

The Effect of Americanization on the Dramatic Representation of Nazi *Aufseherinnen*
(Female Camp Guards)

by Marla Britton-Johnson, B.A., M.A.

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Approved

Dr. Dorothy Chansky
Chair of Committee

Dr. Jonathan Marks

Dr. James Bush

Dr. Daniel Nathan

Dr. Janis Elliott

Dominick Casadonte
Interim Dean of the Graduate School

December, 2013

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Preface/ Statement of the Problem

Anyone in this day and age who believes that the “gentler sex” encompasses all that is sweet, soft and sighing, luscious and loving, kind to men and to animals, content to be the loyal and understanding helpmate of her chosen hero, is in for a shock in these pages. Andrew Ewart

In May of 1960, Nazi SS leader Adolph Eichmann was captured in Argentina and taken to Israel to be put on trial for crimes against humanity. The trial gained international attention and played a significant role in exposing Nazi atrocities on a global scale. The United States, among other countries, recorded the trial for broadcast television. “The intensely public nature of the trial not only communicated an enormous amount of information; it also transformed the status of the Holocaust in the American mind. It became, in a sense, ‘registered’ in American collective memory as a key event in the modern age and as a watershed in the definition of what humanity is capable of” (Mintz 11-12).

In the aftermath of the Eichmann trial, the Holocaust has become a product of Americanization, that is, the process by which an event is adopted as an American experience (Flanzbaum 2). More specifically, this Americanization refers to the United States using the Holocaust—including images, survivor testimonies, and other residual items—as products to be sold and exploited—often in the form of popular entertainment (7). No longer is the Holocaust a European subject nor is it exclusively a Jewish subject (Mintz 4). The events of the years 1933 to 1945 have infiltrated American culture and

have led to biased (if not sentimental) views of the Holocaust. Partially to blame are media coverage and the arts, especially film, television, literary fiction, and theatre—what could be called “Hollywoodization” (16). Holocaust scholar Alan Mintz affirms that “the image of Anne Frank, in the various media in which it was refracted, is the chief example of a process that continued to unfold in various Hollywood movies, the 1978 miniseries *Holocaust*, and more recently, *Schindler’s List*” (17). An event that occurred miles away from the United States “gained admittance through the engine of entertainment” (26).

In this dissertation I explore how the Nazi *Aufseherinnen*, the title given to female camp guards, are portrayed in American dramatic literature, television, and film to discover if and how the Americanization of the Holocaust has had any significant influence on that portrayal between the years following the much-publicized Eichmann trial and the present day. This dissertation focuses specifically on American-generated perceptions of women, actual and fictional, as perpetrators working within Nazi concentration camps. I also examine the duties and lifestyles of the average *Aufseherin*, and their textual and on-screen representation. My goal is to shed light on how the representation of the *Aufseherinnen* in American film and dramatic literature has changed throughout the past five decades and how this has affected not only the view of Nazi women in the United States, but also globally, as more American film and literature have infiltrated the rest of the world.

While a significant amount of American popular and avant-garde entertainment regarding the Holocaust has been produced, much of it addresses male involvement only. Little scholarship has been undertaken regarding German, non-Jewish, female

involvement and there are few American representations featuring these women.

(Hereafter the word “women” will refer to German women of non-Jewish descent).

There have been many publications and films and much media coverage regarding female survivors of concentration camps; resisters such as Sophie Scholl (a member of the White Rose, a group of college students who were executed by the Nazis because of their public rebellion against the Party); and notorious camp guards, including Irma Grese and Maria Mandel, these latter depicted in several Nazi sexploitation films such as *Ilse: She-wolf of the SS*. Yet the life of ordinary German women during the Third Reich has been largely ignored. The “average” German woman became the ideal female concentration camp guards (*SS Ausferinnen*). These women, who came from a low to middle working class background with no strong affiliation with the Nazi party, were often just as cruel as were their male colleagues to the people they were hired to guard.

The global acknowledgement of a women’s participation as camp guards during the Holocaust is relatively new. It was not until the 1980s that the idea of women being active participants in the murder of millions (Daniel Goldhagen refers to them as “Hitler’s willing executioners”) became a credible topic. “Historians have dismissed women as part of the timeless backdrop against which Nazi men made history, seeing men as active ‘subjects’ and women as the passive ‘other’...However, this bifurcation encompasses only part of the complexity of Nazi society” (Koonz 3). Women served as more than just innocent bystanders, mothers, and wives in the Third Reich. Thus one might wonder whether women were victims of the Nazi regime or perpetrators using and abusing power. The short answer is that they were both.

The United States has been at the forefront of creating films, television, and dramatic literature about the Holocaust. Looking specifically at film, between 1960 and 1969, thirty-three films about or alluding to the Holocaust were produced in the United States. Between 1970 and 1978, the number was twenty-five. That number more than doubled to sixty-three between 1980 and 1989. Between 1990 and 2000 there were sixty-six, for a grand total of roughly 187 films. This total is significant when compared to the 294 Holocaust films produced in all of Europe combined (Baron 25). Yet female characters within these works are often, with a few exceptions, minor characters, victims, or sexual objects. Part of my goal is the creation a definitive list of popular American movies, television miniseries, and dramatic texts that will provide an educational resource outlining the development of the female camp guard persona. I will examine these films and texts with an eye to how that persona-an evolving fictional construct-affects historical perception of their role in the Holocaust. My research explores the effects of Americanization/Hollywoodization and what that means for the future of Holocaust representation and education in the arts for students not only from the United States but students worldwide, who are unequivocally affected by this phenomenon through popular entertainment.

Behind the Debate

In the 1980s a debate arose in Germany regarding how women in the Nazi party (as well as all non-Jewish women in Germany during the Third Reich) should be perceived and what role they played in the events of the Holocaust. German scholar Gisela Bock and American scholar Claudia Koonz led opposing sides of the argument. In 1987, Koonz published *Mothers in the Fatherland and Nazi Politics* in which she

argued that just like Nazi men, women who followed the Nazi ideals acted with choice (Koonz 5). The book was lauded by many historians but was not universally embraced. Many feminist historians found Koonz's analysis distasteful (Leck 148). This distaste arose from her somewhat shocking (and new) view of World War II German woman and perhaps women as a gender. Her statements contradicted assumptions, both German and American, regarding what women are capable of, thereby shattering the image of innocent mother and wife.

A fantasy of women untouched by their historical setting feeds our own nostalgia for mothers who remain beyond good and evil – preserves of love, charity, and peace, no matter what the social or moral environment.

(Koonz *Mothers* 4)

Koonz placed agency not only in the hands of the German women working in the concentration camps who physically and mentally abused prisoners, but also in the hands of those women who stood back as citizens and remained complacent in the face of National Socialism.

Ignoring this ahistorical shortsightedness has led to the ignoring of the women who did have blood on their hands. Koonz states that just like Nazi men, women who followed the Nazi ideals acted with choice. While no woman served high in the administration of the Third Reich, many played a role in carrying out its orders (5). Occasionally, and perhaps more than is acknowledged, women were active promoters of Nazi Party ideals inside the powerful regime by which they were employed. Koonz's own interviews with former *Frauenwerk* (figurehead) Gertrud Scholz-Klink give truth to such statements.

“Looking back at Nazi Germany, it seems that decency vanished; but when we listen to feminine voices from the period, we realize instead that it was cordoned off.... Nazi women facilitated that mirage by doing what women have done in other societies – they made the world a more pleasant place in which to live for the members of their community. And they simultaneously made life first unbearable and later impossible for ‘racially unworthy’ citizens. (Koonz *Mothers* 17)

Koonz makes it clear that while the Nazis in power may have made the decisions regarding the treatment of all citizens of the German Reich, ordinary Germans, including women, were not merely acquiescent, but complicit collaborators. “Over time, Nazi women, no less than men, destroyed ethical vision, debased human traditions, and rendered decent people helpless” (17).

Gisela Bock responded to Koonz’s arguments both as a citizen of Germany and a feminist. “Her response was and clear: women were not the perpetrators of Nazi tyranny. German women, on the contrary, were ‘particularly resistant to National Socialism’” (Leck 149). Bock believed Koonz failed to recognize the “separate spheres” within Nazi Germany. In addition, the inherent anti-feminism that enveloped the Third Reich played a significant role in the actions of women. According to Bock, women under the Nazi regime were counted as mothers only, valued solely for producing and raising many children for the Reich. Any identity outside of motherhood was simply unachievable (Bock 273). Bock argues that it was activity of the feminist movements in Germany prior to the National Socialist regime that led to this backlash against women.

Her argument covers non-Jewish German women but does not reference Nazi racism, an area she concludes is directly connected to sexism, as she argues in her article “Racism and Sexism in Nazi Germany.” It is Bock’s lack of focus upon racism with which Claudia Koonz finds fault. Koonz believed Bock’s focus on sexism and not racism led to the argument that all women were victims of Nazi patriarchy (Leck). Denying underlying cultural racism alters the understanding of the real victimization in the Third Reich: the destruction of European Jews and all social “deviants.” The Bock-Koonz debate, further discussed in chapter three, has led scholars into researching an area much less traversed than the previously male-dominated history of Germany: the development of German feminism and what it meant to be a German woman in a rapidly changing German state beginning with the Weimar Republic.

During the years of the Third Reich (1933-1945), Hitler implemented policies that ultimately forced German women back into the home, a place many bourgeois women had had a chance to leave during the economic upturn of the Weimar Republic (1918-1933). Hitler’s goal was for German women to produce children for the state and return to the ways of the past, in direct contrast to the freedoms Weimar had allowed (Reagin 108). Taxes were lowered for larger families and increased for the childless. Marriage benefits were also put in place, luring more women back into the home and out of the workforce (Frevert 236).

It was not until 1943 that the Nazis initiated a labor movement asking women to work outside the home for the benefit of the nation and to fill jobs left empty by male soldiers. (Stephenson 55). This included work in factories, offices, and concentration camps. Approximately 10,000 women were trained up until 1945 to fill these positions

(Frevert 249). Between 1942 and 1945 approximately 3,500 women were trained as SS guards in the women's concentration camp at Ravensbruck, which served as the major training locale. These trainees were assigned to either Ravensbruck or to the women's sections of other camps (249). Concentration camps (also known as labor camps) were one of the integral parts of the Nazi regime. Specifically, these camps were designed to confine prisoners, often in severe conditions. Within the camps, prisoners were often used as forced labor. This included working on military projects, Nazi construction projects, and camp expansions (*Concentration Camps*). These camps were located throughout Germany and neighboring countries. Concentration camps should not be confused with Nazi extermination camps, which were designed specifically for mass murder. Extermination camps, like those at Auschwitz-Birkenau, incorporated the use of poison gas and mass shooting to murder over two million people (*Killing Centers*). These camps were located outside of Germany, mainly in Poland.

The Ravensbruck concentration camp (built in 1939) was designed specifically for female inmates and was the largest camp for women. Other concentration camps, such as Auschwitz I and its extermination sister camp Auschwitz-Birkenau, had female sections, but such camps were not solely built for female prisoners. During its lifetime, the Ravensbruck camp held, on average, between 10,000 and 100,000 women (*Ravensbruck*). This camp also served, as noted above, as a training locale for female guards. The administration of the camp was male only, but the prisoners were left in the hands of *Aufseherinnen*.

Employment in concentration camps not only provided steady monetary compensation, but it also granted a kind of liberation for the women, who were given

authority and new skills outside of their family and community (Noakes and Pridham 342). Ute Frevert states that many of the women responded to newspaper ads promising high wages and chances of promotion. According to Frevert (who chooses to brush over the subject rather casually), the women acted no differently from their male coworkers, abusing, torturing, and killing women and children as well as selecting others for medical experiments and gassing (Frevert 249).

Problems, Parameters, and Methodology

Utilizing the historical information about the *Aufseherinnen* and the films, miniseries, and plays in which they play a part, this dissertation seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What characteristics are most common in representations of the *Aufseherin* in American dramatic literature and film?
2. How has the Americanization of the Holocaust affected *Aufseherinnen* representation? How do American representations differ from European?

The following chapters focus on the process of Americanization discussed by Holocaust scholars Alan Mintz and Helene Flanzbaum as it developed in popular film, television films, and dramatic literature. These artistic outlets are important because of their nature as artifacts—man-made documents to be both studied on the page, and witnessed on screen for what could be an infinite length of time—, public notoriety and usage in educational institutions. My research consists of the examination of popular American film, television films and mini-series, and dramatic literature regarding the Holocaust with a focus on critically examining the portrayal of the *Aufseherinnen* during the years from the Eichmann trial until 2012. The study looks at popular film and

television as a source of recorded physical performance meant for mass consumption and at dramatic literature as a fixed source of textual portrayal that serves as an educational tool for students of theatre and literature.² Within the study, I also consider how the Americanization of the Holocaust affects present-day stage and screen portrayals of the *Aufseherinnen*. My filmography includes the following: *The Hiding Place* (1975), *The Boys from Brazil* (1978), the television movie *Playing for Time* (1980), *Sophie's Choice* (1982), *Triumph of the Spirit* (1989), *Out of the Ashes* (1993), *Schindler's List* (1993), *X-Men* (2000), *The Reader* (2008), *Inglourious Basterds* (2009), and American Nazi sexploitation and pornographic films *Ilsa: She Wolf of the SS* (1974) and *Prisoner of Paradise (Nazi Love Island)* (1980). The plays I examine are *Playing for Time* by Arthur Miller (1980), *Angel: A Nightmare in Two Acts* by Jo Davidsmayer (1995), and *All Through the Night* by Shirley Lauro (2010)³.

The chapters of the study comprise a chronological examination of popular film, television film and mini-series, and dramatic texts, referencing not only the film/recorded and textual content and staging of *Aufseherinnen*, but also the cultural and historical zeitgeists in which they emerged. I analyze each instance of *Aufseherin* representation and assess all character and language choices and overall treatment of the characters as women within an otherwise male-dominated artistic medium. In the final chapter, I will also provide brief analysis of specific European Holocaust films and plays with *Aufseherinnen* in their casts to give readers a comparison of the treatment and portrayal

² I acknowledge that film and television use scripts. These scripts, however, are often a result of collaboration, and were not intended to be used as literature. Plays, however, can function as both literary and performable text.

³ There are twenty years between plays first published and movies/television premieres. I have searched for American drama prior to 1980 but have found no materials.

of the *Aufseherin* between the United States and Europe. This comparison further emphasizes the power of Americanization in popular media.

Chapter One: The Americanization of the Holocaust and the *Aufseherin*

Historians have dismissed women as part of the timeless backdrop against which Nazi men made history, seeing men as active 'subjects' and women as the passive 'other' ...However, this bifurcation encompasses only part of the complexity of Nazi society.

