

Anne Frank in the World Right Now ... Just Now: Examining Politics in Childhood within the Politics of Childhood

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Résumé: Le présent article analyse la représentation de la Shoah et de l'Apartheid dans la littérature pour la jeunesse comme moyen de sensibilisation aux questions politiques chez les jeunes lecteurs. À la lumière de deux romans canadiens sur l'Holocauste, *Fitting In* de Sharon Kirsh et *Lisa* de Carol Matas, et de deux romans sud-africains sur l'Apartheid, *92 Queen's Road* de Diane Case et *Not Another Love Story* de Dawn Garisch, les auteurs examinent l'apprentissage du politique chez les enfants et définit l'inscription de la littérature de jeunesse dans le domaine de la littérature politique.

Summary: This article focuses on Holocaust themes and apartheid themes in youth literature as conduits to studying the emergence of political awareness in childhood and early adolescence. Using two contemporary Canadian novels of the Holocaust, Sharon Kirsh's *Fitting in* and Carol Matas's *Lisa* and two South African novels of apartheid, Diane Case's *92 Queen's Road* and Dawn Garisch's *Not Another Love Story*, the article locates the study of politics in childhood within the body of literature on the study of the political novel generally.

Introduction: A Time/No Time for Toys

An incident in the children's section of the book store where I purchase the picture book *A Time for Toys* earlier in the day foreshadows the events of my evening class in children's literature when the clerk wonders aloud to whoever might be listening why anyone would write a children's picture book on the Holocaust, let alone buy it or read it! Some of the students in the class make that very point in class; others wonder why there were so few books on the topic for children. It is a

very uncomfortable evening, one that is contentious and controversial. This night we don't laugh about the adventures of the little badger, Frances, or say "awwww" as we might have after Judith Viorst's *Alexander and the Terrible Horrible No Good Very Bad Day* or *Tenth Good Thing about Barney*. And all my best classroom skills of managing group discussions, dealing with differing views, inviting people to respond freely to literature go right out of the window.

One student is so upset she doesn't return from the break, and I find myself babbling on about what it was like to grow up in a small town that was 'run' by the Orange Lodge and what it must have been like to have been a Roman Catholic in that environment. But being the daughter of an oppressing group counts for little this evening and I am fully aware of my failings as an instructor — for this class, at this time.

(fieldnotes, CM)

The book which sets off this controversy, Margaret Wild and Julie Vivus's *A Time for Toys*, introduces the young reader/listener to an episode in the life of the children and women in a concentration camp during World War II who, in spite of their harsh living conditions (and only a hint that liberation might be nearby) are still able to experience playfulness. Miriam tells the story of how she, with the help of Old Jacoba and the other women in camp, makes a toy elephant and a toy owl for her younger brother and sister. In order to do so, they playfully steal bits and pieces of yarn and buttons. Indeed, the book might be seen to be as much about the playfulness of Miriam and the women of the camp as of the children. But their actions might also be read as a type of memory-play in that Miriam, who is old enough to remember what life was like before the war, tells stories about the toys she used to have to her younger brother and sister, David and Sarah, who have known only life in the concentration camp. In so doing, she offers them a version of history — her own — which includes toys and having enough food to eat.

Much of the controversy in the children's literature class relates to the fact that this book on the Holocaust is a picture book, a genre normally associated with the reading material of children under the age of seven or eight. Arising from this is the same question posed by the clerk in the bookstore, centring on the issue of whether children would even be interested in such topics, a question that also forms the title of an article written by Ursula Sherman, "Why would a child want to read about that? The Holocaust period in children's literature" in Betty Bacon's (1988) *How Much Truth Do We Tell the Children: The Politics of Children's Literature*. Students in the class also express the view that children should be protected from even knowing that such conditions *could* exist, so that the time of childhood can be lived out in a free, imaginative existence unencumbered by worries about pain and death.

The responses to *A Time for Toys* also illustrate the interconnection of what might be regarded as the political and the everyday in the lives of

children and young adults. Thus students were concerned about whether there could be for the women and children in the camp anything that is even remotely “ordinary” or “normal” in terms of play or laughter in such conditions, and whether a book such as *A Time for Toys* might be seen to trivialize the atrocities of the Holocaust, or to romanticize them. Throughout the book we have a sense of the everyday playfulness in the community of women who laugh at/with Old Jacoba, and who stay up late working on the toys which will serve to distract the children from their hunger.

Interestingly, both of these themes — concern for an unencumbered childhood, and a sense that politics and the everyday can co-exist — have been expressed in relation to childhood in South Africa under apartheid. For example, the significance of considering the link between the politics of childhood and politics in childhood through various attempts at artistic representation is highlighted by the South African novelist, Nadine Gordimer, in her introduction to *In this Land: Writing and Art by Children of the Townships*:

To go through the pages in this revealing book is to see, reflected in the concerns of black children as expressed by themselves in texts and drawings, how remote they are from anything resembling a normal childhood and adolescence. In place of fairy tales and adventure stories, the younger children recount a rehash of political sloganeering and personal experience of everyday violence. Life is simply accepted as ugly. There is no space for imagination, that territory of childhood make-believe in the dreary streets of terrorised townships. There are no anthropomorphic fantasies here, where police dogs instead of pets represent the animal world — a world of friendly companions important to children. In place of trees and flowers, there bloom only mounds of rotting trash. Lullabies are the sound of gunfire in the night. (3)

This perspective is “off-set” by the view articulated in a collection of short stories for young people on apartheid edited by Hazel Rochman, *Somehow Tenderness Survives: Stories of Southern Africa*. The title of this anthology, adapted from a poem by the South African poet Dennis Brutus “Somehow we survive/ And tenderness, frustrated does not wither” (cited in Rochman) suggests that people can and do still fall in love, play and dream against a backdrop of political oppression.

