
Rethinking Resistance:
Children in the Holocaust
and in Ilse Aichinger's *Die größere Hoffnung*

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The Holocaust is one of the most tragic and morally significant events of the twentieth century, acting as a sort of watershed of conscience. In the years since, the civilized world – from scholars to artists to philosophers – has been obsessed with trying to explain it, to comprehend it, and to come to terms with its horror and its implications for civilization and humanity. The calculated murder of millions of innocents is a catastrophe so unfathomable that statistics and images, now almost cliché, can often obscure the human face of this tragedy. Perhaps one of the most poignant ways of looking at that human face is to consider the Holocaust through the eyes of its children – a vantage point that enables the modern thinker to approach reality with a childlike criticism that rejects arbitrary norms (that is, externally-imposed standards and modes of thinking dictated by forces other than conscience) at the same time as it allows for a re-conceptualization of what constitutes the notions of resistance and hope.

One of the most heartbreaking aspects of the Holocaust experience was the tragic lack of effective physical resistance to the diabolical deeds of the Nazis. Among the many complex issues faced by scholars of the Holocaust are not only the questions of why the perpetrators so calculatingly committed such a monstrous crime and why so relatively few bystanders defended the rights of their fellow human beings, but also the haunting question of why so few victims effectively fought their victimization. Physical (including armed) resistance, by virtue of its immediate visibility, appears to post-Holocaust readers to be the most appropriate response to the violence of the Holocaust, and certainly the most psychologically satisfying to the wounded sense of justice and thirst for redemption. While there are indeed a few outstanding and well-documented

examples of heroic acts of Jewish resistance (including the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, the organized escapes from the death camps at Treblinka and Sobibor and the destruction of the crematoria at Auschwitz-Birkenau by the Sonderkommando), the Nazi apparatus severely restricted both the means by which such resistance could be undertaken and its ultimate effectiveness in halting the Jews' eventual fate.

In light of imminent physical doom, the only resistance left to many Jews was to cling stubbornly to life as long as possible, which, in the face of an enemy unshakably committed to their destruction, was a defiant stance in and of itself. In the Warsaw Ghetto, Rabbi Isaac Nissenbaum reportedly uttered the following words, which provide historical perspective and shed new light on the goal of resistance to the Nazis:

Now is the time for the sanctification of life (*kiddush ha-hayim*) and not for the Sanctification of the Name (*kiddush ha-shem*) through death. Once when our enemies demanded our soul, the Jew martyred his body for kiddush ha-shem.¹ Today when the enemy demands the body, it is the Jew's obligation to defend himself, to preserve his life. (qtd. in Dawidowicz 216)

George Eisen, who focuses specifically on children's resistance in his study, *Children and Play in the Holocaust: Games Among the Shadows* (1988), points out that in the light of the Holocaust and its unprecedented horror, the definition of what constitutes resistance, defiance and opposition (like the definition of so many normative concepts that the obscenity of the Holocaust has forced human philosophy to reevaluate) is highly problematic. The human spirit is capable of forms of resistance to evil that transcend normative expectations:

One would like to see a powerful resistance against an evil of such magnitude as the Holocaust; one wishes for heroic figures who stand with avenging swords in their hands and fallen enemies strewn at

their feet. But whereas this has been the customary image of heroic resistance through history, this picture – connoting “armed resistance” – presents only one of many options of human reaction to annihilation. It restricts our understanding of a wide range of actions that can occur in opposing one's physical and mental oppression or demise. The essence of opposition, which includes resistance, defiance, and protest, encompasses more than armed action. The definition must include a wealth of human responses, especially when the means of and ability to respond are severely limited. A simple comment of the survivor Genia Silkes exemplifies well the problem of specifically defining resistance. An educator and one of the heroines of the Warsaw Ghetto, she observed that “to live one more day is resistance. Amidst the dysentery and typhus, the starvation, is resistance. To teach and to learn is resistance.” (Eisen 83)

Children in the Holocaust used these responses, more than physical resistance, to defy subjugation and deny their oppressors' total victory. As opposed to stories of armed uprising, which are generally more satisfying to the human thirst for vengeance than an atrocity of this magnitude provokes, the accounts of children resisting through play and fantasy, through creativity and imagination, even through laughter and hope – both disappoint and exceed our expectations. Rather than providing an illusive (and, in view of the ultimate senselessness and pervasive evil of the Holocaust, profane) sense of resolution, stories of children's affirmation of life in the shadow of death resonate with a poignant dissonance that works against trivialization and condemns evil in a voice that can only be described as a deafening whisper:

[A] child's action offers a much more delicate heroism because it springs from inequality, powerlessness, and innocence and demonstrates the strength that can be derived from living by

ideals that contradict the executioner's intended design. (Eisen 86)

The Austrian writer Ilse Aichinger, herself classified as a *Mischling* (a person of "mixed race") under Nazi rule in her native Vienna, portrays these forms of resistance by children in her only novel, *Die größere Hoffnung*.² Aichinger's own wartime existence, so poignantly reflected in her novel, contains its share of danger (having to protect her Jewish mother, who was no longer exempt from deportation once Ilse reached the age of twenty-one) and defiance (participating actively in several secret resistance groups for young people). In the course of her clandestine activities, Aichinger became familiar with the pamphlets circulated by the Munich youth resistance movement *Die weiße Rose* and its leaders, brother and sister Hans and Sophie Scholl. Ilse Aichinger found a source of strength in the words of Sophie Scholl, a young woman near her own age whose group constituted perhaps the most visible resistance movement in Nazi Germany – and whose young life was ended by beheading when she and other leaders of the group were caught. Aichinger later commented on the hope that Sophie Scholl's courage engendered in her – the hope that forms the heart of what she later defined in her novel as *Die größere Hoffnung* – it is less a hope of tangible success against the monstrous Nazi regime than it is a hope of moral victory:

[I]ch weiß, daß von ihnen eine unüberbietbare Hoffnung auf mich übersprang. Diese Hoffnung hatte, obwohl sie es uns möglich machte, in dieser Zeit weiterzuleben, doch nichts mit der Hoffnung auf Überleben zu tun. (Aichinger qtd. in Kaiser 19)

Ilse Aichinger was, in fact, fascinated both by Sophie Scholl's example of girlhood resistance and by the potential of youth in general to deal with adversity, even death, with a courage that adults often lack: "Whenever I look at children or adolescents, I wonder: How would *you* manage to cope with a death sentence, passed either by the political powers or by physicians? How will *you* manage to

grow old?" (Aichinger qtd. in Bridges 70). The half-Jewish heroine, Ellen, and the Jewish children of Aichinger's *Die größere Hoffnung* cope with this Holocaust reality through play, through fantasy and through their very tenacity, forcing adult readers to rethink the traditional concept of what constitutes resistance in the face of a horror to which traditional modes of rational thinking hold no satisfying answers.