Claudia Koonz, Mothers in the Fatherland

The *Aufseherinnen* were a particular cohort among German Nazi women. They hold a fascination for dramatists, filmmakers, and other writers because of the frontline role they played in the “final solution.” While few in number among German women under the Third Reich, they shared cultural and economic traits with other adult female citizens. Their participation in the Nazi project emerged from historic circumstances that can never fully explain but can nonetheless shed light on their choice to step into a traditionally male, often sadistic, always disciplinary, ideally impersonal, and highly unusual job. Fictional representations of these women have run the gamut from sensationalist to sympathetic, but assessing these is impossible without an understanding of the actual phenomenon and people to which they refer.

My project in this chapter is twofold. First, I articulate the imperatives and evolution of the Americanization/Hollywoodization of the Holocaust as seen through a noteworthy and popular film and an equally important television mini-series, including the written work that led to the film creation. The implications of this Americanization are large with regard to American Holocaust pedagogy, history, and showbiz as education. This is especially true as much of the American Holocaust pedagogy used in

American schools includes the same Americanization/universalization seen in many of the films discussed.³

Second, I seek to historicize the back-and-forth dance between German feminism and anti-feminist backlash that set the scene for women's gainful employment outside the home in the war years. This employment included work as prison guards. The Nazi party, famous for promoting *kinder, kirche, and kuchen* (children, church, and kitchen) as the proper domain of the German woman—who was always a wife and mother—also encouraged women to go to work, as the exigencies of war required personnel that could not be found other than by recruiting women. This push/pull both recapitulates and ramps up a tension that began with the German women's movement of the mid-nineteenth century.

Within this large framework, the figure of the female prison guard is important for its development out of the working class, an economic and social group that historians considered inferior in German women's history. Women who had previously enjoyed little to no power in the history of Germany suddenly saw it placed in their hands.

The Americanization of the Holocaust As Seen Through Popular Media

What is Americanization? According to Alan Mintz, the term refers to the Holocaust (or other historical phenomena) being “refracted through the means of representation that are characteristic of American culture” (Mintz 81). Helene Flanzbaum expands the term defining Americanization as an event adopted to fulfill an American need to understand its own humanity through American terms (Flanzbaum 2). More specifically, this Americanization refers to the United States using the Holocaust,

³One of the more popular teaching methods used is *Facing History*: a lesson plan focused on using the Holocaust to study American human behavior and worldwide genocide (Fallace 91).

including images, survivor testimonies, and other residual items as products to be sold and exploited (7). Yet the process is deeper than mere American exploitation. “On one level, the phrase simply groups the many ways that the Holocaust has been represented; on another, it is political and theoretical quicksand, providing all the pitfalls of postulating about history, nation, and ideology” (2).

The effect of Americanization on the United States’ relationship with the Holocaust is evident. A simple examination of the number of films, television programs, and memorials created in the United States alone is proof enough of the Americanized Holocaust. There are plenty of factors contributing to this phenomenon, including the relationship between the United States and Israel, the treatment of Jews in the United States, and the heavy comparison between the prejudice of the Holocaust and America’s own racial problems.¹⁴ Popular cinema and television, and dramatic literature however, play one of the strongest roles in Americanization (Doneson 7), thus creating a sub-category of Americanization: Hollywoodization.

Between 1945 and 1961,¹⁵ what most discourse in the United States now refers to as the Holocaust was viewed very differently than it is today. In fact, the term “Holocaust” as it refers to the Nazi Final Solution was not officially cemented into U.S. culture until following the broadcast of the 1978 mini-series *Holocaust* (Frequently Asked Questions). Following World War II, the United States viewed itself as a liberator and little more.

¹⁴ For more information on other reasons for Americanization, see *The Holocaust in American Life* by Peter Novick.

¹⁵ Some scholars argue that the U.S. active participation in Holocaust awareness occurred roughly a decade later than 1960. It was the trial, however, that allowed for the ultimate awareness and the 1978 miniseries.

Historians have long since disproved the heroic view of the Allies as simply innocent liberators. Clearly, the Allies had fairly complete knowledge of the Nazi genocide as it happened, and only a few scholars have argued that the Allies could not have done more to save at least some Jews before the end of the war. (Abzug viii)

Nevertheless, at the time, the country had other concerns. It would be callous to suggest that the images and video of corpses and emaciated bodies did not affect Americans. Quite the contrary, these images helped expose horrors to a country that lived, as a whole, in denial or disbelief. That being said, while the war may have ended, the struggle continued as American soldiers, along with the Allies, ended the slaughter and had the difficult challenge of rebuilding a ravaged Europe (192). The Nazis became a symbol of evil; the opposite of the United States.

For almost twenty-five years after the end of the war, this basic image remained in place, obscuring the more complicated story of America's relation to the Holocaust. The reasons were clear. First, the politics of the cold war allowed for little questioning of any less-than-heroic roles played by America during the Second World War. Second, few Americans wished to replay the horrid details of Nazi genocide. Third, no new generation of Americans had yet come along to challenge the image that those who fought the war had created of themselves. (207)

This changed in the 1960s, thanks to the growing "Baby Boom" generation of Americans and the arrest of Adolf Eichmann.

Adolf Eichmann was a key SS (*Schutzstaffel* or defense corps) officer in the coordination and implementation of the Nazi Final Solution. An SS-*Obersturmbannführer* or Lieutenant Colonel, Eichmann was put in charge of the deportation of millions of Jews and other “undesirables” to concentration and death camps (Adolf Eichmann). He was arrested by the United States army but escaped in 1946 to Argentina, where he was found in 1960 and taken to Jerusalem.

In 1961, Adolf Eichmann was put on trial in a very public way. “This was the first time that the Holocaust was presented to a competent judicial body in full detail, in all its stages and from all its aspects” (The Eichmann Trial). Journalists from around the world flocked to Israel to film the trial events.¹⁶ Eichmann was charged on fifteen counts, including crimes against humanity. During the trial, televised survivors testified (many for the first time) and, according to the web archives of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, these testimonies provided other survivors the support and freedom to tell their own stories (Eichmann Trial). Eichmann was convicted on all counts and sentenced to death on December 15, 1961. He was hanged in 1962.

The Eichmann trial both confirmed the truth of and opened new eyes to the events of the Holocaust, and, at the same time, created new wounds. One famous observer of the trial, Hannah Arendt, posited a different view of what is considered “evil.” Arendt challenged the popular idea of evil by stating that, instead of demonizing Nazis, the public should consider their own tendencies towards evil. “Right or wrong, Arendt shattered an agreed-on moral and historical tale and sent scholars back to the archives” (Abzug 208). The Holocaust became a central reference point for nearly every other act

¹⁶ Clips of the trial can now be viewed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fv6xbeVozhU>. This video is just one of the over twenty sessions of the trial. All sessions can be viewed from this website.

of genocide in the future and the concept of “evil vs. good” was no longer allowed to be so shallow.

Popular media references in the United States and globally began very quickly following the 1961 trial and have yet to dwindle. Tom Paxton’s 1962 song “Last Train to Nuremberg” and Bob Dylan’s 1963 “With God on Our Side” referenced Nazi atrocities. Writers such as Sylvia Plath used Nazi genocide as themes, if not direct allusions, in novels and poetry. Crowds flocked to films about the Holocaust, including *Judgment at Nuremberg*, released in 1963 and *The Pawnbroker*, in 1965 (Abzug 208). The Holocaust became a well-known and well-used term. Its roots in lasting popular entertainment grew first from a young girl and her diary.

The Diary of Anne Frank

One of the best-known figureheads for victims of the Holocaust is Anne Frank. While she died in Bergen-Belsen at the age of 16, her name and her diary have been permanently placed in the minds of the American public (Rosenfeld 244). Anne Frank’s diary became a catalyst for Americanization. The diary was transformed from a teenager’s thoughts and feelings during years of her life into a universal symbol for hope in the face of extraordinary suffering.

Simply put, she is the most famous child of the twentieth century. Her book has been translated into dozens of languages and has been read by many millions of people throughout the world. Millions more acquainted with her story through the dramatic and film versions of her diary. Streets, schools, and youth centers bear her name, just as public statues, stamps, and commemorative coins bear her image. Youth villages, forests, and

foundations have been named for her; ballets, requiems, and cantatas written for her; poems and songs composed for her. Public figures of every kind, from politicians to religious leaders, regularly invoke her name and quote lines from her book. In all of these ways her name, face, and fate are kept constantly before us. (Rosenfeld 244)

The United States has adopted Anne Frank as its own, with many cities creating “Anne Frank Week” in her memory such as the 1989 event in New York City (244). Lawrence Langer points out that other teenagers writing their own diaries at the same time as Frank told a much darker tale.

While the diaries of other children immersed in the slaughter record tales of innocence corrupted by circumstances imposed on them by their oppressors, Anne Frank’s account of her ordeal, despite scattered moments of genuine if limited vision into the darker reality, tells a story of innocence preserved. (Langer 19)

The suffering of others and their diaries were overshadowed by Frank’s spirited, hopeful words .

How did the writing of a young girl capture the American imagination and come to embody the American spirit? The process began in 1952 with the publication of her diary in the United States. While the diary served as a historical document of sorts (with edits made by her father, Otto Frank), many readers viewed the diary in a much different light. The American printing included a forward by former First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, who spoke of the book’s message of the prevailing human spirit (249).

In order to give the book this emphasis – one that urged readers to cherish its youthful author rather than to mourn her – one had to read her diary in such a way as to have it appear an uplifting and not a harrowing experience. The only way to do that, though, was to dehistoricize Anne Frank's story: to see it, on the one hand, as emblematic of Jewish fate during the Nazi period, to be sure, but, on the other hand, as transcending that fate. (250)

Playwrights Francis Goodrich and Albert Hackett took the diary to the stage in 1955, further manipulating Frank's story and becoming an iconic example of the American media influencing global perception (Plunka 103).

Readers and play-goers familiar with the stage adaptation of *The Diary of Anne Frank* by Goodrich and Hackett may not be aware that there was another author who adapted it first, approximately four years earlier. Meyer Levin, author and war correspondent, sought to publish a play adaptation as early as 1951. Levin could not get publishing rights due to his lack of Broadway connections and, according to Holocaust scholar Gene Plunka, his overly ethnic portrayal of the Frank family (Plunka102). Playwrights Kermit Bloomgarden and Lillian Hellman were chosen to produce the project, finding Goodrich and Hackett, a husband and wife writing team, to make a stage adaptation that would serve both the anti-Fascist agenda of Hellman and Bloomgarden, and the need for a Broadway super-hit with mass appeal (103).

Goodrich and Hackett's new script of *The Diary of Anne Frank* premiered on Broadway October 5, 1955. The play won several awards including the Tony (The Antoinette Perry Award for Excellence in Theatre presented annually by The American

Theatre Wing), the New York Drama Critics' Award, and the Pulitzer Prize (104). The play's popularity led to the production of the 1959 film version.

One of the film's major goals was a creation of authenticity without losing the "universalism" that the play projected to an audience. This meant that several initial scenes from the film were revised or eliminated, including one scene that ended with Anne walking in a concentration camp (Doneson 71). Scenes for the film also included documentary footage of camp life and shots filmed in the house in Amsterdam where the Franks had hidden.

The film's realistic elements are marred by the casting, which consisted of strictly Hollywood choices. Anne and her attic mate Peter were played by "All-American" actors Millie Perkins (who was much older than Anne had been during her hiding) and Richard Beymer (who went on to star in *West Side Story*) (Insdorf 7). Emotional music scored the film, and Millie Perkins' voice as Anne narrated intermittently throughout the dialogue (Insdorf 7). This added narration proved troublesome because viewers were led to believe that the words they heard were taken directly from the diary, which was not always the case (Doneson 80).

As in the play, the film worked to "universalize" and "de-Semitize" many portions of the diary's Jewish themes. Filmmakers sought to appease all Americans by allowing the identification of non-Jews with Anne and her family as citizens under duress. At the same time, Jewish audiences were asked to connect to the film's attempt to nod at Judaism in its Hanukkah scene (74).¹⁷

¹⁷ The film also encouraged thought regarding African American persecution in the United States and the 1950s Red Scare as a result of the Cold War (Doneson 74).

At the same time, the universalization and Americanization of its content fit into the prevailing mood—one that was simultaneously repressive and liberal—a time when being “different” suggested either the wrong political attitude or the wrong social attitude... Through Frank’s diary, America becomes Europe’s teacher on the moral implications of the Holocaust (Doneson83).

The film finalized the process of the diary being transformed from a European product to an American one. As Holocaust scholar Lawrence states, American producers and audiences were in the process of finding the “Holocaust we need.” (Langer 29)

The play and film were remade several times, and had all-star casts featuring Elizabeth Taylor as Anne on film (1959) and a young Natalie Portman as Anne in the Broadway revival (1997). Most recently, in 2001, *Anne Frank: The Whole Story* was produced as a TV mini-series in an attempt to explore what life may have been like for the Frank family after leaving the attic. Over sixty years later, Anne Frank’s memory remains alive and well in the minds of the American public.

Holocaust Miniseries

The impact of *The Diary of Anne Frank* film on the minds of the American public was great. However, neither the diary, the play nor the film did much to expose the horrors of the Holocaust. All three managed to accomplish what was asked of them in the 1950s: universalization. During the 1960s and early 1970s, Hollywood created Holocaust films exploring the idea of justice (Doneson 91). By the late 1970s, the American mindset had changed and so had the technology of choice. The airing of April, 1978’s *Holocaust* served as the start of a resurgence with the American and European

fascination with World War II, bringing the events of the Holocaust back into public consciousness (144).

What the American public experienced in regard to U.S. history in the harrowing mini-series *Roots*, premiering just a year before *Holocaust*, prepared them for questions posed by Gerald Green and *Holocaust*'s producers. What is the place of America in the history of the Holocaust? What is the place of Jews in America? In some ways, just as African Americans became a symbol of U.S. oppression, the Jew became a symbol for the hope and promise of America, far away from the destruction in Europe (151).

Critics of the mini-series were quick to condemn the inherent Americanization they claimed existed. Langer felt that the mini-series's ultimate upbeat ending (an ending also seen in *The Diary of Anne Frank*) was not befitting the storyline (159). Once again, the mini-series production team was faced with two opposing forces: historical truth vs. popular culture and the desire for mass appeal. Scholar and Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel felt that the mini-series attempts at realism were a disservice to the memories of those who died (Baron 54). How real was too real? What was possible for those who attempt to represent the Holocaust?

The two positions that emerged in the debate surrounding *Holocaust* would later be restated with variations each time a new commercially successful treatment of the Holocaust would come on the scene. One position argued that the vulgarity of a given film or show was mitigated by its power to convey the "message" of the Holocaust to those who would otherwise be untouched by it. The other position argued that any vulgarization of the

Holocaust cannot escape betraying the victims and desecrating the sacred mystery of the event. (Mintz 25)

The fine line between trivialization and too much realism had yet to find acceptably balanced middle ground. That being said, however, the mini-series reached 120 million viewers and, as hoped, exposed a new audience to the horrors of the Final Solution and created American legislation, the demand for educational programs, and an increase in Holocaust film production (Baron 54-55).

