

## Literary and Historical Uses of Life Writing for Young Adult Readers: “She’s only a gypsy, after all”<sup>1</sup>

—Marlene Kadar



*For the writer of a work of children’s literature, the balance is to show that the Holocaust is history, and the Holocaust is more than history—a simultaneity that cannot and must not be avoided.*

—Gary Schmidt

Versions of the memoir, or any form of auto/biographical<sup>2</sup> writing, are part and parcel of the frames of mind of contemporary readers, both young and old. Theorists of autobiography remind us of the popularity of life writing and its usefulness, especially in the classroom, as an instrument of good teaching. Over the past three decades, scholars of autobiography have also made their contribution to the upsurge in popular forms of life writing; they have analyzed and theorized memoirs, letters, diaries, and auto/biographical narratives as captivating literature. Although we assume that the life writing genres are “true to life,” innovative authors use both fictionalized

versions and non-fictional versions to tell their stories. Clearly, life writing holds the attention in either version but, as Schmidt’s words in the epigraph suggest, certain other questions about appropriateness and suffering come into play when the reader is a child or a young adult.<sup>3</sup>

A lack of attention paid by theorists of autobiography to autobiographical fiction for young adults is clearly an oversight, but it may be an oversight from which we can learn much—a generation later—about adult anxiety concerning the Holocaust and its representation. It may represent a lingering prejudice we harbour about the things we write for young adults. It may also

be a sign of something more pervasive, what Boel Westin suggests is a “fear of fiction” in works written for children and young adults on the subject of war and pain, and the Holocaust in particular (qtd. in Kokkola 2). According to Westin, adults fear that children and young adults will read fictional writing about traumatic events in history as non-fiction; with Lydia Kokkola, I worry more that children and young adults will not recognize the truth in the fiction. Writing about the Holocaust within the life writing genres reveals the threat to children from adults and government and social institutions: it reveals the threats posed by everyday “horrors and monsters,” not by the carefully concealed or the extraordinary ones (Reynolds 132–33). In either case, fiction and non-fiction are not discrete categories: the boundaries between the two are blurred and crossed regularly, and apart from this precept, some contemporary writers, such as Erich Hackl, who may be considered to write in the style of the Latin American *testimonio*, intentionally call attention to the impossibility of a simple conclusion as to what constitutes which and which is truer (Evans; Kokkola). Although the contemporary *testimonio* has its roots in popular Latin American resistance life writing such as *I, Rigoberta Menchú* by the young Guatemalan activist Rigoberta Menchú, *testimonio*-like texts in general tend to represent

those subjects who are excluded from authorized representation because they cannot write “for themselves”—this would include the child, the criminal, the woman-activist, the proletarian, and the insane (Beverley 93; Kadar, “Write Down” 22). To this list of exclusions, we can add the matter of the Holocaust subject: the Roma or Gypsy youth is rarely seen as a subject, never mind a protagonist, in autobiographical fiction for young adults. It is this oversight, perhaps a failure to notice, that I want to probe in this paper.

In recent years, the auto/biographical genres have been widely used in order to represent intense traumatic events for a young adult readership, including the specific historical events of World War II, the rise of Fascism, and the Holocaust. It has been suggested by theorists such as Jeremy Tambling, Adriana Cavarero, and Ivan Callus that the conventions of the life writing genres are best suited to the question of the relation between life, death, and text or textual representation.<sup>4</sup> Auto/biography, and life writing more generally, challenge “a life-death distinction” by demonstrating, often in compelling narrative, the fine line between life and death. Marie-Louise Wasmeier’s essay on Carol Shields’s *The Stone Diaries* begins with an exposé of the contradiction inherent in the relation: “Life writing preserves aspects of past lives that would

otherwise dissolve without trace, but, in the act of preservation, it destroys the very features which make 'life' into the activity of living—so as a text it constitutes a contradiction in terms: it extracts life from life in order to conserve it" (439). "In death," Wasmeier continues, "we become our stories" (440). This tautology makes the issue of children's literature about the Holocaust complex, and, as Adrienne Kertzer demonstrates in her analysis of *Daniel's Story*, much is at stake when we produce a children's book—or a book for young adults—about the Holocaust (205). As many readers will know, Daniel's story is unusual in that Daniel's creator, Canadian children's writer Carol Matas, was asked to represent the "voice of a representative child" of the Holocaust for an exhibition, *Remember the Children: Daniel's Story*, at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (Kertzer 154). Kertzer asks, "how do we decide what a representative child sounds like when the subject is the Holocaust, and what exactly does that child represent?" (157). These questions are obviously relevant in the case of *Daniel's Story*, but they may also be relevant in instances of biographical fiction about the Holocaust where authors were not hired with instructions to represent a particular voice.