While on the surface the questions which arise with regard to the treatment of themes of the Holocaust in *A Time for Toys* and themes of apartheid in South African literature appear to be about the politics of children’s literature, it is our contention that the underlying issues are really about the politics of childhood itself in a general way, and specifically about politics in childhood. At present relatively little is known about the emergence of what might be described as a political consciousness in children and young adults, although recent scholarship within adolescent psychology which seeks to

understand the development of political understanding (Haste and Torney-Purta) offers a promising framework within which questions such as the following might be examined:

What does a ten or eleven year old child think when driving past a group of picketers? How do youngsters react when they walk by a homeless person sleeping on a sidewalk? Does a police officer inspire respect and admiration in all children? More importantly, which variables account for any differences in the meanings children attach to these situations? (catalogue entry, Peter Lang Associates, Silvia Blitzer Golombek's (1993) book *A Sociological Image of the City: Through Children's Eyes*)

While it is beyond the scope of this article to answer these questions directly, we use the treatment of overt political themes in children's literature, in particular those in Holocaust literature and literature of apartheid in South Africa, as a type of conduit to exploring politics in childhood. The notion of literature as a conduit to studying readers is not without precedent, drawing as it does from a range of interests and eras — from Cervantes's idea that "Fictions have to match the minds of their readers ..." (from *Don Quixote*, qtd. in Sarland, np) to Betsy Caprio's study of Nancy Drew readers: "Serious students of fiction should take formulaic fiction seriously, because it helps them understand readers of that fiction" (Sullivan, qtd. in Caprio 192n24). Its application to the study of the political in childhood and adolescence, too, is not without precedent.

This themed issue on politics in literature for children and young adults is an important point of entry into the examination of borders, boundaries and the notion of "going political"; our own paper draws from a body of literature that has received sustained scholarly examination, and which, in a sense, provides a framework for examining themes of oppression, politicization and social change as a generic convention within adolescent literature.

Reading across Borders

Literature for children and young adults that addresses themes of social and political change is rich and abundant; its concerns range from apartheid in South Africa to war and strife in northern Ireland, from the oppression of blacks and Japanese in the United States and Canada to the discrimination against First Nations peoples, from gay and lesbian identity to the Holocaust. There are a number of writers for adults whose works are also seen to be political, and a body of scholarship that supports the literary investigation of these sociopolitical themes. Such literature has been explored in a number of works, including Irving Howe's influential work, *Politics and the*

Novel; Robert Boyers's *Atrocity and Amnesia*; Barbara Eckstein's *The Language of Fiction in a World of Pain: Reading Politics as Paradox*; Mehta Gurleena and Harish Narang's *Apartheid in Fiction*, Maureen Whitebrook's *Reading Political Stories* and Michael Hanne's *The Power of the Story: Fiction and Political Change*.

It is only recently that scholars within children's literature have begun to pay attention to the treatment of a political consciousness in the texts themselves — or how they are read.¹ The work of researchers such as Myrna Machet and Sarah Nuttall involving real readers in a South African context serve as examples of scholarship which has begun to "read closely" the interpretive community of both child and adult readers. Caryl G. Crowell's teacher-researcher study on the uses of literature with explicitly political themes during the Persian Gulf war provides a practical example of how such literature contributes to a political awareness. In developing a unit of study with her third grade class using such books as *Rose Blanche* by Roberto Innocenti, *Faithful Elephants* by Yukio Tsuchiya, *The Wall* by Eve Bunting, *The Butter Battle Book* by Dr. Seuss, and *My Hiroshima* by Junko Morimoto, Crowell concludes that such literature can play an important role in helping children develop historical-political understandings. Along the same lines, Beverley Naidoo's analysis of the responses of British and American school children to her two anti-apartheid novels *Journey to Jo'burg* and *Chain of Fire* is framed within a consideration of the need to read beyond national boundaries, or what is described as "crossing boundaries through fiction" (4) in order to examine the significance of the emergence of multiple identities in a multicultural society.

Hazel Rochman's *Against Boundaries: Promoting Books for a Multicultural World* looks at the ways that books for young adults might be seen to "break down borders" (9), noting that, "Reading makes immigrants of us all — it takes us away from home, but most importantly it finds home for us everywhere" (15). Similarly, Elaine G. Schwartz in her essay "Crossing borders/shifting paradigms: Multiculturalism and children's literature" observes that we need to shift our focus towards one of "critical postmodernism." Citing the work of Rochman, along with Aronowitz and Giroux and Bigelow, Schwartz suggests that a critical postmodernist perspective on multicultural literature should:

aid children in the creation of a more profound and inclusive 'we' (Bigelow 277) within a broad understanding of the historical and contextual ways in which subjectivities are created. This critical postmodernist multicultural curriculum should create a critical, reflective sense of agency and enable students to learn how to critique inequality both within and between cultures. (39)