Thanks to the positive public responses to *Holocaust*, the Carter Administration created the Holocaust commission, ultimately resulting in the building of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. High schools and universities were answering the demand for more Holocaust education that led to a considerable boost in the number of educational materials in circulation (Fallace 79). After the *Holocaust* miniseries aired, the term “Holocaust” no longer needed to be prefaced by the word “Nazi” (79). The proliferation of Holocaust education, an occurrence discussed at a greater length in chapter three, caused an interesting effect in regard to other epochs in American history. A survey completed nine years following the *Holocaust* premiere found that while 76 percent of students were able to identify “the Holocaust” and its meaning, only 32 percent could do the same for the American Civil War, an event that occurred on U.S. soil (104). The Holocaust had become an American term and event.

The Roots of the *Aufseherinnin* in German Feminism

To begin to understand the motivations and decisions of camp guards, their origin within Germany history must first be evaluated. These women were daughters of a women’s movement that developed decades before their birth, grew in strength during

World War One, and served as a direct influence on what it meant to be a German woman in the Third Reich. The German women's movement was not monolithic and its membership was not homogeneous; it concerned women of all social classes, backgrounds, and ethnicities. For the sake of this study, the movement will be simplified into two distinct groups of women of non-Jewish ethnicity: The Federation of German Women's associations (*Bund Deutscher Frauenvereiner*) a middle class feminist group here after referred to as BDF, and the women within the Social Democratic Party or SPD, with mainly working class membership (Koonz 40).

The Federation of German Women's Associations (*Bund Deutscher Frauenvereiner*) was formed in 1894. The BDF's formation led to increased publicity promoting women's rights, tenuously swaying between conservative and radical approaches used by its members (40). The group strived to create a perception of women beyond *Kinder, Küche, Kirche*.. Suffrage, better education, and social welfare were just a few of the Association's causes. Women began to take their future into their own hands on a much more active level than was seen previously, though it was by no means a swift process.

The working class women's associations (separate from the SPD) kept their distance from the bourgeoisie and instead focused on the working class as subjects of social policy. Working class families had little time to devote to household environments. Children were often left to care for themselves, making the ideal of the bourgeois family practically impossible. Within the household there was also social structure in which women remained at the bottom. "The situation within the family was but an extension of the marked undervaluation of female labor" (Frevert 90). By the time

the official Social Democratic Party (SPD) formed in 1869, female labor was heavily restricted to specific areas of employment that were less physically demanding than what was performed by their male counterparts.

The SPD gained popularity rather quickly within the German working class, attracting over a million members including women prior to World War One (107). Political unrest within Imperial Germany created more desire for the breaking down of class separation and the social stigmas attached to the lower classes. This was especially true in regard to the lower working class, often pandered to but ultimately pacified.

Within the socialist subculture, the women's movement was a symbol of change and a challenge to traditional relationship between the sexes... The subculture proffered a supportive milieu to women concerned with improving their lot as part of the proletarian struggle for human liberation. (Quataert 5)

The working classes in Germany struggled not only for economic success, but also for political recognition, and their efforts were often viewed with suspicion by the bourgeoisie. What the SPD did have was strong ties to women; the party included female emancipation in its political platform as a means to restructure society (5). This likely had more to do with political power than actual emancipation. At the same time, working class feminists viewed Socialism as the only means of real change while struggling between class and sex loyalty. "In socialist theory, the revolution was expected to solve the 'women's question' by introducing a new era in human relations that would accord all men and women an equally dignified existence" (Quataert 12).

Socialist women became more radical, actively seeking women's suffrage, the legalization of birth control, and political reform. The numerous public activities performed by the women of the SPD included broadening education to allow for better employment opportunities. Socialist women, unlike their BDF counterparts, sought the elimination of the class hierarchy in education in a quest to allow for everyone to be given the same skill sets for the future (10). As Jean Quataert notes, the SPD worked beyond "simply ameliorative measures in a charity mold to propounding a vision, however moderate, of structural change to improve social conditions (Quataert 10). These women were not only subordinated by gender, but by class as well, and it they believed that by dismantling the existing class structure, they could bring about changes in women's rights as well. (11).

World War One (1914-1918)

The events of the First World War were very significant for the fate of the German women's movement and German women in general. As men went off to war, factory, office, and other jobs needed to be filled by those who were left, i.e. women. Yet it was this possession of jobs that led to an eventual backlash following the end of the war (Bridenthal, Grossman and Kaplan 7). Despite significant events that were the roots of the rise of the Third Reich and put an end to the women's movement until at least after 1945, scholars such as Ute Frevert spend only a brief amount of time discussing the occurrences. World War One was perhaps the first test of the strength and longevity of the women's movements in Germany.

The ties between two very different feminist movements strengthened as World War One began. The common good of the nation and survival at home were more

important than any one particular group. The economy was highly unstable and because many workers left to become soldiers, women found themselves needed in the workplace (Frevert 152). In some ways this was a big step forward for the feminist movement.

It seemed...that under such a system women would no longer be measured by the masculine yardstick, but could assert themselves, using their own unique talents and capabilities, and take part in the project which overrode questions of gender and class – war. (152)

Gender discrimination laws in the workforce were relaxed and many women who had previously been unskilled workers found themselves in supervisory positions.

Any possibility of social change within the German state during the early years of World War I was halted by extreme food shortages, disease, and social unrest in the latter years of the war. In order to save supplies and funds, the German government began a rationing program with the overall goal of making Germany self-sufficient (Reagin 74).

Since most households were without their major breadwinners, women were forced to become heads of household just for survival. While the rural populations dealt with the changes more successfully due to their own self-sufficiency prior to World War One, in urban areas, crisis hit. This included riots, strikes, and the rejection of the government (76).

The fall of Imperial Germany, although in the end a result of military revolt, was affected in part by the actions of women at home. In late October 1918, Kaiser Wilhelm surrendered, abdicated, and fled the country. What was once Imperial Germany now had become an unexpected republic. The people of the new republic had to begin again. Men came home, ravaged by war, and women stepped out (or were forced out) of the

jobs they once filled. From the male point of view, women belonged in the home so they could provide a soothing, safe environment to calm the haunting of war (Bridenthal, Grossman, and Kaplan 7). Women's groups protested against the loss of jobs but a significant number of women (those whose husbands had survived) were happy to go back into the home (Bock *Women* 176). The Weimar Republic began with increased antagonism between the sexes that would profoundly affect the future of Germany. (Bridenthal, Grossman and Kaplan 7).

The Weimar Republic (1918-1933)

The new republic brought many changes to the lives of women for better and for worse. An interim Socialist cabinet was put into office and introduced many political reforms, including women's suffrage. Women over the age of 21 were granted the right to vote on November 12, 1918 (35). This did not mean automatic political power and female equality. Men returning from the war and women (mainly of the working class) who firmly believed in a woman's right to work were at odds regarding employment, and political propaganda that once asked women to work for Germany suddenly reversed policy (Koonz *Mothers* 27). More women were becoming members of the National Assembly and women's suffrage offered new opportunities for political parties to lure voters, yet their male counterparts made no secret of their desire to keep women out of making political decisions (Frevert 171). Even among female politicians the most common occupation was housewife, automatically pointing to the bourgeois class as leaders. The poor outlook on any political power for women was, according to Holocaust scholar Elizabeth Harvey, a likely starting point for the eventual rebellion of younger feminists in Germany.

The feminist sects of the first wave, once united by war, again parted ways. There was no longer a need to be a united force, and politics outweighed gender. The BDF built its new goals around a nationalistic spirit. The BDF believed that a German woman should strive for German unity, a spirit of self-sacrifice, a sense of civic duty, and a strong unified national consciousness (Evans 235). Housewives' associations were formed to help support bourgeois women and to legitimate the household as employment locale (237).

The women of the SPD, on the other hand, felt more defensive about their rights to work (Koonz *Conflicting* 674). They were focused on practical achievements in the workforce rather than the middle-class spiritual revolution. Socialist women were interested in reform for female workers, including better working conditions, benefits and pay (674). According to Claudia Koonz, the SPD still hoped to integrate women into modern society through the cultural acknowledgement of women's rights as both workers and wives/parents (682). This required significant legislation that was likely doomed from the start. Even when the SPD was in power, however, the government was more concerned about the protection of women than with their complete equality (675). After the end of World War One, the women of the SPD began slipping into obscurity. The ideologies they hoped to see into fruition as a part of the Social Democratic Party proved to be false promises.

Political idealism aside, one significant product of the Weimar Republic emerging from both the SPD and the BDF was the "new woman." As described by Ute Frevert, the new woman of the 1920s wore pants, used contraception, had abortions, and served as a wage earner in her household (Frevert 176). The mere appearance of these young women

led cultural critics to claim the “age of the liberated women,” and the women seemed to use their liberation (or the appearance thereof) confidently (176). This was not met without resistance, however, as sexual liberation and population control planted the seeds of anti-liberation in the years to come (Bridenthal, Grossman, and Kaplan 11).⁵

The hard-won sexual freedoms of the previous decades faced backlash from those who feared for the future of Germany (Koonz *Mothers* 47). Birthrates declined, sex became a public topic, and fears of growing prostitution, sexual disease, and the decline of morality became fuel for conservatives in what they saw as the demise of the German nation as a result of women “aspiring to the individualistic ethic of the modern age and failing to meet their obligations as mothers of the nation” (Frevert 186). As a means of countering what they felt was the demise of the family, members of the bourgeoisie became proponents for the home as workplace (186).

This led to the Law on the Legal Position of Female Public Servants, which required that married female employees in civil service be dismissed (Frevert 198). Within the labor force it was not the law but the ideology of the law that had the greatest impact. Wifedom and motherhood became of utmost importance in creating a peaceful united nation. Possible political power that may have been grasped following the First World War dwindled (203). Women, mainly of the “first wave” who watched young German women “abuse” their freedoms, played a very significant role in decline of the first wave. Feminists, who once worked for change, now seemed to be working against it.

⁵ This came Anti-feminism in the form of anti-feminism from the National Socialist Party, whose policies directly undermined feminism.

Inflation in the 1920s and the Depression of the 1930s, the latter affected directly by the Depression in the United States, left the Weimar Republic in a constant state of instability (Bridenthal, Grossman, and Kaplan 16). Financially, Germany was unable to pay the reparations mandated by the Treaty of Versailles (Koonz *Mothers* 37).⁶ The inflation of the German mark left average citizens in poverty. In 1924, the American dollar was worth nearly four trillion marks. (Koonz *Mothers* 38). Though the economy did recover, it was not for long, as the 1930s saw a worldwide depression. Barriers may have been broken and shifted within the Weimar Republic and younger women were given new opportunities, but the gender divisions resisting long-lasting social and political change remained in place. Contradictory policies and feminist responses left women confused (Frevert 203)

The Rise of the Third Reich (1931-1938)

While there were many successful years in the Weimar Republic, the troubled social and economic state of the final years left many doubts as to what the future of the nation would be. Concerns with the social welfare of Germany fell on women (Gupta 43). “There were some gains made...but simultaneously a part of the feminist movement also became socially and politically conservative” (43). BDF conservative concerns with the state of the German family left many searching for new options. (Koonz *The Competition* 219). For many, the National Socialist Party, or NSDAP was a hopeful choice, a hope that many future *Aufseherinnen* longed for.⁷

⁶ For more information on the Treaty of Versailles, see “Treaty of Versailles 1919” United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005425>.

⁷ Nancy Reagin states that the majority of women who “converted” before 1933 to the NSDAP were from Protestant backgrounds (pg 114).

The NSDAP party had existed since 1919 and remained steadfastly male-centric. Yet its party views also encouraged female involvement (Frevert 210). In many cases women formed their own NSDAP subgroups, including the German Women's Order of the Red Swastika and the German Women's Battle League (211). These groups shared many of the views on women that were held by the BDF. By 1931 the Nazi groups joined to form the *NS-Frauenschaft*.

Its program represented a curious mixture of beliefs: though Nazi women had no desire to turn back the clock of history, welcoming the education and social integration of all women to the benefit of the nation, as they put it, they simultaneously held marriage, family, and motherhood to be the most obvious way to serve the whole people. (211)

This was troublesome to more liberal women's groups, which foresaw the disempowerment of women through the NSDAP (Bridenthal *Professional* 164). Such groups' warnings went mostly unheeded. By 1933, Hitler and the National Socialist Party were in power.

The lure of the Nazi Party had more to do with the nation as a whole than it did with any feminist or anti-feminist motives (Koonz *Mothers* 53). Hitler and the NSDAP made many promises for change and betterment that leftist parties failed to make. There were not many alternatives. Weakening trade unions, the demise of the SPD party, and gender struggles resulted in unrest (Gupta 43). The NSDAP promised new job opportunities and the creation of an ideal Germany, even at the expense of the feminist movement.

German honor developed into not just the goal of the NSDAP but of the citizens of Germany (Koonz *Mothers* 56). Hitler's fiery speeches on racial purity and his often unrealistic promises were emotionally appealing. Troubles of the past were blamed on the Weimar woman and people of Jewish descent. A hopeful future was placed in the hands of German women, as mothers and wives--their natural place (56). Revolts by members of lower classes who disagreed with the Nazis were quickly suppressed (Frevert 213). Women were left with little choice: a promise of an improved economy with the support of a new party or failure and dishonor in the current state of the nation. The decision seemed clear, though regressive.

The Nazis had many obstacles to overcome as they began their stranglehold of Germany. Besides the struggling economy and "race" problems, Hitler wanted desperately to improve the declining birth rate (Frevert 232). In October, 1935, new regulations were introduced requiring all Germans who planned to marry to undergo medical examinations to insure racial and health clearance. Without a certified health certificate, couples could not marry (Frevert 235). The couples that did marry and were ideal Germans in the eyes of the Nazi party were encouraged to produce many children (Frevert 236).

"Nazified" women's groups were the only groups allowed during the Third Reich. Formerly strong feminist movements led by the SPD women or the BDF were forced to disband. Housewives' leagues were taken over by the Nazi Party as well, resulting in the German Women's Bureau (*Deutsches Frauenwerk*) as controlled by the central women's Nazi organization called the Nazi Women's League (*NS-Frauenschaft*) (Reagin 114).

The Nazi Women's League was intended for the Nazi women elite and worked

with the less selective Women's Bureau. Gertrud Scholtz-Klink, whom Hitler appointed *Reichsfrauenführerin* (Leader of the Reich's female labor service) in 1934, led both organizations (Reagin 114). By 1939 approximately eleven percent (over 3.3 million) of the German and Austrian female population over the age of eighteen belonged to the German Women's Bureau (114). The groups served as role models for young German mothers.