The topic of the roles of children and young adults in the Holocaust is treated in a variety

of ways, but often stories revolve around the victimization of Jewish children and youth and their families. Among many others, one thinks of Canadian examples with international subjects and characters—Jack Kuper's *Child of the Holocaust* (1967; a Polish boy survives the Holocaust by changing his identity and moving from place to place), Carol Matas's *Daniel's Story* (1993; a fictional character's memories of Hitler's Germany, based on the recorded experiences of real children) and *Lisa* (1987; Lisa's experiences as a resistance fighter in Denmark after Hitler has invaded the country, also published as *Lisa's War* in the U.S.), and Karen Levine's *Hana's Suitcase* (2002; Hana is a Czech girl whose suitcase is sent to the curator of Holocaust Centre in Japan after her death). These examples ensure that readers outside the theatre of war and the time of the genocide never forget. Lydia Kokkola reminds us that most of our knowledge about the Jewish experience of Fascism in Europe comes to us through the act of writing, and it leaks into other lands, other generations, and other communities through a young adult readership.

The question of narrative voice is crucial to the verisimilitude of the stories in these texts, but also to young readers' expectations. Sometimes the narrators in the autobiographical genres are themselves children, or speak as if



In other words, believing in the educative value of such stories, adults encourage younger people to read them.



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they are children, or the subject is the suffering of children and youth at the hands of adults in violent historical circumstances. The most popular examples, although not always the most sophisticated, include well-known non-Canadian authors as well. Some texts that are widely read in the current period come to mind: *Milkweed: A Novel* by Jerry Spinelli (2003; an outsider boy who lives in the Warsaw ghetto aspires to be a Nazi when he grows up, until he encounters Hitler's violence and cruelty in his own life); *Run, Boy, Run* by Uri Orlev, translated from the Hebrew by Hillel Halkin (2003; eight-year-old Strulik escapes the Warsaw ghetto only to find danger and fear in the forests and countryside); *Friedrich* by Hans Peter Richter, translated from the German by Edite Kroll (1961; 1987; seventeen-year-old Friedrich and his family suffer at the hands of the Nazis and their followers—among them, Friedrich's neighbour and his family); Jane Yolen's *The Devil's Arithmetic* (1988; twelve-year-old Hanna travels back in time to 1942 Poland, where she takes on the identity

of Chaya, who is removed from her home by the Nazis) and *Briar Rose* (1992; Yolen retells the Briar Rose fairy tale from the point of view of Becca Berlin, a young Jewish American journalist, against the backdrop of Nazi Germany and Becca's grandmother's own story as a survivor); Lois Lowry's *Number the Stars* (1989; ten-year-old Annemarie Johansen is called upon to save the life of her friend, Ellen Rosen, during the occupation of Copenhagen), and the best-selling American classic, Aranka Siegal's *Upon the Head of a Goat: A Childhood in Hungary, 1939–1944* (1981; nine-year-old Piri is visiting her grandmother in the Ukrainian countryside when war breaks out, and she is unable to return home to the Hungarian town of Beregszasz for one year—during which time her family's life is changed forever) and the less well-known sequel, *Grace in the Wilderness: After the Liberation, 1945–1948* (1985; Piri is finally "liberated" from Bergen Belsen by British troops, and with her sister, Iboya, tries to establish a new life away from Hungary). These examples

indicate that writing about the Holocaust is still timely and that this is a subject of history and education that, one anticipates, will lead to good deeds, humanitarian ideals, and enlightened personal and political practices. In other words, believing in the educative value of such stories, adults encourage younger people to read them. A dance ensues between the horror represented and the testimonial character of the stories.