Resistance Through Play

The concept of childhood play in the Holocaust seems almost blasphemous at first glance; many feel "a graveyard is no place for entertainment" (Eisen 55). The barren landscape of the Shoah is undeniably hostile to merriment; mature reasoning and documented evidence shrink in revulsion from the notion of play in the midst of ubiquitous death, unable to reconcile the playground with the gas chambers of Auschwitz. Yet, the vast malevolence of the Holocaust also dwarfs adults' attempts to reduce it to logical systems of rationality and belief. An attempt must be made to see children's reactions not from the traditional adult perspective – the sentimentality and symbolism of which appears to be hollow at best, in the light of the irrevocable damage the Holocaust has wrought on the structure of moral rationalism – but from the vantage point of the children themselves. Ilse Aichinger, in compelling the readers of *Die größere Hoffnung* to view the nightmarish universe of the Shoah through the eyes of children, affords them the opportunity to assume precisely that stance.

In contrast to adults' forms of 'play,' children's play functions, in many respects, as a tool with which they come to terms with reality, rather than changing or even transcending it (Eisen 109). Children's play during the Holocaust rarely displayed the hedonistic, escapist and frivolous qualities that commonly characterized that of adults; rather, children used the act of play to make some sort of sense of their surroundings – an ability most adults lacked. Bernd Zabel, in an article for the *Neue Deutsche Hefte*, agrees: "Doch im Unterschied zu den verfolgten Erwachsenen, die alles tun, um dieses Bewußtsein abzuschütteln, fliehen [die Kinder] die Realität nicht, sondern nehmen sie in ihr Spiel hinein" (qtd. in Bartsch and Meltzer

178).

The children of the Holocaust, like the children in *Die größere Hoffnung*, faced adversity and death as a part of their daily reality, and this is reflected in the content of the games that children played. In the world of the Shoah, misery and death became the overwhelming reality, and while the children continued to play, their games necessarily reflected inescapable reality, which became the 'normal' way of life for children who had never known anything else. The constant sorrows – including hunger, separation from family, raids, deportations and death – were assimilated into children's play. As Aichinger points out in *Die größere Hoffnung*, "was mit uns gespielt wird, verwandelt sich nur unter Schmerzen in das, was wir spielen" (146). This observation is strongly confirmed by stories of children's games in the death camp of Auschwitz-Birkenau, where the ever-present symbols of death became part of the children's play. While the children of the Lodz ghetto fashioned toys from cigarette boxes and scraps of wood, the lifeless limbs and wispy hair of the corpses were the objects of children's play in Auschwitz (Eisen 90). A nurse in one of the children's blocks of Birkenau reported:

They played "Lageraeltester" and "Blockaeltester," "Roll Call," shouting "Caps off!" They took on the roles of the sick who fainted during roll call and were beaten for it, or they played "Doctor" – a doctor who would take away food rations from the sick and refuse them all help if they had nothing to bribe him with... Once they even played "Gas Chamber." They made a hole in the ground and threw in stones one after the other. Those were supposed to be people put in the crematoria, and they imitated their screams. They wanted me to show them how to set up the chimney. (qtd. in Eisen 80, 81)

The adult mind is repulsed and shocked by the image of innocent children enacting such gruesome scenes in their play, as if this were normal. As Gabriel Motola affirms:

[T]hose [children] most vulnerable socially, not

to mention physically, were exposed to and had embedded in their memories a world inconceivable in even their worst nightmare. [...] [T]he adult reader, unlike the child victim, has a moral center which assesses and assigns blame, which demands justice as it laments its absence, which recoils from the unspeakable horror that the [children viewed] as normal. (Motola 222, 224)

As adults struggle to comprehend human catastrophes like the Holocaust, they often overlook or even dismiss the child's 'other' ways of dealing with the trauma with which adults attempted to cope through logical, religious or philosophical means. Indeed, adults may gain unique insight into the tragedy of the Holocaust by allowing themselves to 're-view' children's responses. Ruth Klüger, writing from her own Holocaust experience, agrees:

Kindern, die Pogromen und anderen Katastrophen entkommen sind, hat man oft untersagt, diese Erfahrungen zu verarbeiten und sie dazu angehalten, sich wie "normale" Kinder zu benehmen. Man tut das zum Besten der Kinder, die nicht über "diese Dinge" sprechen sollen. Die verarbeiten ihre Traumata oft in erfundenen Spielen, die sie vor den Erwachsenen geheimhalten. (Klüger 109, 110)

From the adult's perspective, the child is a vital symbol of humanity and innocence that must be preserved as a sort of psychological refuge from phenomena such as the Holocaust and from the consequent devastation of the moral landscape. Yet, children in the Holocaust witnessed everything that adults witnessed (Eisen 116); rather than sentimentalizing the Holocaust, their perceptions illuminate the depths of its perversity and injustice. Even as the children's games reflect the evils that defined ghetto and camp existence, they provide poignant contrast to the environment in which they lived and died.

For Ellen and her Jewish friends in *Die größere Hoffnung*, as well as for children of the Shoah in general, these "Kinderspiele...

stellen...ein paradigmatisches Verhalten im Umgang mit der eigenen Verfolgung dar" (Rosenberger 121). Through such games that enacted the atrocities that were being committed against them, children learned to accommodate themselves to the insanity and horror in which their everyday lives were immersed. Play, as Eisen argues, came to provide a reflective mirror of all the "sorrows, dramas and absurdities of the children's brief existence" (77).

However, games also afforded a chance for children to take back their childhood, subverting, even for a moment, their own victimization. Eisen emphasizes that children did not merely copy the acts of violence they witnessed; rather, "they imposed on reality their own constructions and interpretations" (Eisen 114). In the Lodz ghetto, at the height of the children's deportations in 1942, children were seen to play 'deportation,' with different children acting in the roles of the Germans, the anguished parents and the frightened children. A defiant nine-year-old boy is said to have stepped out and protested his assigned role: "I don't want to be a German because the Germans take away little children from their mothers... and they kill them! [...] I don't want to be a German and I don't want to catch children!" (qtd. in Eisen 88). The children were, in essence, performing a dress rehearsal for a tragedy they inevitably faced; yet, being cognizant of their fate, one of the organizers of one of these games took on the role of "protector," empowering himself and the other children through their game as they never would be empowered in reality: "The Germans will come to take you away, I won't let them, and you'll have to cry" (Eisen 88).

Aichinger powerfully illustrates this appropriation of suffering through play in the sixth chapter of *Die größere Hoffnung*, entitled "Das große Spiel." Their discovery and deportation imminent, the Jewish children enact a Christmas play that recounts not the traditional story of Mary, Joseph and the infant Jesus in flight from King Herod, but superimposes it onto the children's own plight. The two stories – the Biblical, in which Joseph, Mary and Jesus found refuge (the 'great hope') in Egypt, and the children's own reality, from which there was no longer any escape – mingle in the children's play: "Vor Ägypten wird gekämpft!" "Dann eben nach Polen." "Und der König der Juden?" "Fährt mit" (126).