Young German girls were not isolated from Nazi policy either. Before having the opportunity to serve the Reich through the home, many girls chose to become a part of the League of German Girls and by 1939 all non-Jewish girls were required to participate, regardless of their parents' party affiliations (Noakes 340). The Nazis knew very well how to perpetuate their policies, and that was through the Reich's children. The League of German Girls, similar to that of the male equivalent, promoted a comradeship and party loyalty that served as background for a few well-known *Aufseherinnen* including Irma Grese, the "Beautiful Beast" (Brown). By the beginning of the Second World War, any remnants that remained of the "New Woman" brought about in the 1920s were destroyed.

World War Two (1939-1945)

The events of the years of the Second World War in the German women's movement timeline are fairly unexplored and controversial. While a decent amount of English-language scholarship⁸ has been done regarding survivors of and resisters to the

⁸The list is fairly extensive and includes multiple survivor autobiographies as well as scholarly works such as those by: Esther Fuchs, in *-Women and the Holocaust: Narrative : narrative and Representation; representation;* Dalia Ofer, in *- Women in the Holocaust;* Robin-Ruth Linden, in *-Making Stories, Making Selves: Feminist Reflectionsstories, making selves: feminist reflections on the Holocaust;* Inge Scholl, in -

Nazi regime as well as notorious female perpetrators who worked within concentration camps, very little has examined the life of the average urban German woman during the war.⁹ Even the oft-cited German feminist scholar Ute Frevert spends very little time on the subject in her book dedicated to German women, *Women in German History*. The contemporary scholarship by British and American authors including Claudia Koonz, Matthew Stibbe, Jill Stephenson, and Alison Owings provides a small glimpse into this time period.

At the onset of the Second World War, German women were faced once again with the need to fill the shoes left empty by soldiers. The response was quite opposite to what occurred during World War One (Stibbe 92). Instead of seeing a large increase of women in the workforce, the percentage dropped (92). According to Matthew Stibbe, this was due to two things: first, a large percentage of women lost their jobs in areas such as textile and shoe manufacturing as the machinery parts used to make these items were repurposed for munitions manufacturing. Another reason was that the Nazi regime was reluctant to encourage the mobilization of women, often sending messages that their efforts would not be needed (though this was only true during the early years of the war). In September, 1938, the Reich Labor Ministry issued an official statement regarding the employment of women, which stated that while women should be encouraged to work to allow men to be released for combat, on no terms should a woman be employed “where it

The White Rose : Munich, 1942-1943; and Dan Brown, in – *The Beautiful Beast: The Life and Crimes of Ss-Aufseherin Irma Grese*.

⁹Very little has been explained about the German woman in English. Since I am not fluent in German, scholarship in existence written in German remains mainly inaccessible.

would otherwise threaten the nation's life spring by jeopardizing the fulfillment of their task of motherhood" (Noakes and Pridham 311).¹⁰

Economically, urban women faced similar problems to those they encountered during World War One, although not to the same extent. Chief among these were food shortages, hitting working class women the hardest (the rural areas affected less than urban due to their level of self-sufficiency) as they tried to maintain home life while working to be able to afford to feed their families. The Nazis managed to keep relative peace and prevented the numerous strikes and riots that were common between 1916 and 1919 (Stibbe 93). One way the regime countered this was through utilizing the German Women's Bureau to encourage women to become self-sufficient (Reagin 166). Women were encouraged not only to recycle goods but also to produce their own, saving families from the need to stand in line for dwindling rations. High expectations were often met with resistance by the household need to consume. German women were being asked to become unrealistically self-sufficient in order to become what Nancy Reagin calls "martyrs" for the sake of the state. (170). This attempt at developing any sort of female pride or empowerment through the stability of the home failed soundly despite propaganda encouraging state before the home (180).

In January, 1943, an official decree was released requiring all women between the ages of 17 and 45 to register for work (with some restrictions) (Noakes and Pridham 331). The decree was followed by increased propaganda to further influence registration. Women who had previously "avoided" work, or complied with the otherwise static Nazi desire to keep women within the household, sought ways to avoid registration.

¹⁰ I am referring to women in urban Germany, not those living and working in rural areas whose lives were affected in different ways.

According to Jeremy Noakes, the Nazi demand was also undermined by the regime's lack of enforcement of any decrees regarding women and the reluctance of employers to hire untrained women due to regulations for German women that were not required for foreign workers, whose work could be abused (333).

The decree of 1943 led to the employment of women within the German Labor Force to military support positions including the armament industry previously held by men (Noakes and Pridham 342). Also included within the military was the training of women by the SS (*Schutzstaffel*) to become *SS-Aufseherinnen*, otherwise known as concentration camp guards or SS auxiliaries (Bock, *Women* 223).

About 10,000 selected women were trained up to 1945 (222). Of this total, approximately 3600 women were trained in the Ravensbrück concentration camp and worked in camps in Poland and the Soviet Union (Frevert 249). Employment in concentration camps not only provided these women with steady monetary compensation for their time but it also granted them a kind of liberation, as they learned new skills and were given authority outside of their family and community (Noakes and Pridham 342). Many of the women responded to newspaper ads promising high wages and chances of promotion. According to Frevert, the women acted no differently from their male coworkers, abusing, torturing, and killing women and children as well as selecting others for medical experiments and gassing (Frevert 249).¹¹ The women's training was similar to that of male coworkers, as well. For women, this training began in Ravensbrück, the women's camp. Peter Vrosky, an American author who dedicated a portion of his book about female killers to Nazi women, describes the brutal nature of camp training.

¹¹Frevert describes these women in as little as a paragraph before quickly moving on to life after the war. Claudia Koonz spends more time discussing these women in *Mothers in the Fatherland*.

Pity or mercy were seen as signs of weakness. It was drummed into the trainees' heads that inmates were enemies of the state...guards were not permitted to speak to inmates other than in official capacity to ensure that inmates remained anonymous subjects for their brutality. (Vronsky 384)

Punishment for inmates was also often delivered by someone other than the person who ordered it. This allowed for disassociation between guard and victim. The women guards were indoctrinated in Nazi ethos, but there were apparent limits to permissible punishment (at least officially). Murders of victims had to be for reasons of the state and not for sadistic, personal reasons. Those who violated these rules were tried and sent to prison and occasionally executed (Vronsky 385). Of course, this meant they had to be reported, something which often did not occur.

Not all experiences between female overseers and camp inmates were the same. Along with the very cruel guards, there were also those who were indifferent or even kind. Claudia Koonz writes of survivors who found the women to be far more cruel than the men.

Susan Cernyak-Spatz recalled: "In my experience the matrons were cruel, more vicious (sadistically vicious) than any SS man...You rarely found SS men who played games with their dogs in which the point was for the dog to get the prisoners' derrieres, but the matrons did." (404)

Alison Owings, who interviewed numerous German women for her book *Frauen* writes of another survivor's testimony very similar to Cernyak-Spatz's.

The SS guard, a Frau Lehmann, in a towering rage and with an inhuman look on her face, was thrashing the women prisoners with a club, hitting

randomly everyone she could reach and then pounding a group that had sought refuge behind overturned furniture. (Owings 163)

Other survivors' testimonies describe guards who purposely watched the gassing of prisoners as well as women like the infamous Irma Grese at Auschwitz who was considered a sado-masochist (Koonz *Mothers* 404).

Koonz is quick to point out that the job required women to depart from what were considered normal female values and experiences. Too, there were bound to be a few more apt than others to become sadistic and cruel. She also reminds readers that these women who were perceived as more cruel than their male counterparts may have seemed that way because their behavior was far different from the common perception of what it means to be a woman. In other words, most people are more likely to accept a man committing deviant behavior than a woman (404).

At the opposite end of the spectrum were those camp guards who appeared to work against the Nazi system. In my telephone interview with survivor Noemi Ban, she recalled that there were many female guards who tried to help the prisoners or at the very least, ease some of the torture. One particular experience Ban remembers occurred in *Mühlhausen*, a sub-camp of Buchenwald, and concerns a female guard who sat next to her during lunch, spoke to her "like a human being," and offered to share her more abundant lunch.

There remain conflicting points of view regarding guard behavior. Koonz interviewed one survivor who stated the only guard who was ever kind to her was punished (Koonz *Mothers* 404). Yet according to Daniel Goldhagen, no evidence exists that any German was ever hurt or imprisoned for refusing to kill prisoners, and all guards

had the option of appealing to higher authorities to be transferred (Goldhagen 381).¹² It is unknown whether this same option was available to those who felt uncomfortable working within the camps themselves. However, as stated before, many female guards volunteered for their jobs.

The amount of information available in English regarding specific backgrounds of female guards is relatively limited, but this archival material previously only available to readers of German has become accessible via the work of Daniel Brown, who researched within the archives of the *Ravensbrück* concentration camp for his biography of Irma Grese. At the *Helmbrechts* camp there were twenty-seven female guards ranging in age from twenty to forty-five, the majority in their twenties. Of these twenty-seven, half were assigned to the camp and the other half volunteered, believing working in the camp to be far better than working in a factory. All were working class and came from families that were not affiliated with the Nazi Party (338). Alison Owings interviewed former *Ravensbrück* and Auschwitz camp guard Anna Fest, who described her background as humble and modest, making the job of guarding women she considered higher in social status difficult. Fest was the daughter of a single widowed mother, her father having been killed when she was two. To earn money, Fest's mother worked as a seamstress. Fest joined the League for German Girls for the camaraderie and friendship (Owings 314).

The camp guards of Helmsbrecht and Anna Fest had typical working class backgrounds, growing up in families of a lower to lower-middle economic class that

¹²*Hitler's Willing Executioners* provides a critical look at the average citizen in Germany. While Goldhagen includes female perpetrators in his book, most of the text deals with men.

often required both parents to work to support the family. The freedoms promised by the feminist movement of the Weimar period did not materialize in the working classes. The “gender-related limits of social, economic and political action” remained the same (Frevert 203). Young women of the working class did not reap the benefits promised to them. They saw the “old” women’s movement as bourgeois and divided. What National Socialism seemed to bring, then, was solidarity between the working and middle classes that would better the lives of the German people (246).

Very few records (if any) exist of camp guards from higher social classes. Even the notorious Irma Grese (who makes appearances in multiple works studied in this dissertation) was the product of a working class environment, born into a farming family in rural Germany (Brown 12).¹³ According to her biographer Dan Brown, Grese, like so many young German youth, joined the League of German Girls for friendship and escape from her unstable home life (16). Likely affected deeply by the loss of her mother at a young age, Grese became one of the most feared camp guards in the Ravensbruck camp (Sarti 109). Witnesses at Grese’s trial testified that, “Grese...would beat, whip, kick, sadistically physically and/or sexually abuse female prisoners, sometimes under order and other times of her own volition (116).

Maria Mandel (discussed in chapter two), sharing an equally infamous status as her coworker, Grese, also shared her vicious nature, despite a relatively average background. While little has been written about Mandel’s life, scholar Wendy A. Sarti writes that she was privileged with the nickname “The Sadistic Beast and Queen of the

¹³I acknowledge that while rural and working class backgrounds are not synonymous, in Grese’s case, they were.

Realm of the Dead” (131). Mandel was known both for her cruelty and her favoritism. A survivor of Auschwitz-Birkenau recalled a story in which Mandel saved a young Jewish boy from selection, spoiled him as her own child, and then suddenly delivered him to the gas chamber herself (133). Mandel was also directly responsible for the orchestra organized at Birkenau. Music, like young children, calmed her. One survivor remembers her as “being human again” upon the start of a concert (Brown 58). When the music stopped, Mandel was the “beast” once more. Mandel and Grese can be seen in multiple films and plays depicting *Aufseherinnen*, with Mandel appearing in 1980, and Grese beginning in 1995

What was it within the Nazi regime that produced so many perpetrators from such humble beginnings? There are no clear answers, though there have been theories, five of which can be found in the landmark study *Hitler’s Willing Executioners* by Daniel Goldhagen. The first, contested by Claudia Koonz, states that these women performed the role of camp guard with such fervor due to fear of being executed, deported, or otherwise punished (380-381). The second theory places blame on the Nazi indoctrination that essentially brainwashed perpetrators into following order blindly—not unlike the former *Aufseherin* seen in the film *The Boys from Brazil*. Goldhagen refutes this theory as well, citing incidents of resistance that proves Germans capable of thinking for themselves (382). The third theory emphasizes peer pressure within the camp system. “Pressure to conform was indeed to be found among the perpetrators, as in the case of Germans staffing “work” and concentration camps who hit or feigned hitting Jews when and only when in the presence of other Germans” (383). Goldhagen refutes this third theory by exposing the facts that peer and institutional pressure was unimportant in the

grand scheme of mass murder. It may have pertained to a small group of individuals, but even this peer pressure couldn't exist on a continuous basis (Goldhagen 383).

Theories four and five pertain to self-interest and fragmented knowledge about the perpetrators' personal actions, neither of which can be sufficiently proven.

Goldhagen believes that the even if perpetrators knew very little, it is unlikely they would have acted otherwise (385).

None of the five conventional explanations can adequately account even for the Germans' killing of Jews under orders. Whatever their enormous failing in explaining the act of killing under orders, they have at least a surface plausibility regarding this category of action. In accounting...for the other types of perpetrators' actions, the conventional explanations do not have even this semblance of credibility. In fact, their adherents almost universally fail to address directly, explicitly, or systematically the perpetrators' actions other than killing under orders. (385)

Anna Hest, the former camp guard interviewed by Alison Owings, firmly stated that she knew very little of the goings on within the camps at which she worked. She also insisted that prisoners were not beaten or starved, though documented evidence has proven her incorrect (Owings 323). Following her arrest, Irma Grese firmly stated her reasons for committing crimes of humanity were for the greater good of Germany. The women executed with Grese shared similar opinions (Brown 74, 86-87).

Best guesses based on concrete but limited evidence is all that scholars have left to work with in determining causes of female guard involvement within the concentration camps. Most of this evidence is based on information about male guards. Any

correlation of behavior between male and female guards has proven difficult to ascertain because of the inherent sexism within the camps.

The SS, originally conceived of as a form of mystic brotherhood as well as by the corresponding impulse that Germanic men must defend their women and children, were hardly disposed to integrate women into their *Schwarzes Korpo* (Black Corps). In fact, the prospect of female SS supervisors dispensing orders seemed completely contrary to everything that the SS men and their 'elite formation' stood for...One can imagine that it would be difficult to find SS commanders who had acknowledged, much less valued, SS *Aufseherinnen* assigned to their guard units. (Brown 4)

Scholars are left with fragmentary information, testimony and translated documents.