Writers from Matas to Siegal write within a maelstrom of competing restraints. One way to minimize the tension they inevitably feel is to err on the side of hopeful endings, whether this is realistic or not. How does this work? Narrators tell stories of cruel adventure in which children and youth who have suffered at the hands of the Nazis overcome the horror and seemingly insurmountable odds. Often, the narrator's voice maintains a certain polite distance from the author's, thereby underlining the tension between what really happened back then and over there and the imaginative representation of it here and now. We see that the genres of biography and autobiography are blended with fiction to such a degree that the boundaries are unclear. The young person's engagement with the text can be seen to be cemented by a kind of hoax that is sustained by a personal or historical point of view and realistic tone, a hoax that leads the reader to declare

that "this is a true story" when, in fact, it cannot entirely be. The life writing text must maintain this hoax consistently and persuasively, and thus an adult fear of telling too much of the horror generally obliges the author to craft a protagonist who is not exterminated, or at least is not seen to be exterminated, by the end of the story. So while this is not exactly subterfuge, the whole truth is not really told, because it is not palpable. Death cannot coexist with autobiography, so the profundity of the claim that life writing usurps death is not lost on us. Great liberties are taken by an adult writer whose intention is to protect the child reader, perhaps because s/he cannot protect the child in the story or, more precisely, because s/he could not protect him or her in the history that has passed. As Gillian Lathey demonstrates in her study of autobiographical children's literature, this history is an "impossible legacy."

Hamida Bosmajian goes one step further: "literature for the young," she writes, "exemplifies the inability to mourn because of the author's motivation to 'spare the child' and, indirectly, spare himself or herself even as information and experiences are communicated" (22). A closer look at one of the most popular American autobiographical novels for young adults, *Upon the Head of the Goat*, in which Piri, the protagonist, recalls the days, weeks, and years

leading up to her family's deportation, illustrates this point.

Piri's siblings do die in the future that follows *Upon the Head of the Goat*, but Piri herself survives to write the story as an adult. That Piri is the same person as the adult writer, Aranka Siegal, is never declared, but the identity is nonetheless believed by readers. Another example is the story of Annemarie Johansen, the protagonist in *Number the Stars*, who is also "spared." In the first example, the narrative is a fictionalization of an autobiographical tale and we assume that the child narrator becomes the adult author; in the second, Annemarie's life is very loosely based on the life of a friend of the author, but in such a way that Lowry is able to explain where "fact ends and fiction begins" in the afterword, a near-separate, almost apologetic text or "paratext" (Kokkola 57). It is this ambiguous interplay between fact and fiction that seems to draw our attention, as long as the child protagonist survives her ordeal and we do not have to say we have witnessed the unholy extermination of a young one too much like the young ones we encounter and love in our everyday lives in Canada in 2007.

Even though we talk about the innovativeness of the life writing genres, and their usefulness in representing the Holocaust, non-Jewish victims are rare in Holocaust literature for children (Kokkola

6). Erich Hackl's *Farewell Sidonia*—originally published in German in 1989 and translated into English in 1991—is one of the few books whose protagonists are not Jewish. Neither is Sidonia the narrator: she is a unique biographical subject in a book that amends our expectations of biography. The book offers young adult readers a digression from the genres and themes of life writing in three ways. First, although described as "non-fiction" by reviewers, *Farewell Sidonia* is identified as a "novel" by the author. Second, although Sidonia's memory lives on in her family's hometown of Steyr, Austria, the little girl, the hero of the tale, dies in Auschwitz. Third, although the author is distant in the first part of the book, eventually he is pressed into entering the narrative as the autobiographer, the "I," the one who can attest to the truthfulness of this fictionalized "true story."

In short, *Farewell Sidonia* is a biographical novel that becomes auto/biographical on page 127 and page 129, when the author cannot in good conscience remain outside the story any longer, and thus the hoax is relaxed, softened by his earnest intrusion. Reminding us of Lydia Kokkola's "fear" that "children will not recognize the factuality of what they read" (2), this narrator performs admirably and responsibly in the face of a traumatic past that young adults, too, must remember. He also provides a context for readers



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in similarly traumatic circumstances today, or more commonly in Canada, for readers who “hear” about war zones, or whose parents speak about today's news. Moreover, the author's intrusion coexists with a narrative innovation that helps the author cope with his restraints: there are, in a sense, multiple endings to the story of Sidonia. The author refers to himself as “the chronicler” (127); we understand him to be telling it like it was.