This Christmas play, while presented by the traditional figures,

also includes roles for peace, war and the world. Though in reality the world is torn by war and the children sense that their physical lives will end brutally and prematurely, they envision an alternate reality in their little drama. Ellen, in the role of the world, must choose between 'war' and the figure of the Christ child (symbolic here not only of moral integrity, but also of the outcast minority). Ellen's decision determines "the World's" fate³ (and, consequently, that of the people who inhabit her); she thus assumes through play the power to transform the world into a better one than she or the other children will ever know:

Die Welt streckte die Arme aus dem Tuch nach dem Kind aus. "Ich habe mich entschieden, für dich!"
Der Krieg riß den Helm vom Kopf. "Wie freu ich mich, ich bin der Frieden!" Jubelnd warf er den Soldatenmantel zurück in die Finsternis. (148)

The irony of Jewish children performing a Christmas play poignantly conveys their subconscious need to belong in a vehemently anti-Jewish world, even as its strangeness contributes to the surrealistic tone of Aichinger's novel. The need for normalcy that is evident in the Jewish children's play implies their urge to adopt a tradition other than their own – both (subconsciously) to attempt to belong in a society that had cast them out and to show the moral bankruptcy of that society, which held to the Christian tradition while simultaneously condoning and perpetrating heinous crimes against humanity. Thus, the children not only highlight the tragedy of their situation, but they also subvert the story of the Christ-child, depicting him as a Jewish refugee and, like themselves, a victim of hatred and persecution. Aichinger's blurring of the distinctions between the Jewish and Christian traditions – evident not only in this scene, but also in numerous others throughout the novel⁴ – not only reflects her own background as a *Mischling*, but also underscores similarities between the two religions in a time and place in which the differences were exploited for diabolical purposes.

While the children cling to some vestige of childhood normalcy in performing a Christmas play, their drama is pervaded by the fear that has interrupted their young lives. Just after their play takes

this happy turn, the children open the door to the man from next door, who has come to betray them to the secret police. The man is intrigued by and pulled into their play: "Er spielte im Namen aller unheiligen Könige, eine große stumme Rolle" (152). Though he temporarily forgets his sinister purpose for being with the children (154), he finally remains faithful to his 'Herod/Judas' role in real life and, in drawing the curtain on their play, sets the stage for the final act of the children's physical lives.

In addition to considering the content of children's play, it is also important to address the issue of place. Because Jewish children did not have access to parks and playgrounds, they played in the only space allotted to them – which was often in the streets or in other places that were never designed for or even conducive to recreation. For example, Vienna's *Jüdische Kultusgemeinde* opened the Jewish cemetery to the young, not only to enlist their help in tending the community garden planted there to supplement meager rations, but also to give them a place to meet and to recreate. Ruth Klüger remembers playing in this very Jewish cemetery herself: "Die jüdische Kultusgemeinde stellte uns, den letzten jüdischen Kindern in Wien, Lese- und Freizeiträume zur Verfügung, und der jüdische Friedhof war unser Park und Spielplatz" (Klüger 88). Elisabeth Welt Trahan recalls:

Gate Four [of Vienna's Central Cemetery] became our home in the country, our summer resort. It was green, had trees and, right by the entrance, long before the first row of graves, there was a wide open space for sunbathing and ball playing. And no warnings or interventions of any kind: Gate Four extended its welcome to all Jews, living and dead. At first, picnicking, singing, playing cards, games or volleyball on a cemetery felt weird [...]. Then it occurred to me that the dead could hardly object to our presence. If anything, they might welcome the company of the living. An unanticipated feeling of solidarity and of belonging rose up inside me, and I began to feel at home on the cemetery. (Trahan 128)

In her first published work, the short story "Das vierte Tor" (1945), which formed the basis for the third chapter of *Die größere Hoffnung*, titled "Das heilige Land," Ilse Aichinger describes the only playground that remained to Vienna's Jewish children in a more philosophical way. Aichinger's short story invites the reader to converse with the children who play in that graveyard, forsaken by the rest of the world. In answer to the 'reader's' question (as articulated by the narrator), "...habt ihr denn gar keine Angst vor den Toten?" a young boy gives a reply that condemns the hatred and the indifference of the living: "Die Toten tun uns nichts" (Aichinger, "Tor" 272, my emphasis).

Amid the gravestones of the dead, Jewish children found a sort of refuge from the living. When Aichinger expands on this notion in *Die größere Hoffnung*, she emphasizes the relationship between the dead and the living; while the Nazis declare Jewish ancestry 'wrong' and use it as cause for persecution, the children of *Die größere Hoffnung* find that their departed ancestors, in a figurative sense, hold the key to their identity. In the midst of this unsettling proximity to death, both as they play among the graves of the dead and as they themselves live daily in death's widening shadow, is precisely the place in which the children find freedom, hope and a sense of self, despite their circumstances. The children not only play *Verstecken* with each other amid the neglected gravestones, but they also play 'hide and seek' with the dead, to whom their own fate is bound:

"Unsere Großeltern sind verächtlich, unsere Großeltern bürgen nicht für uns." "Sie weigern sich." "Sie sind von weither gekommen und sind weit weggegangen." "Sie sind gehetzt wie wir." "Sie sind unruhig." [...] "Sie liegen nicht still unter den Steinen!" "Man beschimpft sie!" "Man haßt sie!" "Man verfolgt sie!" "Es sieht aus, als ob unsere Toten nicht tot wären," sagte Leon. Die Kinder packten sich an den Händen. Im Kreis sprangen sie um das fremde Grab. "Jetzt haben wir's, jetzt haben wir's, die Toten sind nicht tot!" [...] "Unsere Toten sind nicht tot." "Sie haben sich nur versteckt." "Sie spielen mit uns

Verstecken!" "Wir wollen sie suchen gehen," sagte Leon. (55, 56)

Children found place for play where it seemed play could not exist. Historical accounts confirm that the environment of disease, squalor and fear was far from conducive to childhood games. Even before the ghettos were sealed off from the outside world, Jews were forbidden to enter public parks; afterward, such areas were almost always outside the ghetto walls. As one mother in the Warsaw ghetto complained: "With intentional foresight, not one park, not one playground or public garden was included in the area (chosen for the ghetto)" (qtd. in Eisen 20). Indeed, parks within the territory earmarked for the ghetto were either closed off or eliminated from the ghetto. Private yards in the ghetto were used to grow vegetables to supplement the meager ghetto diet, or were rented out by their enterprising owners to those who could pay.⁵

The official chronicle of the Lodz ghetto records that in 1942 an amusement park was set up just beyond the outer fence of the ghetto, taunting the ghetto children with the proximity of 'normal' life:

The main attraction, the only one visible, is a suspension-type merry-go-around. Every day the children of the ghetto make a pilgrimage to this corner and gaze longingly at the activities on the other side of the fence. It is mostly children too on the other side, who are romping about and climbing into the small hanging boats of the merry-go-around. A radio amplifier broadcasts phonograph music. The ghetto children have never seen a carousel and have seldom heard music. They listen and peer at a curious, alien world, where children live in a sort of never-never land. A merry-go-around, almost within reach, only the barbed wire keeps them away. Children are children on either side of the barbed wire – and yet they are not the same. (qtd. in Eisen 32)

The Jewish children of *Die größere Hoffnung* have a very similar experience. They spend their days on the *Kai*, close to an amusement park, yet they are forbidden to enjoy the carousel. That carousel becomes an object of the children's fantasies of freedom and normalcy:

"Gehst du ein Stück weiter gegen die Berge zu, so kommst du an das Ringenspiel mit den fliegenden Schaukeln." "Die fliegenden Schaukeln sind schön, da packt man sich und läßt sich wieder los." "Und dann fliegt man weit auseinander!" "Man macht die Augen zu!" "Und wenn man Glück hat, dann reißen die Ketten. Die Musik ist modern und der Schwung reicht bis Manhattan, sagt der Mann in der Schießbude. Wenn die Ketten reißen! Aber wer hat schon dieses Glück?" (36)

The man in the shooting booth empathizes with the outcast children and, since his supervisor is away and there is no one else in the park, he allows the Jewish children to ride on the carousel – an act of defiance both on his part, in that he protests the children's exclusion and violates the Nazi statute in order to bring the children a rare moment of joy, and on the part of the children, who, if only for a moment, fly to a world beyond the reach of their oppressors:

Die Kinder flogen. Sie flogen gegen das Gesetz ihrer schweren Schuhe und gegen das Gesetz der geheimen Polizei. Sie flogen nach dem Gesetz der Kraft aus der Mitte. Alles Graugrün blieb weit unter ihnen. Die Farben verschmolzen. Rein und grell flirrte das Licht zum Lob des Unbekannten. Das Bild ergab sich dem Sinn. Tief unten stand mit verschränkten Armen der Budenbesitzer. Er schloß die Augen. In dieser Sekunde hatte er seine Schießbude gegen die ganze Welt vertauscht. Die Kinder schrien [...] Der Glanz des fernsten Sterns hatte sie erreicht. (43)

Only with considerable effort on the part of the Jewish councils were playgrounds established in the ghettos. The President of the Jewish Council of the Warsaw Ghetto, Adam Czerniaków,⁶ realized the need for organized youth welfare. Moved by the plight of the ghetto youth, Czerniaków records in his diary in 1942: "They are living skeletons from the ranks of the street beggars... They talked with me like grown-ups – those eight-year-old citizens. I am ashamed to admit it, but I wept as I have not wept for a long time" (qtd. in Eisen 43).

In addition to mounting a campaign to raise charity funds for the ghetto's children, Czerniaków also launched an effort to establish parks and playgrounds in the ghetto.⁷ The three playground complexes that resulted from this effort not only provided much-needed space for the children to play, but they, along with other programs organized to feed, clothe, house and educate youth,⁸ also symbolized a collaborative effort and commitment on the part of the ghetto community to the children – an act of faith that the next generation would survive. George Eisen argues that this investment despite the bleakness of their future was, in its own way, a form of life-affirming defiance for adults: "Providing play opportunities was a conscious escape mechanism through which the adult population attempted to transcend in spirit both the physical walls of the ghetto and the mental walls of terror" (Eisen 49). Seeing children at play, despite the fleeting pleasure of it, gave the older ghetto residents a glimpse of a world beyond the daily reality over which they had no control (Eisen 46), enabling them to envision their survival as a people beyond the Nazi nightmare.

Resistance Through Fantasy

Fantasy, like play, fulfilled a vital function in the lives of the young in the Shoah, providing them both with the means to cope with reality and with access to a world beyond that reality. Younger children do not yet clearly differentiate between fantasy and reality; for them, both are equally real: "Innere und äußere Realität gehen für sie ineinander über. Traum und Spiel sind ebenso Realität wie die Realität der Erwachsenen" (Kaiser 25). An examination of children's intuitive responses in the Holocaust reveals this intermingling of raw

experience and fantastic constructs of imagination – a synthesis that not only enabled children to somehow cope with the horror of their oppression, but also, in a sense, empowered them to challenge it.

As Rosemary Jackson argues in her study, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*, fantasy is never completely free from the cultural constraints against which it protests; indeed, fantasy is often the product of these constraints (3). The power of fantasy to subvert reality lies precisely in its "uneasy positioning [...] between this world and the next" (180). Jackson maintains that withdrawal into a world of fantasy can have the function not merely of an escape from tangible circumstances, but also of "protest against a *life-denying reality*" (127, my emphasis) – a phrase that may certainly be applied to the Holocaust.

As the world around them became more nightmarish with every passing day, children in the Holocaust often attempted to compensate by creating for themselves a reality outside of that which could be dictated by the Nazis. In doing so, children could access a frame of reference beyond the present pain, in which they could find a sense of security and normalcy that was otherwise denied them.

Dreams and imagination are indeed the mainstay of childhood innocence and offer priceless insights into the human psyche in general. However, in a society that denied individuals an identity and undertook their physical alienation and annihilation based on externally defined racial criteria, this realm of the fantastic could become an outlet for the defiant expression of a forbidden self, especially for children. Those young people whose childhood was interrupted by the Nazi madness were denied the normal process of self-discovery during which the individual typically develops a moral center and an existential anchor. In the absence of this possibility, children in the Holocaust frequently turned to the realm of the imagination.

Forced separation from friends and family was one of the most traumatic shocks that the Shoah forced children to absorb. Some children invented imaginary friends to replace those from whom they had been torn when their families went into hiding or were deported; Anne Frank, thirteen years old at the time she and her family went into hiding in Amsterdam, addressed her diary entries

to “Kitty,” creating for herself an outlet for the social interaction she lacked in seclusion. As we see in *Die größere Hoffnung*, after Ellen’s circle of friends is deported and she is alone, she often sees their faces (particularly that of Georg, with whom she had a special bond) and converses with them. Though Ellen senses her friends have been sent to their deaths, she continues to relate to them through her imagination, until she is finally united with them in her own death (269). While it is not uncommon for a child in any time and place to have an imaginary playmate, George Eisen describes this creation of fantasy as a tool children commonly used to cope with their dismal situation:

It was natural that a child wished to be surrounded by a magic circle, a circle of friends, in which one could live another life, a life somewhat unconnected with the misery of the ghetto. These imagined friendships were not to facilitate an escape from reality, but to help adjust to, or assist in rationalizing, a completely irrational universe. (Eisen 73)

Imagination also served to carry children to a world beyond the gruesome present over which they had no control. In dreams and in fantasy, children could impose their own interpretations of their universe or even create a new one. In *The Third Reich of Dreams*, Charlotte Baradt indicates that dreams were an outlet for those whose wishes could not be fulfilled in the horrific reality in which their conscious lives were immersed (Langer, *Holocaust* 136). Yitshok Rudashevski, a young boy in the Vilna ghetto, remarked on the psychological respite that dreams offered: “I run through the cold sad little ghetto street . . . to fall asleep as soon as possible, because in sleep you dream and have sweeter hopes than when awake” (qtd. in Eisen 27).