In the past decade the overlap between social and political themes in young adult literature in South Africa and the treatment of the Holocaust in similar literature was recognized in the “Books break barriers” exhibit held in South Africa in 1994-95 in conjunction with the “Anne Frank in the World Exhibition” (*The Weekly Mail*, 1994). The exhibit, which linked apartheid and Holocaust literature, drew attention to the relationship between books and social change. Accompanying the exhibit was a catalogue which listed many recent South African texts written for young adults that might be seen to perform the same social, literary and political function as do such writings as those of Anne Frank.²

But discrimination and oppression can take many different forms, so that even within one variation — the literature of apartheid, for example — varied constructions of Otherness can be linked. A vivid example can be found in such literature of oppression as South African Barrie Hough’s short story “The Journey” in the anthology *Crossing Over: Stories for a New South Africa*. In its investigation of two forms of oppression, the story begins with an account of the friendship between Johan, who is white and who stutters, and Thembi, who is black. When they meet at school, Johan, in recognizing Thembi’s position of explicit, racial Otherness, becomes protective towards her:

Nobody really said offensive things to her. But an expression in their eyes wounded more than words would have. Early on in life, Johan had learned to read this “quiet” language — from the time that he knew that his speech was different to that of other children. (64)

Thembi tries to help Johan who, with his stuttering, is less explicitly understood as being Other except by Thembi who knows and regularly experiences all the subtleties of an oppressive system along with its openly enforced discriminatory practices. Observing that Johan doesn’t stammer when he shouts, she “makes a plan” for working with him on the rugby field:

If you can shout without a stammer, you should also be able to speak and whisper fluently,” she said. “I have a plan. You go to one set of goal posts, I go to the other. We walk slowly towards each other. At first you’ll have to shout so that I can hear you. Then as you approach me, you tone down until you speak, and eventually whisper. (66)

Johan resents her interference:

‘You can all go jump in the bloody lake!’ he shouted. ‘I’ve been trying for years. Speech therapists and shrinks since I’ve been this high. On the phone I struggle. Orals a nightmare. In primary school the kids used to laugh at me. Always looked at me as though I was a moron. Everybody

in the family always gave advice." Give him a good skrik. Put pebbles in his mouth. Make him sing." I've had it, do you hear, I've had it. And now you!

He saw Thembi extending her hand towards him. But she hesitated and said softly, 'Do you really think I don't understand, that I don't know how it feels?' She turned and walked away. (66)

Here we have young adults represented as experiencing oppression and relating to it empathetically within a politically explicit didactic text.

The exploration of a similar kind of parallel discrimination or Otherness based on sexuality and on colour can be seen in another South African young adult novel, Toeckey Jones's *Skindeep*. Eighteen-year-old Rhonda, who is "putting in time" at a shorthand and typing school until the term begins at the University of the Witwatersrand, meets and becomes romantically interested in Dave. Dave, from the beginning, is mysterious. His head is completely shaven — for no apparent reason, political or other — and his family connections remain somewhat "distant." At one point he says that his brother and two sisters are dead. Rhonda, along with the reader, becomes aware that there is much more to know about Dave than what appears on the surface. At one point Rhonda decides that Dave must be gay when he seems to be very attentive at a party to a young gay man. For Rhonda this is an "end of the world" experience and she becomes despondent about having been so deceived. However, the suspicions that Dave might be gay are shown to be unfounded, and this possibility is replaced by an equally "unthinkable" event — Dave is actually coloured and has kept his head shaven so that he can pass as white. Here again, the political agenda of the fictional text is transparent. The novel explicitly advocates sociopolitical change and seeks necessarily to awaken the conscience of its readers.

Further investigations of forms of parallel discrimination can be found in the literature for adolescents that deals with themes of gay and lesbian identity. For example, in Marian Dane Bauer's *Am I Blue? Coming out from Silence*, M.E. Kerr's short story "We Might As Well All Be Strangers" includes an episode in which Alison wants to tell her grandmother that she is a lesbian. Her mother, however, disagrees:

'Alison, this coming out thing isn't working. You came out to me, all right, I'm your mother and maybe you had to come out to me. But where your grandmother's concerned: Keep quiet.'

'You think she'd want that?'

'I think she doesn't even dream such a thing could come up! She's had enough tsuris in life. Back in the old country there were relatives lost in the Holocaust! Isn't that enough for one woman to suffer in a lifetime?'

'Maybe that would make her more sympathetic.'

'Don't compare gays with Jews — there's no comparison.'

'I'm both. That's prejudice against both. And I didn't choose to be either.'

'If you want to kill an old woman before her time, tell her.'

'I think you have grandmother all wrong.'

'If I have Grandmother all wrong' said my mother 'then I don't know her and you don't me and we might as well all be strangers.' (26)

M.E. Kerr explains in the autobiographical notes that are found at the end of the story how and why she came to write this story. She observes that the story was inspired by a friend of hers who came out to her Jewish grandmother in spite of the mother's warnings that "the old lady couldn't take it". As she observes: "To my friend's amazement, her grandmother was the only sympathetic member of the family. She told her grandchild that she had seen more than enough of prejudice in her lifetime and asked to meet "[her] girlfriend" (27). The link between all forms of oppression was, clearly, apparent to this old woman.