The chronicler, Erich Hackl, is an Austrian writer of some repute whose hometown was also the hometown of his protagonist, Sidonia Adlersberg. Hackl's book, described by *Publishers Weekly* as a “fact-based tale” (Steinberg 44), was published in a smooth English translation in 1991 as *Farewell Sidonia*. Although the book is not well-known in Canada, it has been acclaimed by individual school teachers of the Holocaust in the USA and Europe as both a useful historical resource that leaves a “lasting impression” (Lippencott 96) and a “moving piece of fiction” (O'Pecko 163).<sup>5</sup>

Not only is *Farewell Sidonia* an interesting

example of what life writing is and can do, and what it has to offer young readers, but it also forces us to reassess the limited conventions of other kinds of writing on the subject of the Holocaust. When the biographer becomes the autobiographer in the final pages of the book, the status of the real and the fictional are called into question and what remains paramount is “what it must have felt like” to be a Gypsy child in Steyr, and what it felt like, as a later resident of Steyr, to inherit that legacy.<sup>6</sup> The “mental actions and reactions” (Britzman) of the child are not, and cannot be, recorded, but the mental actions and reactions of the autobiographer are within the author's reach. Hackl divides the residents (the witnesses) in the town into “those who howl with the wolves” and those “who say nothing” (131). He turns Sidonia's tale upside down and, instead of dying, the Gypsy child lives. Her name is Margit, not Sidonia, and she lives south of Steyr in “a village called Polfing-Brunn” (135).

Regarded as a young adult or teen novel, *Farewell Sidonia* tells a terrible tale: although

myth and legend have taught us—unwilling ears though we might have—that Gypsies are dangerous because they steal white children from their families, Hackl's story reverses the narrative. Sidonia Adlersburg is a Gypsy child who is stolen by the state (of Austria, after the *Anschluss*, or annexation of Austria into Greater Germany by Hitler in 1938) from her white adoptive family and soon after sent to Auschwitz, where she perishes. "A gypsy will always be a gypsy," declares Siegfried Schiffler, chief inspector for the county of Steyr, and thus, he reasons, Sidonia must be returned to her people "no later than March 30, 1943" (96). During the Nazi period in Austria, this edict is tantamount to Sidonia's death sentence: she is "taken away on the last transport to Auschwitz" (120) and her foster parents, Hans and Josepha Breirather, never recover from the cruel loss. After the war, the Breirathers' friends and countrymen behave "as if Sidonia had never existed" (123). How terribly painful this deeply important fact appears to readers: the message we usually get, because this is the acceptable message, is that the child did indeed exist and her life is precious to all of us. As critics often tell us, the young adult genre and its market are plagued by the problem of acceptable subject matter. Sidonia's extermination is hard to accept, and yet the book has sold millions of copies and has been

translated into many languages. My guess is that Hackl's narratorial presence, because it is there to absorb the shock and take the blame, allows for the limits to be tried and crossed. In addition, Lydia Kokkola remarks in her study that "some of the most sophisticated examples of Holocaust fiction in terms of their representation of the complexity of the portrayal of attitudes are those that are originally written in German" (81).

Daily Canadian newspaper headlines confirm that children and youth are the innocent victims of war, ethnic hatred, and racism today, as in other eras. As surprising and shocking as Sidonia's story might seem to contemporary readers, Sidonia is not the first or the only Gypsy child to have been forcibly removed from her family for the purposes of deportation, concentration, and extermination during the Holocaust, or, as Roma scholars prefer to name it, the *Porrajmos* (the Romani word meaning "the Devouring").<sup>7</sup> As the subtitle of this paper suggests, if they were born into Gypsy families, Jewish families, black families, or mixed-blood families of various degrees (otherwise known as *Mischlinge*),<sup>8</sup> not even children's lives were valued by Hitler's race "scientists." Hackl's concerned narrator reiterates with cool irony, "She's only a gypsy, after all" (89).

Sidonia's life is apparently worth less than the life of a sixteenth-century Romani child living



in Wallachia,<sup>9</sup> where she would have been sold for the equivalent of 48 cents (Hancock, “Roma [Gypsy] Slavery” 3). Slavery was not abolished in Romania until 1864, when it is estimated that 600,000 Gypsy slaves were emancipated, among them many children and adolescents (Hancock, “Roma [Gypsy] Slavery” 4). We can imagine that Sidonia’s ancestors were among them too, and that little Sidonia must bear the burden of what Hackl “the chronicler” (127) calls “a great historical period” of both war and economic growth where “the death of others is kept quiet for a long time” (130). There is no debate that children and adolescents have been murdered, both in public places and in hidden places. Pretending otherwise may protect some children for some period of time, but it will never protect all of them, and it may in fact give us a false sense of our safety, and even of hope. Thus, in spite of the sorrow that witnessing may bring, young readers should have access to the literature that documents and re-imagines those atrocities. Reading the stories of victims of atrocities may be difficult for contemporary Canadian readers who think they are “far” from the time of wounding; but in the realm of the auto/biographical tale, where readers can imagine a different historical outcome if people had been encouraged to witness, to act, and to take up the burden of another’s deep sorrow, contemporary

child readers may derive significant benefit from the reading experience. The Holocaust story does not always need to end in hope, in a safe and single version of a completed story where evil is overcome by hope and happiness. Survivors of the Holocaust do not always feel happy, hopeful, or safe; and they also do not live in the present without the past hanging on to them. Their story is not complete.<sup>10</sup>