Dreams were accessible to children not only through sleep, but through their use of imagination and fantasy in daily life. Through make-believe, children managed symbolically to escape their physical prison. Gabriele Stilten shows how a typical childhood fantasy took on a particular significance in light of the dismal circumstances in which she lived as a ten-year-old girl. She recalls how she and her

younger friend Hans would stand in the archways of the rat-infested attics in Theresienstadt “and pretend that we could fly . . . The flying fantasy was lovely, though, because if we could fly, then we could fly away” (qtd. in Eisen 73).

For Ellen and the other children in *Die größere Hoffnung*, their fantasy world often seems more meaningful and more significant than the bleak reality that opposes it. In the third chapter of the novel, “Das heilige Land,” the children are urgently seeking to cross the border into safety just as war has made such a crossing physically impossible. In their desperate play in the Jewish cemetery, they form a funeral procession behind the coffin of a dead stranger, somehow subconsciously realizing that death was not only the destination at which their own physical journey would end, but also the point at which their inner selves could finally be validated and their questions finally answered:

Schweigend standen die Kinder vor der aufgeworfenen Erde. Es schien ihnen plötzlich, als wäre es der letzte Ausweg, der hier zu Ende ging, der letzte Weg, um über die Grenze zu kommen, der letzte Weg, um irgendeinen Nachweis zu erlangen. Als die Träger das Grab zuzuschaukeln begannen, wandten sie sich zögernd zum Gehen. (66)

The children encounter the driver of a hearse, who has overheard them speak of their longing for refuge in “das heilige Land” – here both a literal reference to Palestine, which symbolized the hopes of Jews everywhere for their own homeland, and a figurative allusion to the more abstract concepts of existential and spiritual freedom. The driver calls this to the children’s attention:

“Das heilige Land ist zu weit, hört ihr?” Er neigte den Kopf tiefer zu den Kindern. “Es gibt eine Grenze ganz in der Nähe, ganz einfach, da hinüber zu kommen! Und von dort müßt ihr gar nicht mehr weiter. Da gibt es Spielzeug in Hülle und Fülle, da bekommt ihr alles zurück.” (67)

Still focused on a literal interpretation of the driver's offer to bring them over the border, the children promise to meet him in the cemetery and to pay him the sum he demands for his services. They depart in a *Trauerkutsche*, a fitting vehicle for a journey that will inevitably end where it began, depositing the children back in the cemetery – an omen signifying their inevitable physical doom. The children suspect that they are being driven in circles and have been deceived (which, in the end, is exactly what occurs); yet the driver assures them that he can bring them over the border. The boundary to which he refers, as Ellen and the other children soon discover, is not one that divides a fanatical dictatorship from a democratic haven or separates danger from safety in the commonly assumed sense. Rather, the driver describes this border as that place, “wo die Linie zwischen Himmel und Erde läuft” (72) – it is the existential barrier that holds the spheres of perceived reality and unseen fantasy apart within the human spirit. Ilse Aichinger's concept of freedom and resistance are clearly visible in this sequence. True freedom, according to her philosophy, is dependent not upon external circumstances, but rather upon the individual's refusal to be defined by them. Meaningful resistance in this sense is not that which takes up arms and punishes the perpetrator, but rather that which rebels against the shackling of the spirit and the conquest of the soul.

Fantasy and reality merge in Aichinger's tale during the carriage ride just as they do in the childhood psyche; three legendary personalities join them on what the children believe is their escape. Each of these figures that accompany the children in this surreal carriage ride imparts a particular symbolic significance. Lieber Augustin⁹ with his bagpipe, Columbus with his globe and King David with his slingshot are voices from legend, from the adventurous past and from religious tradition – figures whose fantastic dimensions represent different facets of the children's longing. Augustin, who urges the children in the *Leichenwagen*: “[S]ingt das Lied in der Pestgrube [...]. Nur das Lied, das ihr singt, weist euch nach” (78), symbolizes their yearnings for the laughter and lightheartedness of the normal childhood that the Nazis stole from them. Columbus, the explorer and dreamer, embodies the children's unfulfilled longing for place and their search for a world other than that in which they are trapped.¹⁰ “Entdeckt die Welt von

Neuem,” Columbus advises, as he inverts their preconceived notions of freedom and belonging:

“Die aber sind, sind immer, und die nicht sind, sind nie. Die aber sind, sind überall, und die nicht sind, sind nirgends. Bleibt und horcht, liebt und leuchtet! Laßt euch verachten und badet in Tränen, Tränen machen die Augen hell. Durchdringt den Nebel und entdeckt die Welt! Sein – das ist der Paß für die Ewigkeit!” (78)

The figure of King David, perhaps, carries special meaning; his victory as a small Jewish shepherd boy over an overwhelmingly powerful and ostensibly unbeatable opponent bears striking parallels to the situation the Jewish children face against the might of the Nazis to control every facet of their lives and to order their deaths at will. David is presented by Aichinger not as the powerful ruler he became as an adult, but rather as the young boy he was when he confronted Goliath: “Da sprang ein Knabe von innen her über die Mauern. Er trug ein kurzes, helles Kleid und eine Schleuder in der Rechten” (75).

Though David is portrayed as a Messianic figure (as evidenced in the scene in which he is being tormented by the non-Jewish children in the street; he takes an old dog that the children had been ruthlessly torturing and offers it as a sacrifice for their sins), he promises no deliverance. The boy David offers the wounded, broken body of the dog (the symbol of an innocent scapegoat), not the flawless firstborn lamb required by the ancient Judaic tradition and reflected in Christian theology. As there is no fitting sacrifice to be made to atone for senseless evil, he offers up that very iniquity for which the human psyche demands an impossible redemption: “Wir wollen Gott von euren Sünden ein Brandopfer bringen. Kommt und schenkt ihm eure Sünden, weil ihr nichts anderes habt” (75).¹¹

The figure of David is also an embodiment of the “Otherness” that the Jewish children feel and that is used to justify the cruelty daily perpetrated against them. In confrontation with the young hoodlums in the street, David subverts the words of hatred that are being hurled at him. The children thus project their own

argument onto this figure and find a voice in the construct of their imaginations:

“Bin ich ein Fremder, weil mein Haar schwarz und gekraust ist, oder seid ihr Fremde, weil eure Hände kalt und hart sind? Wer ist fremder, ihr oder ich? Der haßt, ist fremder, als der gehaßt wird, und die Fremdesten sind, die sich am meisten zu Hause fühlen.” (76)

The figure of David reflects the Jewish children's desire to stand face to face with their oppressors and prove that right can indeed triumph over might. However, King David admonishes the children: “Erschlagt den Goliath *in euren Herzen*” (78, my emphasis). By the end of the carriage ride, as the driver admits he has indeed led them in circles and leaves the children in the exact physical location from which their strange journey started, it is clear to them that defiance and victory are battles they must fight and win within themselves, regardless of whether they succeed in changing their physical circumstances. Lawrence Langer writes: “[N]othing changes in the midst of desires to alter everything until the *wish* becomes a more vital necessity for existence than actual events” (Langer, *Holocaust* 152). Though in reality the children have been cruelly deceived by the driver of the hearse, the children's journey brought them to this critically important existential destination. Though in reality war and human indifference had closed national borders and avenues for physical escape, the children of *Die größere Hoffnung* make a crossing of another kind, in which they discover how to create a solace for themselves even where there is none:

“Springt ab!” schrie der Kutscher zornig und rüttelte die schlafenden Kinder. “Springt ab, springt ab! Überall sind Posten, wir sind im Kreis gefahren. Schaut, daß ihr weiterkommt!” Die Kinder schlugen die Augen auf und hoben benommen die Köpfe. “Zeit, daß ihr aufwacht!” schrie der Kutscher. “Alles war vergeblich. Alles ist verloren, wir kommen nicht mehr über die Grenze!”

“Wir sind schon darüber,” riefen die Kinder. Sie sprangen ab und rannten, ohne sich noch einmal umzusehen, in das Dunkel zurück. (80)

Fantasy and reality are so intertwined in this surrealistic sequence that they are often indistinguishable from one another. It is unclear to the reader whether the carriage ride actually occurred, or whether it was a dream constructed by children who were living a nightmare. Aichinger here succeeds in positioning the reader to take the perspective of the child, for whom reality and the realm of imagination are equally genuine and significant. The figure of Columbus articulates the significance of the imaginary realm and the power it held out to the children in light of their undeniably desperate situation: “Träume sind wachsender als Taten und Ereignisse, Träume bewachen die Welt vor dem Untergang, Träume, nichts als Träume!” (75).

Ellen utilizes this same power of imagination as a tool of resistance in the eighth chapter of the novel, “Flügeltraum,” which is characterized by the imposition of fantasy onto reality. Her friends all deported and her grandmother dead, Ellen finds herself alone. The chapter opens with a wish-fulfillment dream (Reiter, “Holocaust” 90) that is undoubtedly connected to the grief of final and irrevocable physical separation from her friends. The image of the train calls up images of the infamous transports to the East and the tragedy of their final destination: “Drei Minuten vor Abfahrt des Zuges vergaß der Lokomotivführer das Ziel der Fahrt” (184). This envisioned reprieve hints at Ellen's desire to imagine her friends out of danger and to compel humanity to resist moral subjugation. She involves herself in the conflict between the stationmaster, who demands that the train depart as scheduled, and the operator of the train, who represents the struggle of conscience that Ellen attempts to will in a right direction. The engineer's doubts mirror the morality to which the children had been clinging all along; when the stationmaster threatens, “...das kostet Sie den Kopf!”, the engineer feels that there were consequences that were still worse: “als könne es ruhig den Kopf kosten, wenn es nur nicht das Herz kostete” (186).

From behind the train on the other side of the tracks, Ellen cries out to the *Lokomotivführer*, pleading with him – and,

by extension, with all in the station and with the reader – not to become an unwitting accomplice; to resist and to heed the dictates of conscience which were numbed with such shameful effectiveness in those years: “[E]s gibt Lokomotivführer, die nicht wissen, wohin die Reise geht! Ein versiegeltes Kuvert, das ist alles. Gebt euch nicht zufrieden! Fahr nicht, fahr nicht, solange du es nicht weißt!” (189). It is an appeal that the reader, with the benefit of hindsight, wishes to make in a desperate retrospective interrogation of a confounding and troubling past that cannot now be changed. It is an appeal that is silenced by fear and blind duty – forces which are shown to emerge victorious over empathy and conscience in the minds of most of the adults portrayed in *Die größere Hoffnung*. At the command of the stationmaster (“Steigen Sie jetzt ein und fahren Sie. Und denken Sie nie mehr über das Ziel nach. Übrigens, die Sache wird ihre Folgen haben” [189]), the engineer numbly climbs into the train, and it speeds away to “the front.”

A chase ensues, with the station police pursuing Ellen. Interestingly, though, a strange transformation occurs during the chase, which at times resembles the children’s game of “hide and seek” in the cemetery:

Lauf, Ellen, lauf, einer führt an. Längst ist ausgezählt. Der verfolgt wird, führt an. Eins, zwei, drei, vier, fünf, sechs, sieben, du darfst das Opfer sein. Reiß sie mit, reiß sie mit, die Kette der Verfolger! Quer hinüber, Betreten verboten, quer hinüber über euch selbst. [...] Arme Verfolger. Reiß sie mit, dahinter, ins Ziel. (192)

Ellen allows herself to be caught – in fact, she catches her pursuer and allows herself to be brought to the police station (198). By the authority of her ability to transcend, in both the literal and the figurative sense, the prison in which the police attempt to trap her, Ellen subverts their power, confounds their simplistic biases and blurs the distinction between victim and oppressor: “Ellen lief, sie lief wie ein versprengter, geschlagener König, blindes Gefolge im Rücken: diese Armen, die wie alle Verfolger zum Gefolge der Verfolgten wurden” (191).¹²

Ellen feels a strange sympathy for her tormenters, because it was *they* who had lost a sense of direction and had exchanged inner truth for a perverted lie, their humanity for inhumanity (“Warum habt ihr eure Flügel gegen Stiefel vertauscht?” [206]). Even as the police drag the bloodied and terrified Bibi, who had escaped from the camp with Georg’s help, into the station from her hiding place, Ellen tries to convince her to see the perpetrators with new eyes. In doing so, Ellen endeavors with gentle defiance to rob them of some of their power to possess their victims’ souls. The oppressors, Ellen maintains, are, in fact, victims themselves, locked in a prison of their own making by hatred and indifference:

“[A]rme Gefangene. Sie können sich nicht finden, ihr Todfeind hält sie besetzt, eingenommen sind sie von sich selbst. Mit dem Teufel sind sie im Bund, aber sie haben keine Ahnung davon, ihre Flügel sind zerbrochen. [...] Wir müssen ihnen helfen, [...] wir werden sie befreien.” (206)