In the same volume, Leslea Newman, author of *Heather Has Two Mommies* and *Gloria Goes to Gay Pride* points out the overlap between the oppression experienced as a lesbian and as a Jew. As she observes:

I grew up in a traditional Jewish household. It was expected that I would grow up, get married and raise a family. Much of my writing explores the conflicts and joys of being a lesbian and a Jew. The two identities have much in common. Being a lesbian and a Jew automatically places one inside two vital, active communities that value the group as much as the individual. Both communities have a strong need and desire to put an end to all social oppression; and both communities have a strong sense of history. (173)

Like Newman, we see this "strong sense of history" as an important overarching theme which draws together literature of the Holocaust and literature of apartheid. Indeed, it is this sense of history woven into the picture book, *A Time for Toys*, which contributes to the controversy surrounding it. In this book the writer makes use of italicized footnotes as a way to "signal history." Thus, the first page of the book includes the following lines:

During World War II, in the German concentration camps, there was little time for anything but survival. There was certainly no time for toys. (np)

This part of the text is accompanied by the following italicized "footnote":

A small collection of stuffed toys has been preserved that were made by Polish women in Belsen for the first children's party held after the liberation (from *Antique Toys and their Background* by Gwen White, B.T. Batsford Ltd, London, 1971)." (np)

The book ends with an account of soldiers coming to liberate the women and children in the camp. Again, the narrative of the book is accompanied by another italicized footnote, this time a recollection of Dr. Hadassah Rosensaft from *The Liberation of the Nazi Concentration Camps 1945: Eyewitness Accounts of the Liberators*:

suddenly ... we heard the sound of rolling tanks. We were convinced that the Germans were about to blow up the camp. But then ... we heard a loud voice say in German: 'Hello, hello, you are free! We are British soldiers, and we come to liberate you!' (np)

Whether all young readers pick up on all of these references is not the point. Rather, the strong sense of history "as it happening" and "as it happened" might be seen to give readers a sense that history is not only "then" but can also be happening right now, and this thus corroborates what Jane Miller says in her observation: "So a reader is a person in history, a person with a history" (134).

In the section which follows we examine novels for young adults that might be regarded as explicitly historical and political. In our analysis we examine the different strategies that authors use to draw the reader into participating in history, and also the ways in which such novels might be seen to suggest some sort of sociopolitical action. We explore two novels of the Holocaust written by Canadian authors Sharon Kirsh and Carol Matas as starting points to an investigation of the literary treatment of a "strong sense of history" and how it is used to address themes of social oppression in young adult literature. We then go on to consider the ways in which the treatment of history in these novels can also be found in the narrative structure of several contemporary South African novels of apartheid.

"A Strong Sense of History": Readings of Several Canadian and South African Novels

Sharon Kirsh's *Fitting in*, a novel that examines the events of the Holocaust and discrimination against Jews long after the Holocaust is a good example of the way in which history can work as both phenomenon and method. The novel can be seen to explore history as phenomenon in that it addresses two periods in history: the time of the Holocaust during World War II and the early 1960s when the events of the Holocaust began to become part of common knowledge. Thus, whilst being contemporary in terms of its publishing

date (1995) and sensibility in that it “reads as now,” the novel is set over 30 years ago in 1963 in a small Canadian city. Mollie at age twelve is only beginning to wonder about her Jewishness and how it counts in her own history. Indeed, the novel opens with a scene in which Mollie’s close friend, Phyllis, registers her dissatisfaction with “looking Jewish.” It is not something that has ever occurred to Mollie who discovers that not only are many of her other Jewish friends also sharing Phyllis’s concern, but that in fact, when she asks her non-Jewish friends if they think she looks Jewish, they know what she is talking about!

As the novel unfolds, the reader — along with Mollie — experiences what it means to uncover the Holocaust and it is at this point that the narrative structure becomes history as method. Mollie is watching the movie *Conspiracy of Hearts* at a special Sunday afternoon showing for the Jewish teenagers of the community. Prior to viewing the film they are told by their leader, Mr. Levy, of some of the events behind the film:

‘It’s about a group of nuns in Italy who hid Jewish children during the Second World War so that they wouldn’t end up being killed by the Nazis. During the War, twenty million people were killed. Six million of those were Jews from almost every country in Europe.’

Did I hear right? Twenty million. Six million Jews? Mr. Levy presses on. For the first time ever his voice begins to soften. For the first time ever we listen.

Mr. Levy must be exaggerating. The whole story is too absurd to be true. Grown men murdering babies and grandmothers and grandfathers? What’s so special about Jews that we should be chosen for elimination? Nothing makes sense. (86-87)

Mollie’s immediate reaction is to try to take it in on her own terms before she dares to broach the subject with her parents:

How can I have been alive all those years and not known about this Thing? There are probably people in my own shul who survived IT, even in my own family. It takes me until Wednesday night during supper to dare to raise the topic.

‘My mother and father lost brothers and sisters and their children and some cousins. They were from Lithuania.’ That is all my father says at first.

Quickly I calculate. These had been my great-aunts and great-uncles and distant cousins. For the few years that I’d known my father’s mother, I’d never known the most tragic fact about her life. (90)

Mollie is shocked at this revelation and is at the same time made aware of being a stranger to herself. She begins to examine her own previously un-

questioned sense of community:

I'd never noticed anything. I'd spent all my life in a fog. Suddenly the mist is lifting and I'm left staring at a strange land. Nothing is familiar.
(90)

Not only does the reader experience the uncovering of the events of the Holocaust at the same time as Mollie does, s/he is also introduced to events of history "as they happen" and as they affect ordinary life experience. For example, Mollie's family is taunted by the children of a non-Jewish family in the neighbourhood who never invite her into the house after they have played outside and later even refuse to play with her at all:

I join the group and Chris suggests we work on a snow sculpture in her backyard. At first everything seems fine. I throw myself into the fun. By mid-afternoon we're frosty. Then Chris whispers something to both Betty and Kelsey which I can't quite catch.