Unfortunately, because of the fragmentation of information regarding *Aufseherinnen*, their representation in dramatic literature and the big and small screen can be easily manipulated to achieve a production's specific goals. Thanks to the popularizing of the Holocaust in the United States through several branches of popular entertainment, any topic regarding Holocaust events is subject to an adaptation to suit American wants. Nothing is off limits. In other words, the female camp guard was easily ripe for Americanization.

In Conclusion

Students of the Holocaust in the twenty-first century have never known a time in which it wasn't discussed with sensitivity and care. Museums are put in place for

Americans to have their chance to “witness” the atrocities without leaving the safety of their own country. The pre-constructed and institutionalized mass genocide of over six million is another fact that is memorized but rarely thoroughly discussed. Even Nazi policy and the inner workings of what made the National Socialist Party in Germany remain relatively unquestioned for fear of uncovering truths about the capabilities of humans given the right circumstances (Mintz6).

What is the perception of the *Aufseherin* in the American public? Thanks to Americanization, the answer is complicated. Little has been written in English about these women, creating a large gap in Holocaust education (although this does not excuse the lack altogether). The education of the American public regarding these women seems to fall, as is often the case, to popular film and dramatic literature. Yet just as the story of Anne Frank was manipulated to adapt to the desires of the American public, so too remains the danger that any fictional creation of the *Aufseherin* will also become a mere manipulation..

The struggle of German feminists to gain authority in their own lives became one intricate part of the great machine that was the Third Reich. The *Aufseherinnen* were one of the results of the progress made by these groups of women. Their stories are very important to the global understanding of the Holocaust, its victims, and its perpetrators. Because popular film and drama have become key tools in the contemporary understanding of these women, these popular media must be studied. How are the *Aufseherinnen* represented in texts and on screen? What can be ascertained via these portrayals or lack thereof? The following chapters will begin this long overdue study of

film and dramatic texts containing *Aufseherinnen* as both key players and bystanders, two roles the historical female camp guards played well.

Chapter Two: Evil Becomes Human American Film, Television, and Dramatic Literature of 1961 to 1985

The year 1961 is a significant milestone for Holocaust studies in America. It was the year of the now-infamous Adolf Eichmann trial. In May of 1960, Nazi SS leader Adolf Eichmann was captured in Argentina and taken to Israel to be put on trial for crimes against humanity. The April 1961, trial gained international attention and played a significant role in exposing Nazi atrocities on a global scale. The United States broadcast provided coverage of the trial, focusing on the atrocities suffered by Jewish prisoners, informing the public and shaping their perception of Jewish people in general. Thanks to the publicity of the trial, Americans of the 1960s and 1970s were finally ready to “deal with German guilt...” (Doneson 97).

While there were films and works of dramatic literature created prior to this event (namely, *The Diary of Anne Frank* and *The Great Dictator*), it was the globally broadcast trial that struck a chord with the American public in a way no other broadcast event about the Holocaust had (97). This chapter will focus on the films, television miniseries, and plays produced between 1961 and 1985 and the *Aufseherinnen* represented within them, both in lead roles and smaller parts. These productions enjoyed wide, extensive viewership and were written about by popular and scholarly critics. My readings of the *Aufseherinnen* focus on the appearance and written descriptions, actions and behavior, influence/involvement within the overall plot, as well as any obvious American filters placed upon these women, especially those that may reflect the cultural zeitgeist of the United States. In this regard, as scholar Judith Doneson notes,

American films that deal with the Holocaust serve a dual function. Yes, they focus on themes portraying National Socialism and the persecution of Jews, but they also explore contemporary issues that were and are germane to American society at the time of their appearance. (Doneson 8)

The latter includes an American fascination with the Nazi. The following statement captures the light in which “typical” Nazis are often perceived by the American public.

The archetypal Nazi is easy to pick out: he is male (or if female, usually a woman brutalized by Nazi men or the Nazi regime in some way); he is aesthetically pleasing, well-dressed, and uniformed; he is a racist with the utmost contempt for human life; he is linked either to the cold and rational (often depicted as a super scientist) or the dark and mystical; if not a cold and calculating bureaucrat, he is brutal, sadistic, and beyond redemption; he is usually sexually charged (or when comically inverted, bereft of all sexual energy, even camp), seductive yet repellent; and he represents all that is sinister and evil. (Buttsworth and Abbenhuis xix)

Popular culture, then, has “deemed that the most accessible expression of evil is Nazism” (xxix). The films studied in this and subsequent chapters will track how the idea of *Aufseherin* as evil or “other” has evolved in film, television, and dramatic literature based on the zeitgeist.

During the 1960s and 1970s, the United States was undergoing major social changes. The post-war sense of American unity hit a backlash—especially following the death of President John F. Kennedy, the moment that many feel is when America lost its innocence (Monteith 16). Growing internal discord changed the focus of the American public from the global scale to the national. The country was in the midst of a “New Frontier” (as stated by Kennedy in 1961), and change was neither easy nor permanent.

The dawning of the “New Frontier” played a direct role in a new dawning of the understanding of the Holocaust. While the United States public can thank the broadcast

Eichmann trial for a new awareness, it was national occurrences that more strongly influenced how Americans would perceive and gain new appreciation for the Holocaust. For Americans to know the Holocaust, they first had to make it their own. As discussed in the previous chapter, the Holocaust had to be Americanized and “refracted through means of representation that are characteristic of American culture” (Mintz 81). There were three major events/movements that shaped the 1960s, 1970s, and early 1980s influenced Holocaust understanding in the United States (and thus ultimately the understanding of the *Aufseherin*): the Civil Rights Movement, second-wave feminism, and the wave of neo-conservatism that developed in the United States during the late 1970s and early 1980s as a backlash to the aforementioned movements. The Holocaust became a part of the public morale in the United States in the two decades that saw the assassinations of John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr., the symbols of hope and change (Novick 112).

The leaders of the Civil Rights Movement appropriated the Holocaust as a means to describe the trials of African Americans, and the “lessons of Hitler were harnessed to the promotion of Black civil rights” (Cesarani 81). This adoption served as a direct link to the production of the mini-series *Roots* in 1977, “reflecting the resurgence of ethnic consciousness in the United States...”(145). The immense popularity of *Roots* is responsible for the creation of the *Holocaust* miniseries, one of the most influential productions ever made in the US and the single media event that solidified the contemporary American understanding and adoption of the Holocaust.

The violence and struggles of the 1960s and extreme introspectiveness of the 1970s led to a social and political backlash in the 1980s. Increased acts of violence and

upheaval led to several trends. First, “Nazis” and “Fascists” were used to describe any one group’s enemy (Doneson 119). This usage had both positive and negative effects. On the one hand, seeing the Holocaust in a new light caused a demystification of the period and allowed new generations to reexamine historical events that occurred on American soil(119). Second, in response to the chaos of the postwar years, the public saw World War II and the Holocaust as a moment in history where the country was united for a single cause (147). This nostalgia played a large role in the increase of conservatism in the country and meshed with a reactionary longing for a change in the “moral fiber of society” (148).

Finally, the women’s movement, very active and politicized, created immense change throughout American society in the 1960s and 1970s. The power of the movement was largely a response to the behavior of the highly sensitive American public, shaken by the realities of the injustices given attention by the Civil Rights Movement, that opened up the path to women to demand their own rights (Collins 114). This includes new legislation meant to encourage equal pay and put a stop to discrimination in the workplace (Milestone and Meyer 59). The movement took women’s rights forward, but their representation on the screen, especially in terms of the *Aufseherin*, did not follow suit. The movement created roles for women in Holocaust films and dramatic literature, but their representations were more a backhanded opportunity for the exploration of the *Aufseherin*. If anything, it was not the push of second-wave feminism, but the backlash against second-wave feminism (through no real fault of the movement) that created what the *Aufseherin* would be on screen—powerful

but with a fatal flaw. The examples of films and plays within this and the following two chapters reflect this characterization.

The *Aufseherinnen* of this entire study represent a change in the perception of female camp guards, shifting from “evil” to “evil-human.” As described by Caroline Joan S. Pickart and David A. Frank in *Frames of Evil: The Holocaust As Horror in American Film*, the classic villain is “portrayed as radically different; despite some crossover into the realm of humanity, at the point at which the narrative demands that they be destroyed, they are essentially and irreducibly other” (7). The classic villain in Nazi form can be seen in such films as *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981), *The Empty Mirror* (1996), and *Apt Pupil* (1998), and such works of dramatic literature as Arthur Miller’s *Incident at Vichy* (1964), Harold Lieberman’s *Throne of Straw* (1975) and Martin Sherman’s *Bent* (1979). Pickart and Frank only focus on the male Nazi as monster, but these same descriptions apply to *Aufseherinnen* such as the character of *Ilsa: She-Wolf of the SS* who will be discussed further in this chapter. Other is still other. What differentiates male and female is that while male Nazis generally represented classic evil within the Holocaust films, works of television and dramatic literature of this chapter, the *Aufseherin* did not. The *Aufseherin* began to represent a more human side. Reasons for this characterization have less to do with what the *Aufseherinnen* were accused of doing while working in the concentration camps than with their sex. The *Aufseherin*, as a female, could be portrayed as weaker and therefore incapable of truly harboring any power.⁴What is noteworthy,

⁴This statement is based upon research by feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey, who argues that film provides visual pleasure through voyeurism and identification with the on-screen male character, therefore sexualizing and objectifying female characters-making them little more than play things.

however, is that it is these female characters' humanity and not their depravity that makes them far more powerful and disturbing than their male counterparts.

Films, Television Movies, and Dramatic Literature of 1961 to 1985

There are six films and one work of dramatic literature produced during these years that have an *Aufseherin* in the cast. As stated in the previous chapter, between 1961 and 1985 approximately thirty-three Holocaust films and made-for-TV movies were produced in the United States. The total number of American Holocaust plays published during the same time frame is fewer than ten,⁵ with only one play having an *Aufseherin* in the cast. These numbers are not necessarily surprising. During these years, the American understanding of the Holocaust was growing. Citizens of the United States were just waking up to the horrors of the Holocaust. The Eichmann trial certainly played the largest role in this awakening, but, just as the U.S. Americanized the events of the Holocaust as to understand it, so too did Hollywood. This was not done overnight.

Initially, the output of Hollywood in terms of Holocaust films were productions focused on life for survivors after the Holocaust and life for men in concentration camps and occupied countries. Such films include *The Pawnbroker* (1964) and *The Day the Clown Cried* (1972), and plays *Incident at Vichy* by Arthur Miller (1964) and *The Man in the Glass Booth* by Robert Shaw (1968).

The most prolific decades in terms of overall productions were still to come, thanks to the 1978 *Holocaust* miniseries, which served as a catalyst for a new

⁵ I arrived at these numbers via my own reading of Holocaust plays accrued as a result of research (using both online publishing databases including Samuel French and The Dramatist Play Service and collections in print including Alvin Goldfarb's "Brief Bibliography of Holocaust Plays" 1933-1997) into published plays about the Holocaust.

generation's desire to memorialize the Holocaust and the beginning of what is now known as Holocaust education in schools within the United States (Fallace 79).⁶

Between 1960 and 1974, there was a noticeable increase in the amount of materials about the Holocaust published and/or produced around the world that gained popularity in the U.S. Published autobiographies (still heavily read today) include *Night* by Elie Wiesel (1960), Primo Levi's *The Truce* (1965), a follow-up to his 1958 memoir *Survival in Auschwitz*, and the semi-autobiographical novel by Jerzy Kosinski, *The Painted Bird* (1965). Among the published were also several scholarly works including *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* by William Shirer (1960), and *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* by Hannah Arendt (1963). The total number of films produced globally between those years was well over 200⁷ (a significant increase from 1950-1959 when, according to Lawrence Byron, 76 films were made), and included *Judgment at Nuremberg* (1960), *The Pawnbroker* (1964) and *The Shop on Main Street* (1965).

In this chapter, I have organized the films and plays that include *Aufseherinnen* chronologically, beginning with *Ilsa: She-Wolf of the SS*, released in 1974.⁸ These films fall into the category of drama; one, however, is predominantly sexploitation and another is pornography. My discussion of the lone work of dramatic literature within these decades, *Playing for Time* by Arthur Miller, follows the examination of the film of the same name.

⁶ The miniseries *Holocaust* is not discussed in any depth here because there are not *Aufseherinnen* characters.

⁷ His total includes documentaries, short films, and other minor productions.

⁸ I selected 1961 as my starting year rather than 1974 because it was the year of the Eichmann Trial, a catalyst for future Holocaust films, miniseries, and plays. Unfortunately, no U.S. works that include *Aufseherinnen* were created prior to this date.

Ilsa: She-Wolf of the SS (1974)

Ilsa, the first of these films produced in the United States, is a sexploitation film. It was written by Jonah Roysten and John Saxton and directed by Don Edmonds. This film was independently produced with a relatively low budget and was generally viewed only in adult movie theaters. While perhaps not the most “respectable” of films that could represent the *Aufseherinnen* in America, *Ilsa: She-Wolf of the SS* is one of the strongest. To understand this determination, one must first understand the Nazi sexploitation film.

The tradition of sexploitation films dates back to the 1920s and '30s in nickelodeons, although the most current understanding of the genre comes from films beginning in the 1960s (Clark 77). According to Eric Schaefer in his article for *Cinema Journal*, sexploitation films gained popularity in the 1960s because there was a “shortage of Hollywood movies and foreign “art” films” (5). This led film exhibitors to turn to sexploitation to maintain audience attendance. Schaefer states that by 1969, over six hundred theaters (including drive-ins) regularly played sexploitation films (5). (This mainstream acceptance would sharply decline in the mid 1970s, when the sexploitation film degraded to a cheaper, lower-end quality (both in the physical reel quality and the content) and filmmakers shifted to either “legitimate” film or hardcore pornography (7).

Films within the sexploitation genre range from both the nonexplicit or “soft-core” pornography in which seminude or nude performers engage in nongraphic representations of sexual intercourse or masturbation, to the explicit or “hard-core” in which explicit sex acts, including penetration and ejaculation are shown (Clark 4). These films are produced to shock and titillate, to bombard audiences with outrageous images,

and, of course, to bring in a steady profit (4). These films “exist to appease the inquisitive, almost morbid nature of the audience, to show them the things they might not experience in real life” (167). Audiences witness gruesome murders, explosions, and gratuitous sex scenes, while at the same time acknowledging that these things are not part of reality. Nazi exploitation films showcase isolated incidences of this suffering within the Holocaust frame but outside of what the Holocaust was historically (Kerner 141).

Ilsa: She-Wolf of the SS revolves around the character of a camp commandant named Ilsa, who rapes and tortures male prisoners and oversees the rape and torture of female prisoners. She is in charge of Camp 9, a medical experiment camp located in Poland. Her goal is to prove that females can withstand pain better than males and thus should be allowed to fight in military combat (Rapaport 102). Ilsa’s stranglehold on the camp creates fear, not only in the hearts of her prisoners, but in fellow guardsmen and women as well. The film is set during the last months of the Second World War.