There are many excellent historical resources that document the extreme racism the Roma and Sinti peoples have endured since their exodus and slow migration from India westward into Europe, beginning roughly 1000 AD.<sup>11</sup> Suffice it to say that Gypsy peoples did not come from Egypt, as was once thought. It is from this mistaken identity that Gypsies got their first European or *gadjé* (meaning non-Roma) name—from “Egyptians” or “Gyptians” evolved the misnomer, “Gypsies,” an identifier which, in spite of some protest, is still used today by both Gypsies and the *gadjé* alike.<sup>12</sup> This misnaming is symbolic, however, of a lack of respect shown by the *gadjé* toward the different, the migrant, the wanderer, “itinerant stock”—the gypsy, whose “dark skin cannot wash off” no matter how hard she tries (Hackl, *Farewell Sidonia* 130).

Sidonia’s story begins on August 18, 1933, the very year that Hitler came to power in Germany,

and it ends in Auschwitz ten years later.<sup>13</sup> As an infant, Sidonia Adlersburg is left on the hospital steps in the town of Steyr, Austria.<sup>14</sup> She is adopted by Hans and Josepha Breirather, who love her and do their best to protect her from neighbours, city officials, and social workers, but to no avail. Sidonia is hunted by the Steyr community, especially by the local Youth Welfare Office and the Magistrate's Office. The community officials are helped along by a dishonourable senior school teacher, Frick, who goes to great pains to undermine the Breirathers' attempts to claim Sidonia as their daughter. Frick is only doing what he was told, mind you, since two female officials in the Youth Welfare Office encouraged Frick's denunciation of his young student, anticipating the willingness of officials to do their duty, to be officious when called upon. Hackl describes Frick's comments in halting, naturalistic detail: he does not use quotation marks to set off quoted text.

*The girl, he [Frick] wrote in letters carefully formed and slanting to the right, at present exhibits attentiveness and enthusiasm for her work, but is a slow learner and immediately starts to cry if she encounters obstacles. She has difficulty with math, as she has no head for numbers. The girl is anxious, sensitive,*

*easily offended, and occasionally somewhat boisterous if she doesn't get what she wants. She is rather shy with the teacher, however, and is apparently compliant. She is sensitive to receiving bad grades and is ambitious. The girl is in good hands with her foster parents, who supervise her learning, but more discipline is called for. (93–4)*

An eerie sense emerges that the distance between Frick's words and the life of Sidonia is very short. In addition, there is a tacit condemnation of the adequacy of the "white" parenting she receives. The teacher gives with one hand—they "supervise her learning"—and takes with the other—"more discipline is called for." In this literary and political context, "discipline" performs as a euphemism for further disciplinary action and deportation. Not only is Sidonia punished for being a Gypsy, but her foster parents are also punished for loving her, and probably also because they are open about their socialist principles. The narrator tells us that they have been punished in the past for their political activities in the community.

Hackl's representation of Sidonia's demise is, sad to say, believable, even to a contemporary young Canadian reader who may be incredulous given the differences she or he may encounter in the world of this text—incredulous that such



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acts of cruelty toward children could be possible, even thinkable. It is primarily for this reason that *Farewell Sidonia* provides an unequalled opportunity to learn about the less-known events of the Holocaust and the dire consequences for humanity of something as apparently banal as officiousness. In a racist world, especially when racism can be so carefully and subtly blended with nationalism, the actions of adults speak much louder than their words. The actions of adults are crucial to the growth of a civil society in which all children's rights to life and liberty are protected and celebrated. What better way to teach the consequences of human indifference, and of irresponsible tutoring and stewardship, than to ask Canadian youth to read a novel about an Austrian Gypsy girl, a child whose story is not well-known in Canada, not even in the lessons that comprise innovative curriculum modules about the history of the Holocaust?

