up of his "forgotten" *Kindertransport* history is not involuntary but just as deliberate as his earlier efforts "to recollect as little as possible, avoiding everything which related to my unknown past" (2002, 195, 197). This is no longer an option for the protagonists of the present examples. As we see in each case, events are viewed as if from the perspective of a child who is unable to understand, rather than an adult, like Samuels's Evelyn, who cannot give up her defence mechanisms, or Sebald's *Austerlitz*, who eventually tries to do so. Graf's and Lewenstein's plays and Newbery's novel represent reconciliation between the survivor and her history, as well as with second- and third-generation descendants. This is not the case in Samuels's *Kindertransport*,

as shown by the play's concluding dialogue between mother and daughter about the high cost of returning to the past:

EVELYN: I'd rather die than go back.

FAITH: You might change your mind . . .

EVELYN: I can't. (Samuels 1995, 88)

Evelyn's fear-filled repudiation, "I can't," suggests refusal as much as inability. If "Alzheimer's is the impetus for the resurgence of the traumatized self" (Plunka 2017, 92), that self has never been lost in Samuels's play.

Such absolutism is undercut by dementia, as we see in all the other cases. In *Leipzig*, Graf's Eva decides to cooperate with her daughter's research; the past of Lewenstein's Eva in *Now This Is Not the End* is acted out by her granddaughter Rosie; in Newbery's *Sisterland*, Heidi's return to the past prompts and enables her granddaughter Hilly's investigations. Repression and suppression are dissolved by dementia, making it an unexpected means of reparation for the characters and of reassurance for the reader or spectator. Such an effect suggests at once that the retrieval of a traumatic past need not be overwhelming for the subject, whose painful memories can be defused as they are passed on to the next generation, and that dementia itself can act as a means for accessing such memories before it is too late. In this way, historical atrocity and debilitating illness are both subject to a compensatory myth making.

This is suggested even at the level of the characters' names. In Samuels's play, the protagonist's changing her given name, Eva, to the more English-sounding Evelyn is designed to remove any clear link to its German, but also to its Hebrew, roots. The fitting duality of the biblical name Eve, with its etymological roots in the Hebrew for 'life,' yet its association with Eve as a figure who is at once a founding mother, scapegoat and exile, is implicitly recognised in its also being adopted as the protagonist's first name in Graf's and Lewenstein's plays. Newbery's *Sisterland* eschews such an obvious homage to the text that inspired its Kindertransport plot, using instead the even more Hebraic-sounding first name Sarah for the central character, which she has changed to the definitively Germanic Heidi. Indeed, the recurrence of 'Eva' and introduction of 'Sarah' enhances the mythic sense of these Kindertransport stories. The fact that they are all narratives of female lineage draws on the fact of matrilineal descent in Jewish law, enabling the irony that, apart from Lewenstein's Eva, whose mother was not Jewish, learning about their forebears' true past has implications for the descendants' own sense of self. As Helen in *Leipzig* puts it to an imagined interlocutor about her discoveries, "Oh, and by the way, did I happen to mention . . . I'm

Jewish” (Graf 2006a, 19), while Samuels describes Newbery’s Hilly as “our everyday English heroine turned Jew” in the wake of her grandmother’s revelations (Samuels 2003), in a reprise of Faith’s declaration to her mother in *Kindertransport*, “I want to know what being Jewish means” (1995, 81). The use of such a textual device raises the stakes of uncovering the past, since the postmemorial subject in the present cannot remain untouched by what they learn.

However, these narratives about the Kindertransport and dementia differ in crucial ways from fiction and drama more generally about Holocaust survivors who are living with that condition (Harmel 2012; Wallenstein 2012). Although Samuels argues that her play is not specifically about the Holocaust but treats a “universal” theme, that of the difficulty of parent separating from child (quoted in King 2007, 5), the invocation of a Kindertransport context does offer dramatic possibilities on its own account. It means that the narrative focus is necessarily on a child and the significance of an abrupt deracination whose meaning is only barely acknowledged for the sake of survival. Such a backdrop makes possible the transplantation of a refugee or Holocaust history into an Anglophone setting. In doing so, it draws on a series of gulfs: those between child and adult, between national cultures, and within the individual in the throes of an “identity denial.” All these divisions are full of representational potential, one that is increased by the inclusion of dementia and its “reveal[ing] as much about the past as it obscures the present” (Baker 2015).

Yet the Kindertransport experience and that of dementia are linked in even more fundamental ways than this. Each is conveyed in terms of deracination and travel. In Samuels’s case, the journey concerned is one out of childhood, meaning that the play addresses, as she puts it in an interview, the archetypal “pain of separation that ultimately every mother and child will experience in life” (Marshall, 2014). In the other works analysed here, the traumatic separation of a young child from the known world of family and nation has its counterpart in the sensation of internal division and estrangement occasioned by dementia at the other end of life. As Heidi in *Sisterland* thinks of a period of mental confusion, “They’re taking me away again. . . . I must have done something bad” (Newbery 2003, 44), conceiving of dementia as a second journey into the unknown. Equally, Heidi’s outburst at the dinner-table – “I want to go home! [. . .] Where I used to live” (133) – is a plea not just to return to her childhood home in Cologne but also to be restored to an earlier state of mental capacity. The travelling into uncertainty of the Kindertransport experience is therefore used as a way of conceptualising dementia itself.

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