'Sorry, what did you say, Chris?'

'Oh, nothing.'

'Oh I thought you said something to us.'

'I said something to Betty and Kelsey.'

'Why not to me too?' My face is hot and distorted.

'Because it's not for your ears, okay?'

'Oh Well, why not?'

'Because I invited them into my house for some hot chocolate, but I think it would be better if you went home, don't you?'

'Why would it be better?'

'Because we don't serve Jewish food at my house.'

'I don't need Jewish food. I don't need any food. I thought we were hanging around together, that's all.'

'Yes, well, now we're cold and we want to go in for a while. If we come back out later, maybe we'll let you know.'

'Chris, why can't Mollie join us?'

'Because my parents really wouldn't appreciate it, that's why.' (143)

Mollie leaves the yard in a state of anger and humiliation:

My face is still burning. I vow never to step foot on her property again. Who wants to step foot on her property anyway? The same goes for monkey-see, monkey-do, Betty. Elizabeth Anne said it herself, we're different. There's no getting around it.

Gradually my anger begins to melt; instead I begin to feel ugly. Why did I have to be born different? Why does everything have to be so complicated? (144)

This uncovering and recovering of a period of history in *Fitting In* contrasts with the treatment of similar historical events in Carol Matas's novel *Lisa*. In this young adult novel, the reader experiences the events of the Holocaust in Denmark not as history past, but as it is happening. The story spans the time between 1940 and 1943 — from the time Lisa is twelve until she is fifteen — and the time of the German invasion of Copenhagen. Lisa's family is part of the Jewish community of this city. Following the invasion, life becomes increasingly difficult and it is hard to find out what is happening in the rest of Europe. The first sense the reader has of how Lisa, at age twelve can become part of the struggle comes when Lisa is eavesdropping on her parents. Her father, a medical doctor, is questioning his own participation in treating the Germans who come to his hospital:

'One of them comes to me with an upset stomach from overeating our Danish food, or a bullet wound because one of our people was brave enough to try to do something, and then I'm supposed to fix him up. Why? So he can ship me off to some camp next week? So he can kill that same freedom fighter next time?' (26)

Lisa comes up with the idea of sabotage and reveals her plan:

'Father, Father. I've got it! You should keep on treating them' — why are they glaring at me like that? — 'but treat them wrong. Be very nice but don't do stuff right.' ...

'Yes,' agrees Mother. 'Just give them sugar pills, anything.'

Father looked at her.

'I have an oath. To medicine.' He pauses. 'But I'm a Dane.' He talks slowly, almost to himself. 'Not enough to kill anyone. No. Just enough to keep them in bed. Put them out of commission. Pain-killers that are really sleeping tablets. Headache pills that will give them stomach-aches. It's not much, but it'll do until I can find a way to really get to them.' (27)

In contributing to her father's plan of action in which he must juggle being a Dane and being a moral keeper of the Hippocratic Oath, Lisa begins to wonder how she too can do something, or whether she has already "done something":

What can I do to fight the Germans? A big gawky twelve-year-old who isn't particularly brilliant at anything — maybe Stefan [her older brother] will know. I'll ask him first thing in the morning. Then something hits

me. Maybe my idea hasn't been such a good one. Maybe the Germans will find out what Father's doing and take him away, and it'll be all my fault. But it was just an idea. Does just having an idea mean someone could die? Now I realize how different everything really is. (28)

Mollie's awakening in *Fitting In* is paralleled by Lisa's assumptions of social responsibility. Lisa finds out that Stefan is part of the Danish resistance — and she too becomes involved as a secret messenger. Inevitably, the reader also experiences elements of what might be described as ordinary everyday life, too, in the same way that Miriam and the women play or laugh in *A Time for Toys*. For example, at one point Lisa finds herself on a bus where German soldiers are showing interest in what she is carrying. She manages to divert their attention by vomiting on them. In recounting this to Stefan and his friend Jesper, all three laugh so hard that tears run down their faces, and we are reminded of the fact that they are still “just kids” who can find vomiting in public funny. That it is vomiting on German soldiers of course makes it even funnier to the three. The parents, hearing only the laughter but not the circumstances comment naively: “I'm glad they can find something to laugh about” (45).

Later, Lisa's father gets wind of the fact that the Germans are planning a mass roundup of all Jews on Roshahanah. Lisa, Stefan and Jesper become involved in a very daring scheme to assist almost all of the Jewish families to escape to Sweden. Even in the middle of this escape, however, we are reminded of the ways in which life goes on for very young children and for Lisa, too, in this incident. Lisa must put baby Sarah down for a nap while she helps her father:

I take her favourite blanket out of the laundry bag and place it on the floor for her. I give her a small doll made out of a blue stocking. It has white yarn for hair and white buttons for its nose and eyes. I made it myself. She clutches it.

'Dada, Dada,' she calls.

Father goes over, picks Sarah up gives her a kiss, and settles her on the blanket. 'You go to sleep now, Sarahle,' he says. She curls up, contented, her thumb in her mouth. (93)

In a sense the “ordinariness” of these events in *Lisa* amidst a type of superhuman bravery resonates with the uncovered history of Mollie's family in *Fitting In*, and in so doing contributes to blurring the boundaries between history “then” in *Fitting In* and history “right now” in *Lisa*. This can be seen in the example we referred to earlier when Mollie realizes that her grandmother had lost brothers and sisters and yet, as Mollie observes: “For the few years that I'd known my father's mother, I'd never known the most tragic fact about her life” (90).