The police chief who questions Ellen grows increasingly exasperated with her use of paradox in answering questions that strike the adult reader as routine in that setting. Aichinger succeeds here not only in allowing Ellen to interrogate her persecutors, but also in compelling her readers to examine themselves, to take a critical position and to re-view meaning that is often taken for granted:

“Geboren?” “Ja,” sagte Ellen. Einer der Männer gab ihr eine Ohrfeige. [...] “Wie heißt du, wo wohnst du, wie alt bist du und warum antwortest du nicht?” “Sie fragen falsch,” sagte Ellen. [...] “Wo bist du zu Hause?” [...] “Wo ich gewohnt habe,” sagte Ellen, “war ich noch nie zu Hause.” “Wo bist du dann zu Hause?” wiederholte der Polizist. “Wo Sie zu Hause sind,” sagte Ellen. “Aber wo sind wir zu Hause?” schrie der Oberst außer sich. “Sie fragen jetzt richtig,” sagte Ellen leise. (201, 203)

By the force of her imaginative outlook, Ellen infuses Bibi with a new strength to face her fate; rather than being hauled off to the train against her will, Bibi now leads the policeman – a sign that she has appropriated her own suffering. Bibi's young life certainly ended as brutally as it would have in any case; yet in the position she took toward death, she condemned those who sentenced her.

Ellen is held at the station and is to be brought to the secret police in the morning. But as she sees one of the policemen tear a page off a wall calendar to reveal that the date is the fifth of December, Ellen is filled with certain hope of a 'miracle' on the eve of *Nikolaus*.¹³ The magical significance of this holiday for children cannot be overlooked in connection with Ellen's story. On a day when children believe their dreams come true through a personage from the realm of fantasy and outside the everyday reality, she still believes that her wish – as improbable as it is – will be granted.

As *Nikolaus* and his procession move through the streets, children's song casts a fantasy spell over the scene in the station, overwhelming the guards, and Ellen escapes through the open door, eluding the secret police. On this one enchanted night, the voices of children could triumph over injustice, as in a fairy tale: "Leise muß man singen, wenn es finster wird, leiser, noch viel leiser, so wie Kinder singen hinter verschlossenen Läden. [...] Die Verlautbarungen flüstern nur mehr und verstummen endlich vor dem fremden Lied. Was singt es, was singt es? Stoßt die Läden auf!" (213).

"Flügeltraum" is a chapter of Ellen's story over which she has considerable control, conversing with her oppressors of her own free will, challenging them and holding them captive with her words, and finally escaping their hold on her. However, it is also a chapter in which fantasy is given free reign over reality. Scholar and Aichinger biographer Gisela Lindemann poses the question of whether the story could have evolved as it did in cold reality. Her answer leaves the reader no comfort: "[D]ie Geschichte...konnte nur so geschrieben werden" (Lindemann 63).

As reflected both in Aichinger's novel and in the Holocaust experience, children defied their circumstances in ways that were "outside" the traditional concept of resistance. The Shoah embodied the antithesis of childhood, yet they were children

nonetheless – their very existence was in this sense an impossibility. Their survival – however rare – was victory. As historian Martin Gilbert states:

To die with dignity was in itself courageous. To resist the dehumanizing, brutalizing force of evil, to refuse to be abased to the level of animals, to live through the torment, to outlive the tormentors, these too were courageous. Merely to give witness by one's own testimony was, in the end, to contribute to a moral victory. Simply to survive was a victory of the human spirit. (Gilbert 828)

Despite this 'victory,' testimony of children's existence and resistance in the Holocaust provides no solace for humanity; instead, it confounds our expectations of comfort and a modicum of saving grace that will allow us to establish some sort of continuity with a past we are not willing to completely repudiate.

The horrific experience portrayed in *Die größere Hoffnung* – which, as Lawrence Langer asserts, only adults could fully 'understand' – is one which the children do not fully comprehend themselves (*Holocaust* 134). Their lives are interrupted by the Holocaust, their innocence a victim of it, and their deaths inexplicably demanded by it; yet children attempted to "assert life and wrench some coherence from an existence that has been reduced...to the illogic of nightmare" (Langer, *Holocaust* 136).

Most children who experienced the Shoah never awoke from the nightmare to the comforting arms of their mothers; the power of their imaginations could not truly transcend the ghastly circumstances under which they lived and died. Yet, the children still played and dreamed, learned and laughed, even hoped – beyond the capacity of adult logic to explain, understand and justify it. Rather than signifying the frivolity of children's responses to the Holocaust, perhaps this phenomenon illuminates the poverty of adult logic and the ultimate futility of its efforts to create a space in which humanity may live comfortably with the terrible knowledge that the Holocaust brought to light. Games, dreams and fantasy appear not merely as a product of hideous circumstances, but also as a sort of rebellion

against them. Children played, laughed and hoped not because they had reason to do so, but *trotzdem* – in spite of the fact that such reasons did not exist.

Ilse Aichinger, in portraying the Holocaust through the eyes of children, exhorts humanity to choose the discomfort of 'Otherness' over the deceptive consolation of accommodating truth to our own expectations. "*Die grössere Hoffnung*" after the Holocaust depends not on humanity's reconciliation of traditional sources and interpretations of meaning with a reality that will always lie beyond its grasp; that is the "*grosse Hoffnung*" that can no longer be reached. Rather, it is to be found in placing oneself in the center of the conflict between these two irreconcilable forces, defying oversimplification and contenting oneself with living and communicating in the perpetual paradox that is the legacy of the Holocaust. Though despair is all that remains, we must refuse it; though understanding is impossible, we must seek it; though hope and meaning seem futile, we must pursue them *trotzdem*. Our concept of the Holocaust must allow not only for the *Judenstern*, the cattle cars and the ashen smoke of the chimneys, but also for the playground, the power of imagination and the laughter of children where they least seemed to belong. That is the essence of the resistance exhibited by children in the Holocaust, and it is in this space of perpetual conflict between these two worlds that humanity must willingly place itself in order to begin to grasp the ponderous and maddening truth of the Shoah.

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Notes

¹ Rabbi Nissenbaum is most likely referring here to the religious persecutions of Jews that took place through the Middle Ages and into the early modern period, including during the Inquisition, which demanded that Jews either convert to Catholicism (thus denying their own religion) or be killed.

² Aichinger's novel was published in English translation in 1964 under the title *Herod's Children* (see bibliography).

³ Ellen's racial status of *Mischling* is noteworthy in regard to the decision she faces as she plays her role. Her "self" is racially split; therefore, she is not born into one role or the other, but must decide for herself, of her own will, what her fate will be. In her own life, she consistently chooses to identify with her Jewish self and her outcast Jewish friends. In the role of

the world, she makes a similar decision, reflecting Aichinger's message that every person faces a similar choice.

⁴ In the chapter entitled, "Der Tod der Großmutter," for example, Ellen adopts the Christian ritual when she baptizes her grandmother following the old woman's suicide.