The film opens with a voice-over from Adolf Hitler while on-screen text states that the events from the film are based on facts and its characters are composites of notorious, real-life Nazis. Statements made in the first few moments are, however, false. Women were never given charge of an entire camp, let alone commandant status within the Third Reich, and while camps like Auschwitz-Birkenau did conduct medical experiments, there were no camps built for that specific purpose. The false statements have one exception: Ilsa’s character is based upon both Irma Grese and Ilsa Koch, now infamous Nazi women. Grese was an *Aufseherin* known as the “Beautiful Beast,” who brutalized female prisoners in several death camps, and Koch was the wife of a Nazi commandant who had a sadistic fascination with prisoner torture and is said to have made

lampshades from human skin, among other gruesome artifacts. The first image from the film is the character of Ilsa, who is seen having sex with a camp prisoner. We learn from her cries that her partner has not satisfied her sexually, ejaculating too early for her satisfaction. The prisoner is taken away to be tortured.

Ilsa, played by Dyanne Thorne, is blond, busty, slim, and aesthetically perfect. Even after intercourse, her hair and makeup remain flawless. Thorne (born in 1943) is an American actress who studied with Stella Adler and Lee Strasberg. The majority of her film appearances were in independent B-movies and soft-core films in which she played a cocktail waitress, a bar maid, and an insane asylum inmate. Thorne, while discussing *Ilsa: She-Wolf of the SS*, stated, “It was a job to me, and I did the best I could with it. I never tried to glorify Ilsa. I felt she was a character to pity, rather than to emulate. I wanted to show the truth about her” (Dyanne Thorne). Thorne has a commanding presence on the screen as Ilsa and creates an air of sexuality and cruelty. There is no question about who is in charge at the camp. The film was, indeed, a response to the women’s movement and the anxieties that it created, especially among men. As author of *Film and the Holocaust* Aaron Kerner states, *Ilsa* is “what (Western) patriarchal culture fears the most: a woman ‘on top,’ authoritative, and an independent woman with sexual agency” (145). Therefore it is not so dangerous that the character of Ilsa is a Nazi (or that the film takes place during the Holocaust), but rather that she is a *woman*.⁹

Ilsa’s many sexual conquests have all failed to satisfy her and must be castrated. She says, “Once a prisoner has slept with me, he will never sleep with a woman again. If he lives, he will remember only the pain of the knife” (*Ilsa: She-Wolf of the SS*). We are

⁹ For more information on *Ilsa* and feminism, read Rapaport’s chapter in *Monsters in the Mirror* entitled “Holocaust Pornography” and Aaron Kerner’s *Film and the Holocaust*.

not shown the castration, but it is suggested via both blood and prisoner screams. The audience recognizes the newly castrated prisoner as the man who had just recently failed to please Ilsa and watches him die as a result of her “experiment.” Other experiments shown during the film as “torture scenes” include a gang rape of a female prisoner, whipping deaths of several prisoners, and one particularly cruel murder by strangulation at a dinner party, where a naked female prisoner standing on a melting block of ice is slowly choked to death as people around her dine.

A new German-American prisoner named Wolfe challenges Ilsa’s camp authority by using his own “sexual prowess.” He is the only prisoner who is finally able to satisfy her sexual needs. Wolfe is able to prevent himself from climaxing, and he uses this to his advantage by slowly taking control from Ilsa as she pleads with him, night after night, to ejaculate.

Ilsa’s sexual weakness is her downfall. She is punished not only for her camp experiments, but for enjoying good sex. The prisoners revolt and kill several guards while Wolfe ties Ilsa to her bed, promising that he will return to have sex with her. He never returns. The chaos within Camp 9 creates enough of a stir that other Nazis arrive to destroy the remains of the camp, including the commandant. A male commandant shoots Ilsa, and the camp is burned to the ground. Camp 9 was a failure. No one was to know it even existed.

Dyanne Thorne creates Ilsa as both a dominating and sexually weak character. It is ridiculous to suggest the correlation between her character and “real” *Aufseherinnen*. What is most prominent about Ilsa is her appearance. While appearance is not mentioned in other films within this chapter, it is impossible not to comment on how Ilsa appears in

this film. That is part of the point. Her character demands to be looked at and desired by her audience, not unlike the real-life *Aufseherin* Irma Grese, who made it a point to look desirable during her war crime trial courtroom appearances in order to appear likable and innocent. She was desirable and therefore less guilty (Brown *The Camp Women* 21).

Thorne's Ilsa is cold and scientific as well as passionate. She is not a woman to be manipulated, but she is also a woman with a deep need for sexual satisfaction. She is a villain, and yet audiences cannot help but feel sorry for her—a woman who worked hard (doing the wrong things) to achieve female equality who is ultimately put to death.

Yet Ilsa is not without weakness. In fact, her weakness is what makes her all the more human. In this case, her sexual promiscuity gets the best of her, and she “sacrifices” herself so that all will be right with the world again. After all, it was embedded in American society that a woman's sex drive was much less than that of a man's, and Ilsa's sexual deviance was uncomfortable and unexpected (Collins 177). This woman of power had to be eliminated. “For a woman to make decisions, to triumph over anything would be unpleasant, dominant, masculine” (Collins 5). This woman of power had to be eliminated. This was the first attempt to represent this need, but it would not be the last. The fear (and domination) of the *Aufseherin* would be a recurring theme.

Overall, Ilsa is important to this study not because of her appearance, but because of the ideas she represents. There is no other film made in this period that captures the idea of *Aufseherin* as monster better than *Ilsa: She-Wolf of the SS*. Ilsa is a woman of power—a power that, while exaggerated, does provide a glimpse of how audiences might imagine a sadistic Nazi female. It also sheds light, even uncomfortably, on why Americans find the Holocaust so appealing: because there is pleasure in horrors of

Holocaust imagery (Kerner 154). As Lynn Rapaport states, “Although we might want to criticize representations of Nazi evil in a film like *She-Wolf*, the sad truth is that the real Nazis were much worse” (126).

The Hiding Place (1975)

Outside the sexploitation genre is the first US representative of the film biopic (biographical film), which gained increased popularity in the latter half of the 1970s and remains the most popular genre of the Holocaust film (Baron 66). This increase in popularity was another result of the public broadcast of the Eichmann trial. The trial encouraged more survivors to tell their own stories. One such memoir (also mentioned above) is *Night* (1960), the well-known story for young adults by Elie Wiesel, which has become as significant in the bedrock of American Holocaust education as *The Diary of Anne Frank* (Elie Wiesel). Filmmakers and playwrights, inspired by survivor stories being published, began the creation of more survivor-focused American Holocaust films and plays.

The Hiding Place is the first American biopic with *Aufseherinnen*. *The Hiding Place* was written by Allan Sloane and Lawrence Holben, produced by World Wide Pictures, a division of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, and directed by James F. Collier (*The Hiding Place*). The Golden Globe nominated feature film, based on the Corrie Ten Boom memoir of the same name, was released in 1975. Both the book and film were largely the result of a chance meeting between Ten Boom and the Reverend Billy Graham, who was present at the film’s Los Angeles premiere. During the originally scheduled premiere, a teargas canister was thrown into the theatre, leading to immediate evacuation. The film premiered the following day with a much larger crowd. Since its

release, the film has remained popular with churches and families seeking education about the Holocaust (*Remembering the Life of Corrie Ten Boom*). Corrie Ten Boom made several public appearances following the film's release and passed away in 1983.

The film begins with a scene in a clockmaker's shop, owned by Ten Boom and her family. Her family decides to join the Dutch resistance because they feel it is what Christians should do, and they aid several Jewish families by hiding them in their house and providing false identification papers and safe travel out of the country. The Ten Booms' activities are discovered, and the Nazis deport the family to separate concentration camps. Corrie and her sister Elizabeth (called Betsie) are taken to Ravensbruck as political prisoners.

The Ravensbruck conditions are harsh, and Corrie and Betsie struggle to survive while maintaining faith in a loving God. Betsie eventually succumbs to disease, and Corrie is released soon after her sister's death as a result of a clerical error. Corrie is supposed to have been one of the many prisoners murdered a week later. The real Corrie Ten Boom makes an appearance at the end of the film, discussing the aftermath of her release and her strengthened Christian faith.

Because the film is set in Ravensbruck, the training camp for *Aufseherinnen*, there are several *Aufseherinnen* characters in its scenes. Most of these women, however, are seen only in passing, and only one has a speaking role. The film's only significant *Aufseherin* character is credited as the "camp matron" and is played by Carol Gillies. Gillies (1951-1991) was a British actress whose career ranged from plays to television series, including brief roles in the Royal Haymarket's production of *Orpheus Descending*

and the television miniseries, *I, Claudius*. Most of her work was in the United Kingdom (Carol Gillies).

As one might expect, the camp matron is a strict, domineering woman who uses force when necessary. She has a deep, commanding voice that demands respect. All of her scenes involve interaction with the prisoners in their barracks, at roll call, or during work calls. The only significant instance of any violence from the camp matron occurs when the camp prisoners are working and the character of Betsie Ten Boom stops working out of exhaustion. The camp matron whips her, shouting, “I decide who stops!” Yet the camp matron is hardly overly vicious. She whips Betsie, but she does not kill her as she easily could have. If she were a camp guard like the one in *Ilsa: She-Wolf of the SS*, Betsie would have been taken away to be tortured. Instead, Gillies portrays an *Aufseherin* very similar to the real women of the camps (as described by survivors and the former *Aufseherin* in interviews). She is a creation based on the biopic, and the humanity within the female camp guard (even in its barest form) gains focus.

Several unnamed *Aufseherinnen* who carry whips or have large dogs with them join the camp matron in shepherding the camp prisoners. These women appear for a limited time as the prisoners first arrive at the camp and descend from the trains, during the inspection and inventory, as well as during roll call. They range in age between twenty and sixty, the latter being unusual for the historical *Aufseherin* who was between twenty and forty (with some exceptions) (Brown 22).

The plot of *The Hiding Place* is fairly straightforward. There is a remarkably clear distinction between the “good” and “bad.” Audience members know that the heroine of the story is Corrie Ten Boom, and they root for her survival. Because this film

is an adaptation of Ten Boom's book, which, in turn, is an adaptation of her personal experience, there is an expectation of authenticity. This not only includes film scenery such as railroad tracks and barracks, but also the characters themselves. The "camp matron" of the film (Gillies) is based upon a combination of real people who Ten Boom remembers (Ten Boom, Sherrill, & Sherrill). A review of the film written in 2006 states that James Collier (director) "offers one of the bleakest and visceral portrayals of life in a concentration camp" (Nehring). Scott Nehring makes note of the obvious changes occurring within the American viewing public with regard to Holocaust films of the era that allow for more violent depictions than seen in films prior to *The Hiding Place*. Interestingly, the *New York Times* movie review of the film from 1975 does not even mention the portrayal of concentration camps and instead focuses on the message of Christianity throughout (Canby).

In actuality, the realism within this film goes only so far. The violence within the film is decidedly tame compared with films similar to it in later years. The only act of real physical violence audiences experience is the camp matron beating prisoners with a whip during work call. There is no blood shown. The realism of *The Hiding Place* is consistent with other American Holocaust films during this period, including *Judgment at Nuremberg* and *The Pawnbroker*, where violence is suggested or partially shown (usually in the form of beatings or gunshots heard but not seen), but the aftermath (blood, newly dead corpses, etc.) is not. There was the desire for realistic storytelling, but within that desire was a real question about how to do it effectively without exploiting it (Doneson 89).

One hallmark of the film is the fact that *The Hiding Place* is one of the first films produced in the United States that dealt with a factual story. According to Lawrence Baron, during the 1960s and 1970s, less than twenty-five percent of Holocaust films were based on true stories and experiences (50). This would change dramatically soon after. One major shift in the change during the late 1970s was the production of films and series for television. Cinema responded to this new desire for real events. According to film theorist Stephen Lipkin, creating a backdrop of real events creates

a sense of closeness to that history, an access made possible by rendering chaotic, destructive horrors understandable as essentially domestic conflicts escalated to vastly larger social scales...Proximity to the factual anchors the artistic vision within the sober ground of historical actuality, suggesting at the same time that good has come out of suffering, that justice has prevailed, that as it must in melodrama, some order has been restored to a chaotic universe. (10-11)

The Hiding Place, then, becomes one of the first Holocaust biopics that create the personal connection, without disturbing viewers who were already experiencing disturbing and violent events in their daily lives.

The Boys from Brazil (1978)

The increased understanding of the Holocaust and its perpetrators also contributed to the rise of neo-Nazism. A “neo-Nazi” is generally considered to be a white supremacist with an admiration for Hitler, Nazi racial politics, and doctrines (Baron 201). Neo-Nazism in America grew out of conditions similar to that which resulted in the Nazi Party in Germany. According to the Jewish Virtual Library, neo-Nazism in the U.S. was

largely due to unresolved race issues, conflicts over government spending, social welfare provisions, and affirmative action. This in combination with the failed Vietnam War produced “an atmosphere of political and cultural resentment on the right that became increasingly strong over time” (Neo-Nazism). The fears (justified or not) produced by the rise of neo-Nazism included the possibility of the rise of a “new” Hitler with the attendant possibility of another Holocaust.¹¹ That is the basis of the 1978 film *The Boys from Brazil*. This thriller, based on the novel by the same name, represents a side to *Aufseherinnen* unseen in other films during these years. Out of uniform and in prison, a former guard played by Uta Hagen aids a Nazi hunter (Laurence Olivier) as he discovers the truth behind a secret Third Reich organization located in South America. This film is the first within the 1961 to 1985 timeframe to be entirely a work of fiction, alluding to the events of the Holocaust but not displaying them.

The US/UK-produced film was written by Heywood Gould and directed by Franklin Schaffner. It was released in the US on October 5, 1978. The film and its actors were nominated for several awards, including Academy Awards for best film editing, musical score, and actor (Laurence Olivier) (*The Boys from Brazil*). Richard Schickel of *TIME* Magazine called the film “a crude exploitation—decked out with our latest scientific finery—of what amounts to a penny dreadful fantasy” (Schickel). Nevertheless, the film contains a very short but poignant scene with the famed actress and acting teacher Uta Hagen, whose character provides a glimpse of the behavior of a caged former *Aufseherin* whose heart and mind still belong to the Nazis.

¹¹ For more information about the history of neo-Nazism in the United States and abroad, see “Neo-Nazism” in the *Jewish Virtual Library* found here: http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/judaica/ejud_0002_0015_0_14689.html.