We also draw attention to such “acts of normalcy” in *Lisa* as the laughter, the small cloth doll, the curling up of Sarah because of their connection to the kinds of issues of the everyday that are raised in *A Time for Toys*. While the conditions of Lisa’s family in Copenhagen at the beginning of the invasion, and the living conditions depicted in hut 22 of the concentration camp in *A Time for Toys* are in no way comparable, nonetheless, they do indicate that such literature might still contain episodes of the ordinary.

Two contemporary South African young adult novels *92 Queens Road* by Diane Case and *Not Another Love Story* by Dawn Garisch, both of which address issues of apartheid within an historical context, might be seen to provide “parallels” to some of the literary-historical approaches explored in *Fitting In* and *Lisa*. Diane Case’s novel, *92 Queens Road*, draws on the same “as it is happening” approach to history used by Carol Matas in *Lisa*. Similarly, it spans several years of history. Unlike Lisa who becomes politically active early on in the novel, Kathy, the politically naive narrator of *92 Queens Road* remains inactive. Kathy occupies the role of “witness” (Flockemann) to the situation of growing up in the coloured community³ of Woodstock just outside of Cape Town in the 1960s, at the time when South Africa asserts its independence from Britain — and at the time when apartheid was firmly entrenched. In the course of the novel the reader becomes, like Kathy, a witness to the long-term toll on families when members decide to leave South Africa for a better life, to the social and political significance of reclassification, to enforced removals, and to other apartheid enforcement strategies. Much of Kathy’s witnessing is focused through the comings and goings of her Uncle Reggie, her mother’s older brother, who is often away at sea. Uncle Reggie declares early on in the novel that South Africa is not for them: “This is not our country. We have no say here. We don’t belong here. This is not our country” (32). In a sense the events in the novel serve as evidence of this view. For example, an episode at the beach where Kathy plays with a white girl — and eventually with a whole collection of white children — ends up with the father of the white children intervening:

‘Get away from those coloured children!’ he bellowed [to his own children], and he began kicking our castle down, burying our precious shells underneath the wet sand.

I looked up into his face for some explanation, but there was no answer in his steel-blue eyes.

... ‘And you children get away from here,’ he roared, glaring directly at me. ‘You coloureds have your own beach. Go on! Shoo!’ he said, and gave me a shove with his foot. (45)

Following this altercation, one of the other children who is also coloured gives Kathy a lesson on the politics of separate beaches and of being col-

oured. Like Mollie in *Fitting In*, Kathy is forced into seeing herself as Other:

'That's not a coloured beach!'

'What's coloured?' I asked.

She ran her forefinger along the outer length of my arm, from my shoulder to my finger tips.

'This,' she said, 'is coloured. This brown skin is coloured. Those people are white, and that is why they have a better beach than we do. We, on this side, we are all coloureds.'

A wave of revulsion swept over me. I felt dirty.

I looked at the sea and wished that I could rush into it and wash this brownness from my arms, off my entire body, out of every corner of me. (46)

At a later point, Kathy witnesses the ways in which families might become estranged through classification procedures through which people applied to be classified as white. Her mother's brother Peter and his wife decide to try to become reclassified. As Kathy observes:

The process involved a certain amount of humiliation. They had to have a certain number of white people vouch for their characters and had to present themselves to be viewed — so that their skin colour and features could be assessed.

'We are going to do it for our children's sakes,' Uncle Peter said, trying to convince Ma [Kathy's grandmother].

Ma sat down with a sigh. She stared at the floor and ignored everything they had to say.... For a few days Ma spoke to no-one. She wore a black dress and didn't even listen to her serials on the radio.... When Uncle Reg came home from sea, Ma told him that he was not to speak about Uncle Pete in the house.

'Your brother's dead,' she said coldly. (52-53)

In the course of the novel, the horrors of forced removals are depicted. District Six is bulldozed and all the residents, including Dolores, Uncle Reggie's girlfriend, are forced to move.

'What's happening to this country of ours?' Dolores said sadly.

'The government is trying to create a Coloured stan, like the Bantustans,' Cedric [the lodger] said. 'They are worse than the Nazis — no respect for human life!'

The reader is made aware of the impotence of those who, like Uncle Reggie, have no space in which to resist. Their option is to leave the country.

This becomes evident when Kathy and Dolores, who is in the advanced stages of pregnancy, try to take a “Whites Downstairs, Non-Whites Upstairs” bus across town. The inhumane treatment of coloureds is once more highlighted. While a “friendly young [white] man” tries to intervene so that Dolores can sit downstairs, the bus driver declares that he is just doing his job and Dolores is forced to move upstairs. A sudden jolt as Dolores is getting down from the bus causes her to fall. She goes into labour early and the baby, who is born prematurely, lives only one day. The family tries to explain to Uncle Reggie when he returns from sea the events leading up to the premature birth — and death — of the baby:

‘He [the bus driver] was only doing his job, Reggie,’ Ralph said.

‘Doing his job?’ Uncle Reggie shouted. ‘Doing his job? That is why coloured people are what they are — just coloured people. Because of people like you. You accept inhumane treatment and say he is only doing his job! My little boy is dead and he didn’t even have a chance!’ (93)

Uncle Reg announces that while he is angry, he is not defeated and that he means to act:

‘What can you do, Reggie?’ Ma asked. ‘You can’t do anything. Look what they did to Braam Fisher — and that was a white man. You’ll end up in jail.’