For example, "Remember the Children" is the

title of an exhibit at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum [USHMM] in Washington, DC. It features "*Daniel's Story*," an exhibit that is constructed around diary entries signed by a young Jewish boy named Daniel.<sup>15</sup> We learn from the educational material that accompanies the exhibit, however, that the diary entries have been written by the exhibition creators, not by an individual youth named Daniel. The entries pose as autobiography, but they are, in fact, biographical in construction. A poignant teaching resource, Daniel lives outside of time, as a way to symbolize all Jewish children who perished in the Holocaust. Visitors to the exhibit remember and memorialize Daniel and the many Jewish children like him whose names we do not know. Alongside Daniel we could easily place Sidonia, a female child and a Gypsy, so that we could remember more of the children, both in Europe, their homelands, and here in North America, where many of their families and their stories migrated after World

War II. Like the well-known story of Daniel, Sidonia's story "encourages children and adults to reflect critically on their own beliefs, behavior, and responsibilities toward each other" ("Family Guide" 1), but the effect is quite different. *Farewell Sidonia* is more powerful precisely because it links Sidonia's life as an adopted Austrian Gypsy girl in the Holocaust with the current period of remembrance. Hackl gives new meaning to geography as a shared space, and discusses Steyr as home to both Sidonia and Hackl, even though their relationships to privilege, family, life, and death are so very different. Hackl's example shows us how to remember and how to be accountable in memory to the best of our ability.

As the narrative of *Farewell Sidonia* nears its end, the narrator's identity melds with Erich Hackl's and the narrator refers to himself in the third person as "the chronicler," not a novelist whose story is invented. He announces that he cannot stand outside Sidonia's real-life/death history—which has become his history—any longer: "At this point the chronicler can no longer hide behind facts and conjecture" (103). Hackl sees the ordinary folk of Steyr, including himself, as culpable, and he wants to be Sidonia's witness. He wants to be the member of the community who became accountable to history because he listened to the voice of the other, thus becoming involved

in the community's witnessing. He must create a memorial in the name of Sidonia so that the reader, too, can remember how she was, step by step, exiled from her community. Hackl's story helps adults adapt to a difficult heritage, both in Austria and in the Diasporas. Because children become adults (and it is adults who must choose whether to protect the Gypsy child or condemn her, at every step along the way), *Farewell Sidonia* may have enormous long-term educative and political powers for both children and adults.

The narrator begins the final chapter of *Farewell Sidonia* with the sentence, "She did not die of typhus—she died of grief" (127).<sup>16</sup> In spite of how she tries, Sidonia "cannot hide her outsidersness by donning white skin or dyeing her hair; even then she would be in danger" (131) for lambs are hunted by wolves, writes the narrator, and lambs are our children. "[A]t the right moment," people must think about the children, he continues, as they did in the case of another young person named Margit—a child who survived the *Porrajmos*—and about whom, therefore, Hackl writes, there is no need "to write a book in her memory" (135).

Hackl refers to his own work—biographical, autobiographical, and fictional at once—as a fable, perhaps because Sidonia did not survive. In other words, true to the form of the fable, Hackl

includes a moral thesis about human actions in the concluding lines of the book. In his view, it was very clear what the community needed to do in order to save Sidonia. Sidonia needed to stay in her foster parents' care so they could wait out the war together. The family needed the community to think about the child at the right moment to make such

a "miracle" work (134). As much as it is difficult to agree about the age at which a child/youth/young adult should read painful historical narratives, the difficulty is worth encountering. We must face it if we want to hope that as adults, our children will have the understanding and willingness to act "at the right moment."

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Mark Hackl, *Farewell Sidonia* 89

<sup>2</sup> The word "auto/biographical" is used with a virgule in order to indicate the close yet slippery relationship between the genres of autobiography and biography. In *Farewell Sidonia*, Erich Hackl adds to the ambiguity of the genres of life writing by fictionalizing a "true" story about a young gypsy girl. For more about the features of autobiography, see Kadar et al, Broughton, Evans, Lejeune, and Smith and Watson.