Hagen (1919 to 2004) was an actress of stage and screen known for her Tony-award-winning roles in *The Country Girl*(1951) by Clifford Odets and Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*(1963). Hagen's German heritage made her ideal for a role as a former *Aufseherin*. Despite the strong (albeit brief) performance, Hagen is all but forgotten by movie reviewers, who may mention her name, but not the scene. Film critics who reviewed it after its release do not even mention Hagen's role.

The plot of the film revolves around Nazi hunter Ezra Lieberman's (based on real-life hunter Simon Wiesenthal) quest to stop the creation of a Fourth Reich, which, at the start of the movie, is in process thanks to the cloning of Adolf Hitler. Ninety-four Hitler clones have been created and given upbringings similar to that of the actual Hitler with the hope that one of them would lead the new Reich. Lieberman hunts for the neo-Nazis who intend to kill the fathers of the boys so as to mimic the experience of a young Adolf Hitler. A former *Aufseherin*, Frieda Maloney (Hagen), aids Lieberman and provides him with information about the cloning and subsequent adoption of the boys. In their short scene, Lieberman and Maloney exchange tense words. Her lawyer is present to make sure Lieberman does not ask about her actions as a camp guard during the war or about her relationship to Joseph Mengele. Maloney married a US citizen and has lived in the United States after the war. She explains what her job at the Rush-Gaddis adoption agency was and the orders she followed. When asked if she questioned any of the strange orders she was given regarding the requirement that selected families had to have older fathers and similar backgrounds, she retorted, "I was to obey orders, not question them, as I always had. "The statement alludes to her actions as an *Aufseherin*.

True human weakness is revealed when Maloney is pushed too far while Lieberman risks asking about her connection to Joseph Mengele. Maloney insists she is in no way connected to him and that it has been “thirty years! The world has forgotten. Nobody cares, and yet you persist! Why don’t you get off my back!” She also calls Lieberman a “Jewish shmuck” before Lieberman excuses himself from the interview. Clearly the hostility Maloney shows gives some hints about her behavior as a camp guard during the war. She still has contempt for Jewish people as well as contempt for her captors. While she may have appeared to be impenetrable just moments before, audiences now see a flawed woman, with honest emotion – even if that emotion is in the form of anger. In Maloney’s mind, what was done is done, and the world has already moved beyond it. Based on the number of productions about the Holocaust in the United States, it is clear that Maloney is wrong. *The Boys from Brazil* is the first American film to show an *Aufseherin* living after the years of the Holocaust. Her behavior and insistence on “following orders” is something that occurred during war crime trials of actual *Aufseherin*, including that of Irma Grese. The post-war *Aufseherin* would not be seen again until the 2008 film *The Reader*, likely because little was known (at the time) about the *Aufseherinnen* who escaped trial and “disappeared” from the public eye.

Prisoner of Paradise (Nazi Love Island) (1980)

Included with *Ilsa: She-Wolf of the SS* in the category of sexploitation and pornography is the film *Prisoner of Paradise* (released on video as *Nazi Love Island*), produced in 1980. The low-budget pornographic film set on an island in the Phillipines features a Nazi officer, his two *Aufseherinnen*, and a female Japanese guard named Suke, who have captured two U.S. army nurses and an American castaway named Joe (played

by the infamous actor John Holmes, whose name alone likely helped the film gain viewership). The *Aufseherin*, named Ilsa and Greta, are in charge of prisoner punishment, which includes sexually satisfying them. Things go horribly wrong for the guards when one of them, even for a brief moment, shows some sympathy towards Joe, the fatal flaw that leads to their destruction.

While purposely exploitive, the women, in their own way, portray a side to humanity that traditional audience-goers do not see on screen. These *Aufseherinnen* are sexual beings—but in a very American way. That is, the women exploit audience fantasies of Nazi control (as seen in *Ilsa: She-Wolf of the SS*), satisfying the need to be both horrified and titillated.

Prisoner of Paradise plays on the power relations associated with Nazi imagery and “how evacuating historical meaning allows for the mobilization of signifiers in fantasies of power play” (Kerner 153). The film says little to nothing about the Holocaust or the roles of the guards. Rather, it reveals the “naked power relations that are invested in the iconography of the Holocaust: the visual pleasure (even despite our moral indignation) in the spectacle of violence, and the pleasure of knowing” (153). According to Aaron Kerner, there should be no intention to change or “save” these types of films, but that they should be given adequate attention because “they harbor the capacity to reveal the naked truth of representing the Holocaust. There is a twisted pleasure that one potentially derives from the representation of suffering” (153). Such films are made to excite and disgust, but at the same time, they support an inherent fascination that audiences have with the Holocaust (154).

Playing for Time (1980) – Film

Films with *Aufseherinnen* of the 1980s exposed even more of their human weaknesses and flaws than was seen in previous decades. What was seen in *Ilsa: She-Wolf of the SS* as Ilsa revealed her weakness in the form of the human emotion of lust is broadened in *Playing for Time*. Inspired by Fania Fenelon's 1977 memoir *Musicians of Auschwitz*, Arthur Miller, playwright known for such works as *Death of a Salesman* and *The Crucible*, wrote the screenplay about the musicians of Auschwitz-Birkenau. He teamed with Fenelon for the creation of the screenplay and eventual made-for-television film *Playing for Time*. The novel, film, and eventual stage play were based upon Fenelon's experiences as a prisoner and member of the women's orchestra in Auschwitz-Birkenau. Fenelon (whose real name was Fania Goldstein but who chose Fenelon as a pseudonym after the war) was both a singer and pianist and was arrested by the Nazis in early 1944 for being half-Jewish and being a part of the French resistance. Fenelon and fellow orchestra members performed concerts for Nazi officers and for doing this received special treatment including better food, clothing, and breaks from work detail. In late 1944 Fenelon and the orchestra were marched to Bergen-Belsen, where she contracted typhus but fortunately survived. Fenelon traveled as a performer and speaker throughout the rest of her life. She died in 1983 (Fania Fenelon).

Playing for Time was created for CBS television and was directed by Daniel Mann. It aired for the first time on September 30, 1980 and was interrupted only four times for commercial breaks (Insdorf 18). (This move by CBS was in response to the backlash NBC Television faced after airing many commercial breaks during the broadcasts of the mini-series *Holocaust* in 1978). The creation of the film was not

without its own controversies, however. The biggest struggle faced by the production was in the casting of Vanessa Redgrave as the lead character, Fania. Redgrave was purportedly (though Redgrave denies it) a supporter of the terrorist Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), which, at the time, worked to destroy the nation of Israel. As a result, some viewers boycotted the broadcast. Fania Fenelon herself was against casting Redgrave and decried the choice until the day she died (Insdorf 21). The PLO has since signed a pledge of peace and was fully recognized by Israel as a representative of the Palestinian people in 1993 (Palestinian Liberation Organization). Redgrave won an Emmy Award for her efforts. The film also won the Emmy for Outstanding Drama Special and Outstanding Writing (Playing for Time).

Film and television historian Paul Mavis reviewed the film in 2010, calling it a film that

immerses the viewer in its events without a foothold, and thus we're continually off our guard, trying to get our bearings as to what is happening to the protagonists (much as the prisoners themselves would have felt from day to day, hour to hour). (Mavis)

He further discusses the “expressionistic shots of the prisoners working, the fires from the ovens, and tinted newsreel footage” that are meant to unsettle the audience, creating the feeling that the characters are never safe from the atrocities around them (Mavis). As a result, he says, audiences are left in the dark as to characters’ actions. In this comment, Mavis references the ever-changing *Aufseherinnen* in the film. The review poignantly reminds readers that the film’s violent scenes are tame compared to the violent film scenes of recent years, but nonetheless the story is still powerful (Mavis).

Playing for Time tells Fania Fenelon's story as a favored orchestra member. In both film and play, the character of Fania (referred to by her first name throughout the film) is a famous opera singer and pianist whose voice seems to silence crowds, and whose face gets her recognized on the trains to Auschwitz-Birkenau. While Fania (Redgrave) is given focus, she has a counterpart in the *Aufseherin* character of Maria Mandel. Mandel, played by Shirley Knight, was also based on a real-life person.

Maria Mandel became an *Aufseherin* in 1938 and worked in camps such as Lichtenburg and Ravensbruck before moving to Auschwitz-Birkenau, where she became the chief-guard, or *OberAufseherin*. Survivors remember Mandel for her brutality. She would first make a prisoner's nose bleed and strike again to shatter her jaw (Sarti 131). Fania Fenelon remembers Mandel as a woman whose "face without a trace of makeup (forbidden by the SS), was luminous, her white teeth large but fine. She was perfect, too perfect. A splendid example of the master race: top-quality breeding material so what was she doing here instead of reproducing" (131). She is said to have enjoyed being a part of the selection process that sent women and children to the gas chambers.

Belying her brutality, Mandel was also known for her love of classical music. She was responsible for the continuation of the women's camp orchestra that performed concerts for Nazi staff as well as during roll call and during prisoners' march to the gas chamber (Maria Mandel). Despite having been responsible for the deaths of 500,000 prisoners, Mandel was also responsible for the remarkably favorable treatment for several musicians in her orchestra, including Alma Rose, the orchestra conductor, whom she considered a protégée. When Rose died in 1944, Mandel openly mourned. She was arrested in 1945 and put on trial in Poland as a part of the Polish Supreme National

Tribunal. Despite her defense of “blindly following orders,” eyewitness testimonies condemned her. She was sentenced to death and executed in 1948 (Sarti 136-7).

Shirley Knight is an actress of both stage and screen. She received much of her training while working with legendary acting teacher Lee Strasberg as a member of The Actor’s Studio. She has won several Emmy awards for her television work and won a Tony award for her role in *Kennedy’s Children* in 1975 (Shirley Knight). Knight portrays Mandel (listed in the credits as *Frau Lagerfuhrerin* Maria Mandel, a similar title to *OberAufseherin*, or chief guard) as both brutal and remarkably kind-hearted. Film reviewer Paul Mavis observes that Knight’s “skittish, *almost* faded beauty seems perfectly suited here, as well, to her character, as we’re constantly put on edge to see if she’ll smile at a prisoner, or order them executed...or just shoot them herself” (Mavis). The film has scenes that show Mandel in a domineering role, but she appears in others with an almost motherly demeanor. In these moments, Mandel appears quite kind.

This unusual kindness is combined with the cold reality that the purpose of the orchestra is to appease the Nazis as they run the death camp (Fackler). The women’s orchestra plays evening concerts for Nazi officials as well as providing background music during the day’s work call. The women respond to Mandel with extreme caution. She may provide well for the orchestra, but she does so for her own personal gain and pleasure. She is still the enemy. “She’s nothing but a killer,” one prisoner exclaims. “She’s still beautiful,” another responds. Fania adds to the heated conversation by saying, “Don’t try to make her ugly. She is beautiful and she’s human. What disgusts me is that a woman who is so beautiful can be doing these things. We’re of the same species. That’s exactly what is so hopeless about the whole thing.” This poignant

comment ends the scene, leaving audiences something to consider in regard to all Nazi officials.

Audience consideration intensifies later in the film when Mandel “adopts” a young Polish boy. She, like a mother, cares for this child as her own. The young boy, of course, is taken from Mandel, leaving her devastated. “We are all forced to make sacrifices,” she states coldly. In Mandel’s final scene, she runs in, ragged and crying, seeking the boy’s hat, the only piece of him she had left.

This scene is significant historically, as Mandel is remembered to have had as her “pet” a young boy whom she took with her everywhere. Survivors remember her sending this child to the gas chamber but vary in opinion regarding whether or not she experienced anguish. In Fania Fenelon’s memoir, *Musicians in Auschwitz* (later editions called *Playing for Time*), Mandel is said to have acknowledged the loss of the boy in what some may consider a colder manner (Fenelon and Routier).

The other significant *Aufseherin* within *Playing for Time* is a character named Frau Schmidt, played by Viveca Lindfors. Film reviewer Paul Mavis called Lindfors’s performance “a terrifying creation, achieved mostly through her malevolent eyes and screeching voice; she isn’t on-screen often, but her evil presence stays throughout the film” (Mavis). Mavis’s review of Schmidt makes the character seem inhuman, a trait that many might consider *Aufseherinnen* to have based on actions alone. This, however, was not Miller’s intention when writing his characters. According to Christopher Bigsby, one of Miller’s biographers, his creations were not to be seen as evil, but rather the result of human choice. “Evil does not exist as a free-floating signifier. That is a sentimentality, shorthand for the apparent opacity of certain extremes. For Miller, all human flaws, as all

human graces, begin somewhere. They begin in the self, which, psychopathology aside, is the product of choice..." (Biggsby 328). Even a character that seems to represent pure evil is not. She is a woman under extreme pressure who made human (albeit wicked) choices. She is one of Goldhagen's "willing executioners" who feels helpless within her own situation.

Frau Schmidt is gruff and no-nonsense. When Alma, the orchestra conductor, learns that she has been given permission to leave the camp to conduct elsewhere, Schmidt coerces her into having a celebratory dinner. Schmidt poisons Alma. If Schmidt cannot leave Birkenau, why should a Jew? Nazi officials give Alma a proper funeral, and it is clear that she will be missed. Schmidt is later executed for her crime. This was a desperate act by an *Aufseherin* who was valued less by officials than an inmate. Schmidt is portrayed as an *Aufseherin* within the film and dramatic text when her real life counterpart was actually a Polish prisoner who was given considerable power and had control over Canada, the building where prisoner belongings were sorted and distributed (Auschwitz). Her execution as a prisoner and not an *Aufseherin* would feel much more plausible than as a camp guard because it creates distinctive boundaries between the victims and victimizers, avoiding (in this instance) the gray areas of prisoners murdering other prisoners that happened often in the camps (Kapo).

However, the boundaries created for prisoners (including Frau Schmidt) do not apply to Maria Mandel. In Mandel, there is an obvious gray area within the subtle exploration of her humanity. Audiences are asked to reflect upon her cruelty and also her kindness, problematizing any easy division between good and evil. *Playing for Time* asks audiences to explore this through what is represented by Mandel's character. Arthur

Miller was criticized for his depiction of Nazis as being human (Abbotson 408). Yet his characters, especially that of Maria Mandel, are portrayed as flawed humans rather than absolute monsters. This does not lessen the impact of the Holocaust; in fact the opposite is true. Mandel is shown as human and audiences must consider what they might be capable of as well – an idea explored in greater detail in chapter four (408).