‘I will leave this country!’ Uncle Reggie said solemnly. ‘I will not rear my children in a country where they are second-class citizens. Nowhere else in the world do you find this kind of situation.’ (93)

While Kathy does witness a type of political awakening in *92 Queen’s Road*, this awakening contrasts with the political awakening circumstances within which Lisa witnesses a call to political action.

This political action is also in evidence in Dawn Garisch’s *Not Another Love Story* when the protagonist, fifteen-year-old Gail, a white young woman is able to enter an essay competition to express her outrage at the working conditions of the coloureds in South Africa. This equals a type of political action that is denied the coloureds like Uncle Reggie in *92 Queens Road*. The narrative in *Not Another Love Story*, published in 1994 but set some years earlier in apartheid South Africa, starts out with the “every day,” with Gail going to stay with her Aunt Stella while her parents go off to London for three months. Gail’s ordinary life takes on a more political agenda because her Aunt Stella, who is white, is living illegally with Bert, who is coloured. Thus Gail encounters the reality of the Immorality Act and the impact of the colour bar. She begins to experience an everyday that is inflected by the

discrimination and injustice shown to those around her. While it would not be possible to say that Gail begins to walk in Bert's shoes, it is possible to say that for the first time in her life she experiences how Bert walks in his own shoes — is not allowed to go to the public library, must stand at the back of a line-up in a corner store, etc. Gail also meets friends of Bert who are coloured, and in so doing she must begin to confront her privileged white existence. Gail experiences the effects of apartheid in very personal ways, too, in that when Stella discovers that she is pregnant she and Bert decide that they are going to move to Botswana where they can live together legally. They vow to return to South Africa when social conditions change — but it is a loss to Gail.

The reader experiences through Gail's eyes the uncovering of historical events — both the events of history "as they are happening" in the terms of the discrimination that Bert and Stella must endure — and history "as it happened" in terms of the mines. Thus, in the same way that Mollie in *Fitting In* becomes aware of the history of the Jews, her own family members in Nazi Germany, and the events of the Holocaust, Gail becomes aware of apartheid — but Gail, unlike Mollie, is herself situated in the instance of historical oppression as it happens. While Gail does not experience the same sense of being one of the oppressed as Mollie or Lisa do, she does experience the sense of being a member of the oppressive white South African society and this is painful to her.

We see Gail becoming politicized when she becomes incensed about the injustices of the mining conditions that her friend Sarel had to experience and is moved to action; she enters an essay contest organized around investigative journalism where she investigates the relationship between lung cancer and asbestos mining. We are drawn to the controversy surrounding the political side of her writing through the disagreement between Bert and her aunt. Bert reads a draft of her essay and is impressed with her work:

'You write well,' he said. 'This is a very good standard, and I'm pleased to see you tackle something political.' This was news to me. I considered the issues to be medical, not political. 'If you want my advice, you should bring that out a bit more clearly. The asbestos companies were aware for many years of the link between asbestos and cancer, yet they blamed it on smoking and did nothing to protect their workers. Your friend Sarel would be well today if they had cared as much for people as they did for their profits.'

This was damning stuff, and I could see a place for it in my article. It meant some editing, and shifting around of passages, and I worked on it with Bert for the next few hours. The net result was sensational. I couldn't wait for Monday to show Mrs. Bolton. (100-101)

Stella, however, wonders if it is appropriate:

'It's very interesting, and well written,' she said, 'But isn't it a bit too political for a school piece? It makes some pretty damning accusations, too. If you were writing this for a magazine, you wouldn't want a libel suit from the asbestos companies. You must be sure of your facts.' (101)

Bert and Stella debate what is "fact" and what is the manipulation of facts as part of a power game, with Bert declaring that journalists must take risks and face the firing line: "Otherwise you might as well interview cordon bleu chefs for *Fair Lady* or speculate about the sex lives of pop stars in *Scope*" (101-102).

Stella in defending *Fair Lady*, which is marketed towards women, observes:

'Do you know how many times you've had your belly satisfied by a good recipe from *Fair Lady*? You would be awfully thin if I fed you from the editorial page of the *Cape Times*. Not everything in life is political, thank God.' (102)

As it turns out, the judges of the writing competition agree with Stella. Even Gail's mother, herself a writer, thinks the essay is too political and advises Gail to "Leave that to the politicians" (126). Although Gail's political involvement is allowed no public arena, it remains a significant kind of political activism for her personally and thus, perhaps, it is more realistic given the impotence of most young white South Africans of the time.