⁵ Chaim Kaplan records in his Warsaw Ghetto Diary: "Desolate, lonely lots, surrounded by high walls at the backs of courtyards or planted in the space between the houses of the wall have been turned into 'parks.' Mothers and children fill them. For space for a baby's cradle they pay 50 zloty a month, and if any member of the family besides the mother accompanies or comes to visit the child, he must pay an additional admission charge. Old people and invalids who want to relax and enjoy 'the beauties of nature' pay two zloty a day. The unemployed young people play games there, and fill the garden with gaiety and lightheartedness" (qtd. in Eisen 35).

⁶ Adam Czerniaków, like other members of the *Judenrat* in the ghettos, was a controversial figure. Part of Czerniaków's function as Chairman was the organization of the deportations to Treblinka and other death camps, though it is not clear exactly how much the Jewish Councils knew about the true purpose and destination of these transports. In a diabolical twist on the crime of the Final Solution, the Nazis used these Jewish Councils (like the Jewish Ghetto Police) to implement their orders in exchange for special privileges (including the promise of exemption from deportation for themselves and their families), though they, like all other Jews in Nazi hands, were marked for eventual death after they had outlasted their usefulness. Still, many of the members of the *Judenrate* sought to use their position to improve the lot of the ghetto residents and even save lives. When in July of 1943 Czerniaków was not able to secure the safety of Warsaw's orphans from deportation, he committed suicide. In his suicide note, he wrote: "I am powerless. My heart trembles in sorrow and compassion. I can no longer bear all this. My act will prove to everyone what is the right thing to do" (qtd. in Dawidowicz 301). Chaim Kaplan, who was one of Czerniaków's most vocal critics, paid him the following tribute: "He perpetuated his name by his death more than by his life" (qtd. in Dawidowicz 301).

⁷ The Nazi supervisors of the ghettos allowed these playgrounds to be established and permitted certain cultural activities primarily because of the calming effect they had on the ghetto population. The German Kommissar of Warsaw, Heinz Auerwald, confirmed this reasoning in a memo: "[...] All these measures have produced a certain reassurance which is necessary if [the Jews'] economic capacity is to be exploited for our purposes" (qtd. in Eisen 40).

⁸ Among the grass-roots organizations dedicated to children's welfare were CENTOS (Central Shelter for Children and Orphans), ZOT (Society for the Preservation of Health), YYGA (Jewish Social Self-Aid Society) and ZTOS (Jewish Society for Social Welfare) (Eisen 36).

⁹ Marx Augustin was a bagpipe player who performed his typically bawdy songs in Vienna's taverns in the late seventeenth century. The Black Death struck that city in 1679, killing almost a sixth of the population before it had run its course. One night, the habitually drunk Augustin stumbled into an open mass grave and slept all night in a heap of corpses. He climbed out of the pit the next morning and continued in his usual lifestyle until his death twenty-five years later. His story passed into Viennese legend through a folk song with which children were widely familiar ("O du lieber Augustin / Alles ist hin!") (Paul Hofmann, *The Viennese: Splendor, Twilight and Exile* [New York: Doubleday, 1988] 18, 56). The Augustin legend has traditionally signified maintaining an indomitable – even sometimes irrational – zest for life that is independent of circumstances. Aichinger's choice to utilize this legend in connection with life in the Holocaust casts this image in a new light, emphasizing tenacity and survival rather than the traditional hedonistic representation of Augustin.

¹⁰ An interesting footnote to Aichinger's use of the figure of Christopher Columbus in this sequence may be added by Simon Wiesenthal, the Holocaust survivor who is renowned for his work in bringing Nazi war criminals to justice. In his book, *Sails of Hope*, Wiesenthal explores the notion that Columbus' voyage coincided with the expulsion of the Jews from Spain at the height of the Inquisition. Using Columbus' own journals and other historical documentation as evidence, Wiesenthal argues that Columbus himself was a converted Jew who may have been utilizing his commission as an explorer to bring Jews out of danger.

¹¹ Lawrence Langer comments on the futility of attempting to assign some sort of redemptive value to the Holocaust. In his essay, "Preempting the Holocaust," he warns against selectively "using – and perhaps abusing" the "grim details" of the Holocaust to support a return to normalcy that the very event of the Holocaust renders impossible. Langer quotes the historian Raul Hilberg, in his response to the question of whether there were any meaning to be derived from the Holocaust. Hilberg said, "I hope not" (qtd. in Langer, *Preempting* xvi).

¹² This reversal of the roles of victim and oppressor is also visible in the fourth chapter of this novel, "Im Dienst einer fremden Macht." As the children are gathered at their English lesson, they are being watched by a group of children from the Hitler Youth. (Though Aichinger does not avail herself of the label, it is evident in the daggers the children carry and the uniforms they wear.) As they hear the words of the old man who is

teaching the lesson, they begin to think beyond the propaganda with which they have been indoctrinated. They begin to feel, to fear and even to laugh – human actions that "arrest" their simplistic presumptions. "Wir wollten sie verhaften," says one of the children in Uniform, "[j]etzt verhaften sie uns" (93).

¹³ The feast day of St. Nicholas is the day on which children traditionally set out their shoes or stockings for the visiting *Nikolaus*, hoping he will fill them with nuts and sweets.

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Icebergs in the Caribbean Sea:
Cuba in Hans Magnus Enzensberger's

Der Untergang der Titanic

Stefan Höppner

Herr Enzensberger hat sich entschlossen, nach Cuba zu gehen und dort eine beträchtliche Zeit zu verbringen. Das dürften drei Jahre sein. [...] Er will dem cubanischen Volk von Nutzen sein. Er selbst, in eigener Person, will einem ganzen Volk von Nutzen sein. Die Verwandlung des Herrn Enzensberger in den Nutzen des kubanischen Volkes, dargestellt auf offener Bühne. Keine Tricks, keine doppelten Vorhänge, keine Schleier! [...] Da geht er hin und veröffentlicht sich in der New York Review of Books.

Uwe Johnson¹

Die Mode, sagten wir, sei unerbittlich, auch in der Kunst, ... und im übrigen begriffen wir nicht, was Cuba damit zu schaffen habe, Cuba sei eine idée fixe.

Hans Magnus Enzensberger
*Der Untergang der Titanic*²

It's all we're skilled in -
We will be shipbuilding,
With all the will in the world
Diving for dear life
When we could be diving for pearls.
Elvis Costello³

The year is 1968. At the peak of the Vietnam War and the student protests in Europe and the US, German writer Hans Magnus Enzensberger renounces his fellowship at Wesleyan University in Connecticut. His main reason is the war the American government is fighting in Vietnam:

Ich halte die Klasse, welche in den vereinigten Staaten von Amerika an der Herrschaft ist, und die Regierung, welche die Geschäfte dieser Klasse führt,