<sup>3</sup> In a special issue of *Biography*, Canadian scholars Susanna Egan and Gabriele Helms write of the enormous popularity and success of the conference "Autobiography and Changing Identities," held in Vancouver, BC in 2000. Egan and Helms make important claims for autobiography as a particular kind of flexible and democratic genre with certain engaging characteristics, open to a variety of narrators and selves and sensitive to representations of gender, age, class, and other

categories of difference. Their claims are reiterated in other countries by other autobiography scholars: Celia Lury, Mary Evans, Regenia Gagnier, and Trev Broughton in Britain; Leigh Gilmore, Sidonie Smith, and Julia Watson in the United States; Philippe Lejeune in France; Gillian Whitlock in Australia; and many others. Canadian scholars are at the forefront of the debates about the usefulness and reach of the autobiographical genres, as we know them (see, for example, Buss, Egan and Helms, Perreault, Rak, and Warley), but scholars of life writing seldom treat genres of life writing for young adults with the same seriousness as the genres written for adults. I have wondered if this is particularly true when the subject is distressing or traumatic.

<sup>4</sup> Maurice Blanchot writes poetically about the ironies in this claim in *The Writing of the Disaster*. He writes about "ruined words" that become "audible rising from the ruins" (83) and about the limit at which "art becomes an affront to affliction," to the memory of Auschwitz (83). Also: theorists use the term

“autohanatography” to examine the relationship between writing, the self, and death.

<sup>5</sup> See “Suggested High School Supplementary Book List” 32 and Vestli.

<sup>6</sup> Dr. Deborah Britzman, Faculty of Education, York University, first used this expression to describe how victims of trauma tell “the truth” in autobiographical writing. The facts may not be exactly right, but how it made the person feel is—and it is this memory of what it felt like that remains.

<sup>7</sup> On this word/naming, see Hancock, “Romani Victims of the Holocaust and Swiss Complicity” 70. For further comment, see Hancock, “‘Uniqueness’ of the Victims.”

<sup>8</sup> The word means persons of mixed descent. *Mischlinge* were at risk, although, it is believed, less at risk than full Jews. The word was also applied to Roma and Sinti. For details, see Kenrick and Puxon 25–30.

<sup>9</sup> Wallachia was a Romanian principality in Eastern Europe from the late Middle Ages until the mid-nineteenth century. It is situated north of the Danube River and south of the Carpathian Mountains.

<sup>10</sup> See Bosmajian 133–34, Kertzer 75, and Martin’s review of their work.

<sup>11</sup> There are many historical articles about the journey of the Roma and Sinti. The journey is a well-used metaphor by Roma singers and poets. See Hancock, Dowd, and Djuri for examples of poems (in English) that focus on the journey motif, or the

motif of the long road. In particular, see Manuš and Iliaz. See also Hancock’s thorough historical introduction for details about Indian/linguistic origins (9–21) and also Hancock’s *The Pariah Syndrome*.

<sup>12</sup> There has been some protest about this inaccurate identifier, with good reason. But the term “Gypsy” is still used, sometimes in a political way as an act of reclamation, and sometimes just because it is there. Canadian Rom activist, Ronald Lee, is an expert on the term and its uses.

<sup>13</sup> Austria was not included in the Nazi regime until the events leading up to the *Anschluss Österreichs* in March of 1938 ensured a political union, which lasted until April of 1945. After 1938, therefore, Sidonia’s life was even more at risk than it had been before, although there is no doubt that anti-Gypsy feeling was virulent in 1933 as well. Nonetheless, some scholars determine that the summer of 1938 marks the beginning of the *Porrajmos*. From June 12 to 18 of that year, hundreds of Sinti and Roma were rounded up and brutalized in Germany and Austria in what is known as “Gypsy Clean-Up Week” (Hancock, *The Roads of the Roma* 78). In December, the order for the “Fight Against the Gypsy Menace” was enacted, and Himmler signed a document that referred to “The Final Solution of the Gypsy Menace” (78).

<sup>14</sup> Erich Hackl was born in Steyr, Austria in 1954. He would have grown up hearing the story of Sidonia’s short life and the townspeople’s reactions to that story.

<sup>15</sup> See also the “biography” that was commissioned to be published simultaneously with the exhibit, *Daniel’s Story*, by Carol Matas (1993). *Daniel’s Story* went on to win numerous

awards, including the Silver Birch Award (1994), the Ontario Readers' Choice Award, and the Mr. Christie Honour Book (1993). Information about "Remember the Children" can be found on the website of the United States Holocaust Memorial

Museum: <<http://www.ushmm.org>>.

<sup>16</sup> "Sie sei nicht an Typhus—an Kränkung ist sie gestorben" (Hackl, *Abschied von Sidonie: Erzählung* 121).

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