Conclusion

"Leave that [politics] to the politicians," the words of Gail's mother, are important ones in terms of taking us back to our consideration of the treatment of political themes in literature as a conduit to studying politics in childhood. While the controversies surrounding the significance of the time of childhood cannot be disregarded, we need to remember in discussions about politicization and youth that much of literature is derived from real-life accounts of real children engaging in political action. Here Anne Frank, the children of the South African 1976 Soweto riots, and the contemporary child-rights activist, Craig Kielburger, come to mind. While the well-known story of Anne Frank's life may be regarded as one of exceptional and outstanding courage under the most inhumane of circumstances, it is still the diary of a real child. The Soweto riots of 1976 in South Africa involved children who were opposed to being taught the language of the oppressors, Afrikaans. Another example of how *particular* circumstances have led to *particular* acts of bravery, heroism or a heightened social and political awareness, by *particular* children as a type of fighting back is provided by Craig Kielburger who, at the age of thirteen, made a trip to Pakistan to protest

child-labour practices:

A voracious reader with a knack for public speaking and getting other children involved — be it organizing a school trip to a food bank or starting a letter campaign to protest against the closing of a local park — Craig read a newspaper article about the murder of a 12-year old child-labour activist in Pakistan and asked his parents if they knew anything about the issue.... Within weeks, Craig had organized Free the Children, a grassroots youth group dedicated to eliminating child labour, come up with a four-point action plan and enlisted the help of 50 children to raise funds and gather names on a petition to spark awareness of the issue. By June, Craig had contacted child-labour activists in Asia and Europe as the result of his own research and had set his mind on a fact-finding trip to Thailand, Pakistan, Bangladesh and India. (Grange)

Craig's actions made national and world headlines when he demanded that the Canadian Prime Minister, Jean Chretien, move the redressing of these child labour practices higher up on the human rights agenda. The point is though, that he is also an ordinary person as is made clear in an interview with one of his school friends:

'He's like a normal kid,' said school chum Vance Ciaramella, 13. 'Like, he does have a life, like, he does go out and plays with friends, he goes to the mall, he does what other kids do.' (*Gazette*)⁴

The political awareness expressed by ordinary children is also reflected in the words of eight-year-old David, one of the participants in Caryl G. Crowell's study, alluded to earlier in this article. Following the readings and discussions of books with explicitly political themes, the teacher recorded this conversation:

David said to me one day, 'Didn't you say that if you don't ... something about Hitler. If you don't remember history and stuff about it that something will happen to you?'

Are you thinking about that if you don't remember history that you are condemned to repeat it?" I replied.

'Yeah, that's it. I think that's true,' he concluded. (59)

We refer specifically to the biographical information on Craig because of the connection to the biographical information available about the writers of *Fitting In* and *92 Queens Road*. On the covers of these two books we learn something of the significance of the autobiographies of the writers to their writing as a way of fighting back: "Diane Case [herself of Malay origin] was born in Woodstock, Cape Town, in 1955" and "Like Mollie, Sharon Kirsh grew up in a [Canadian] community with a very small Jewish popula-

tion." Ironically, these two writers, who are separated not by time but by geography, and who are linked through their "responses-in-common" in terms of addressing oppression in their communities, are also linked in their literary narratives: it is to Canada that Uncle Reggie in Diane Case's *92 Queens Road* decides to emigrate. We draw attention to this irony because of the historical period that both *92 Queens Road* and *Fitting In* describe. At the very time (the early 1960s) that Uncle Reggie decides to go Canada to get away from the living conditions of apartheid South Africa, Mollie in *Fitting In* (a novel also set in the early 1960s in Canada), is beginning to uncover the history of discrimination against the Jews and is experiencing such discrimination first-hand through the taunts and swastikas of the neighbourhood WASP children. This irony might be seen to offer a reading which affirms the observation made by Stephen Laufer in writing about the "Anne Frank in the World" exhibit when it toured South Africa:

Almost half a century has passed since Anne Frank's life ended in Bergen Belsen concentration camp after an odyssey which took her from a secure childhood in Frankfurt am Main to the death factory of Auschwitz via an attic in Amsterdam. Despite the passage of time, Anne's life — and her death less than two months before the defeat of the Nazis — have lost none of their power to move, to give a human dimension to the mind-boggling numbers of victims of the Holocaust. Still, one might ask why should we in South Africa spend time pondering Anne Frank's significance? Does our own country not have enough of a history of death and destruction in the name of racial purity? Should our attention not be focused on understanding our own past? The answer lies perhaps in the ideological links between the Nazis who killed Anne Frank and millions of others, Jews and non-Jews alike and the apartheid theories which enshackled black South Africa. It lies in the universality of racism and the need for universal responses — in the battle against discrimination and in the search for understanding, the only real road to healing. (*Weekly Mail and Guardian*)

Notes

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- 1 The ambiguous position of children's literature in terms of politicization is highlighted in a 1994 issue of *Bookbird* (See Binder, L. and J. Garrett (1994). Editorial:

Political responsibility in children's literature: To the reader. *Bookbird* 38:6, 5) wherein the editors ask the readers (teachers, librarians and children's literature scholars) to "reach your own conclusions" (3) with regard to political responsibility and the organization of IBBY — the International Board on Books for Young People.

- 2 Our use of the expression "right now" in the title of this article refers specifically to the link between Anne Frank and contemporary "right now" young adult literature in South Africa which addresses issues of "righting" the effects of apartheid. The term "just now" has references to "justice" but also is a South African expression used to indicate "in a little while" or "soon" but not at this exact moment. Its significance to this article relates to a sense of timing in terms of becoming political and taking action.
- 3 Flockemann in her paper uses the following definition of "coloured" in South African history: "'Malay, 'Mixed and Other' or 'Coloured' — i.e. Capetonians of dark pigmentation who were descendants of slaves and/or 'mixed' marriages between Khoi, Africans who spoke Banu languages and Colonists from Europe and their descendants" (Vivian Bickford-Smith (1990). The origins and early history of District Six to 1910. In *The Struggle for District Six: Past and Present*. Eds. Shamil Jeppie and Soudien Crain. Cape Town: Buchu Books)
- 4 See also Silvers and Macleod.

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