Playing for Time (1980-1985) – Play

Arthur Miller's success with the film version of *Playing for Time* encouraged him to create a stage version (Biggs 336). The first production of the play was in 1985 at the Studio Theatre in Washington, D.C. The play has been performed several times since then in university and community theaters, including at the Salisbury Playhouse in 2005, where it earned positive reviews for direction and musicianship along with acting accolades for the actresses playing Fania and Alma Rose (Catchpole). It was also performed at the Jewish Community Center of Orange County's Menorah Theatre in 1995. T.H. McCulloch of the *Los Angeles Times* states that there "probably could not be a better play than Arthur Miller's *Playing for Time* to commemorate the ultimate horror of the Holocaust... (McCulloch). McCulloch found the 1995 production to be professional and effective. "If along the lines there are flaws in performance, the central figures are strongly outlined, and the drama itself retains a sense of reality in its remembrance that keeps the echoes of the Holocaust resounding" (McCulloch). These play reviews suggest that Miller's play script remains relevant and effective without being what I deem "Holocaust overkill," or something that exploits the Holocaust for its violence or melodrama alone.

The play, published a few years following the film of the same name, closely follows the original screenplay. The only noticeable change is the fact that the play focuses more on specific events Fania experiences within Auschwitz-Birkenau and the orchestra (as one might expect) than shown in the film. Fania becomes the play's narrator. For Miller, the play was another attempt (following his *After the Fall* (1964) and *Incident at Vichy* (1964)) to explore the humanity of the perpetrators. To Miller, "the lesson of the camps lay precisely in the fact that those who killed were not part of some alien breed but extreme expressions of flawed human nature" (Biggsby 316). This is not a play that wishes to extend guilt beyond the hands of the perpetrators, but it does ask the audience to consider the power of personal choice as well as the women in Nazi Germany who had little choice but to work as *Aufseherinnen*. According to Biggsby, this responsibility is "rooted in an acknowledgement that we share not simply the plight of the victims but also the potential to be the perpetrators, if only by silent acquiescence" (323).

The screenplay is more expansive and includes scenes from Fania's life prior to deportation, but the majority of the stage play is similar to the original screenplay. The play version gave Miller the advantage of

the present-tense reality of theatre, the confrontation of the audience and performer in which there is no mediating camera, in which the conjoined experience of the women, which Fenelon expresses when she insists that it is the group of women and not herself alone who recall, who validate, finds its correlative in ensemble playing. (Biggsby 312)

The play was an opportunity for Miller to connect to an audience with little temporal and spatial separation between the actors/actresses performing for them.

The play's stage directions suggest a set that is bare, requiring only a few furniture pieces but no real theatrical set. The production notes encourage directors to change set pieces in full view of the audience to change locale only. These set pieces include a cot, chair, and shelves.

Frau Schmidt and Maria Mandel are written in a way that mirrors the way they are portrayed in the television movie. Schmidt is described as expressionless and cold. Mandel is much kinder, and shares the same experiences her character does in the film including the loss of the young Polish boy. Miller writes, "in one hand is a child's sailor hat, which she holds tenderly on her lap. She seems in a state of near shock, yet there is an air of self-willed determination, despite her staring eyes" (80). Mandel requests a duet from *Madame Butterfly*, one in which Butterfly sings to her baby as she awaits her lover. As the orchestra readies, Fania asks, "Is there something wrong with the little boy?" To which Mandel responds, "It has always been the same... the greatness of a people depends on the sacrifices they are willing to make. I gave him ... back" (81).

The only scene missing in Miller's play that is found in the film is a wonderful moment when Fania and the women of the orchestra argue over the humanity and beauty in Maria Mandel. It is a moment of pure melodrama that works on the screen but may not be as effective on the stage. I base this solely on the written word, of course, and it is possible that a performed version might make this effective. Despite a missing moment, *Playing for Time* as a dramatic text is a smooth transition from the film. The play, however, did not have the same success as the film. Its performances are limited to a few colleges and universities and community theatres. The theatre was not then nor is it now a popular place to explore *Aufseherinnen*. *Playing for Time* may have created the first

opportunity for both theatre actresses and audiences to explore notorious women like Maria Mandel, but it most certainly did not create a demand or increase in such dramatic works (the next and final work would be written a decade later). Perhaps both American playwrights and audiences preferred to keep the *Aufseherin* on screen.

Sophie's Choice (1982)

While the film only uses the Holocaust as a backdrop briefly, *Sophie's Choice* is still a powerful statement about specific moments of concentration camp life and the aftermath of the Holocaust. Based upon the 1979 novel of the same name by William Styron, *Sophie's Choice* tells the story of a young writer named Stingo in 1947 New York City who befriends his neighbor, Sophie Zawistowsky and her mentally unstable boyfriend, Nathan Landau (*Sophie's Choice*). Both the film and its novel counterpart hinge on the personal torments of Sophie as she tries to forgive herself for her life's actions. The film was produced by Keith Barish and Alan Pakula, and written and directed by Alan Pakula. *Sophie's Choice* won several awards including an Academy Award and a Golden Globe for best actress, Meryl Streep (*Sophie's Choice*).

The film was praised by reviewers such as Janet Maslin of *The New York Times*, who called it "unified and deeply affective," also applauding Streep's near-impossible performance of the troubled Sophie (Maslin 1982). Roger Ebert stated that *Sophie's Choice* is "a fine, absorbing, wonderfully acted, heartbreaking movie" (Ebert). Yet, the film has also been criticized by survivors including Elie Wiesel because of the "moral discomfort" within it. The "exemplary [film] of the melodramatic variety of the body genres" according to Aaron Kerner

universalizes the Holocaust by eliciting sympathy for a survivor in the form of a 'lying Polish shiksa' who happened to be beautiful and multilingual enough to live through Auschwitz – as opposed to a heroine who would have been Jewish or in the Resistance... The film acknowledges that it is only the survivor who can recount the horrors of Auschwitz, but that it requires an outsider's sympathetic understanding and chronicling ability to give recollections universal significance and immortality. (36)

The melodramatic storyline made the movie immensely popular with the majority of the American public who were moved by Sophie's eternal struggle and ultimate demise. Sophie's pain could easily be another mother's pain. Audience members are, in a way, asked to make their own "choice." Was Sophie so horrible a mother to make the choice between saving her daughter's or her son's life?

In reality, this is not Sophie's story, but Stingo's as he reflects on his friendship with Sophie. The unstable relationship between Sophie and Nathan causes significant confusion for Stingo, who often is caught in between the two. As the friendship progresses, Stingo learns that Sophie is a Holocaust survivor who was arrested by the Gestapo for being a suspected member of the Polish resistance and was sent with her children to Auschwitz, where she chose to save the life of her son over her daughter.

While the scenes in Auschwitz are brief, there is an *Aufseherin* character that interacts with Sophie (Meryl Streep). Sophie serves as a nanny/lover for Rudolf Hoess, one of the camp's commandants, in exchange for the safety of her son. She is taken to

the commandant's house by an *Aufseherin*, credited as a "Female SS Guard" and played by Vida Jerman (*Sophie's Choice*).

The brief scene with Sophie and the *Aufseherin* is important for a reason that many would not expect. The scene shows the emotionless *Aufseherin* taking Sophie to the home of Rudolf Hoess. This scene aims at realism, as it shows the "Auschwitz walk" or the difficulty that prisoners and camp guards alike had while trying to walk within the camp's grounds due to the uneven, muddy ground (*Imaginary Witness*). Both actresses worked hard to avoid the many dips and holes in the ground, walking as upright as was possible as they pass by Block 25 (the selection block).¹²

Nevertheless, the film does justice to the lone *Aufseherin* of the film, giving a persuasive representation of how a woman such as she would behave in a similar situation. Everyone in the camp, guards included, did the "Auschwitz walk." It is worth noting that both characters are shown moving awkwardly in the muddy ground. This *Aufseherin*, even for a few brief moments, struggles the same way that Sophie does.

The *Aufseherinnen* of 1961-1985

The number of American films, television programs, and plays with *Aufseherin* characters for this span of history is limited. Two of the most significant productions of the time period were the made-for-television movies *The Hiding Place* and *Playing for Time*. The demand for Holocaust media was increasing, as noted by the response to the 1978 miniseries *Holocaust* that created both a desire for Holocaust education in public schools and the seeds to what would eventually become the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

¹² The scene can be seen online at http://www.metacafe.com/watch/an-J34Nu22uthbJmm/sophies_choice_1982_arriving_at_the_hoesss_in_auschwitz/.

The camp guard characters reflect the changing attitude Americans had during the 1970s and 1980s about the Nazi monster. The human side within the *Aufseherinnen* was more fully explored as years progressed, a tangible result of the personal reflections taken by many during these turbulent years that included both the civil rights and feminist movements. (This exploration of humanity will only increase thanks to research and publications on *Aufseherinnen* and German women during the Holocaust written and debated by American scholar Claudia Koonz-further discussed in chapter three.) Maria Mandel, the leader of the camp women in *Playing for Time*, confuses audiences with her kindness and ferocity. Even Frau Schmidt isn't entirely unredeemable as a woman who desperately wants to leave Birkenau but can't. Her power only goes as far as control over the prisoners but even that has limits.

The camp women are certainly not portrayed as the embodiment of evil. In fact, each one provides glimpses of her humanness, and that trait also includes the darker sides. Their actions were horrific, and they did play a role in the continuation of the concentration camps and death camps, yet audiences may be surprised at how human they seem. At the end of the day, however, all of their real-life counterparts could provide a death sentence for any of the prisoners. Even the limited power given to *Aufseherin* was still power that could easily be abused.

The years of this chapter come to a close at the dawn new scholarship regarding Nazi women and *Aufseherin*. Up until 1986, little was written in English regarding the involvement of German women in the Nazi Party and concentration camps. This changed after the publication of *Mothers in the Fatherland* by Claudia Koonz, a study that outwardly questioned the culpability of both German women who were active within

the Nazi party and those who were “innocent” bystanders. This publication sparked a debate that has affected all *Aufseherinnen* scholarship to date and likewise affected *Aufseherinnen* portrayals and how the American public views them. The next chapter will examine this scholarly debate and the films and plays that followed.

Chapter Three: From Swept Under the Rug to Front and Center American Film, Television, and Dramatic Literature 1986–2000

*A fantasy of women untouched by their historical setting feeds our own nostalgia for mothers who remain beyond good and evil—preservers of love, charity, and peace, no matter what the social or moral environment. (Claudia Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland*.)*

As the previous chapter explains, a woman viewed as a perpetrator in the Holocaust was not a new idea, but it was an idea that had previously been largely forgotten in the United States and often ignored in Europe (Guba). After 1986, this was no longer an option. More works on the topic were published by American scholars such as Ralph Leck and Mary Nolan (who encouraged U.S. scholars of women’s studies to examine the perpetrator or victim debate from a less polarized perspective), but Holocaust film and dramatic literature needed a little more time to catch up.¹³ An *Aufseherin* did not take center stage until the 1995 publication of the play *Angel: A Nightmare in Two Acts*.

A growing interest in Nazi women became evident in American scholarship and media thanks to what is now referred to by Holocaust scholars as the “Koonz-Bock debate” regarding how women in the Nazi party—as well as all non-Jewish women in Germany during the Third Reich—should be perceived and what role they played in the events of the Holocaust. German scholar Gisela Bock and American scholar Claudia Koonz led opposing sides of the argument. The 1986 publication of Claudia Koonz’s *Mothers in the Fatherland: Women, the Family, and Nazi Politics*, which outwardly

¹³ For more information on further scholarship about the debate, see “Women in Nazi Germany: Victims, Perpetrators, and the Abandonment of the Paradigm” by David A. Guba, Jr. *Concept*. Vol. 33 (2010).

questioned the culpability of both German women who were active within the Nazi party and those who were “innocent” bystanders, sparked the debate. Koonz asserted that all German non-Jewish women were complicit in the events of the Holocaust.

Koonz placed agency not only in the hands of the German women working in the concentration camps who abused prisoners physically and mentally, but also with those women who stood back as average citizens and remained complacent in the face of National Socialism. This was especially true of the women who encouraged and were actively involved in the creation of the perfect Aryan family. To Koonz, these women were not victims but accomplices, knowing exactly what their passivity meant for those families deemed unworthy or imperfect (Koonz *Mothers* 5).

Bock refuted Koonz’s argument, favoring the view that German women were victims of the anti-feminist Nazi regime (Bock *Women* 400). She believed Koonz failed to recognize the “separate spheres” within Nazi Germany. The inherent anti-feminism that enveloped the Third Reich also played a significant role in the actions of women. According to Bock, women under the Nazi regime were counted as mothers only, valued for their capacity to produce and raise many children for the Reich (400). Any identity outside of motherhood was simply unachievable (273). These mothers could not possibly be accomplices in a Nazi machine they had no control over. Bock writes,

Not one of the reported cases of women adhering to Nazism... is the outcome of acts that women performed out of motherly concerns and as mothers. True, many of these women were married and had children, but this fact did not cause and hardly shaped their participation in Nazi rule (Bock *Ordinary* 92).

Bock asserts that while there were women who actively participated in the Holocaust, committing violence against others, these women were not the mothers and housewives that Koonz makes out as perpetrators (94).

Post-debate scholar Mary Nolan encouraged a different perspective on the discussion of German woman involvement in the Holocaust. For Nolan, both Bock and Koonz generalized the German female experience. Instead, she suggested that scholars break down the argument by focusing on the individual experiences rather than the blanketed group (Nolan 334). In 1999, Elizabeth Heineman did just that, studying local and national policies and how they were enacted and responded to by individuals. She determined that while marital status and motherhood played a role in how women were treated within the Nazi regime, Bock's and Koonz's wants to create neat categories were unfounded (Heineman 17-18). The German woman's experience was one of fluidity between the public and private spheres and this experience constantly changed—a theory that makes the exploration of female perpetrators even more worthwhile.

Any exploration of the Koonz-Bock debate and other interests in educating the American public about the Holocaust would have been slower-moving had it not been for the 1978 miniseries *Holocaust*. *Holocaust*, a four-part, nine-hour series, premiered on NBC to nearly 100 million Americans (Novick 209). The series revolved around two families, and it contained scenes of the principal events that lead up to the Final Solution, including *Kristallnacht*, the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, and depictions of concentration camps, such as Buchenwald and Auschwitz (209). The miniseries took the facts of the Holocaust and made them into what Annette Insdorf refers to as a “prime-time

phenomenon” with all the benefits (e.g., exposure) and drawbacks (e.g., trivialization) that go along with that process(4).

Thanks to the positive public responses to *Holocaust*, the Carter Administration created a Holocaust commission, which ultimately led to the building of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. High schools and universities also answered the demand for more Holocaust education, giving the educational materials already in circulation a considerable boost (Fallace 79). The boost also gave rise to discussion on not only how much material was being taught, but how it was being taught. During the 1980s, a popular method of teaching the Holocaust was through the 1970s *Gestapo Game*—a teaching method utilizing simulation or reenactment of events/situations in the classroom. This was meant to provide identification with the struggles faced by the victims of the Holocaust (Fallace 85). This kind of popularization/Americanization of Holocaust education “blatantly denied the metaphysical uniqueness” of the Holocaust. Questions were asked by educators (specifically those who worked within the New York/New Jersey curriculum) about what was more important: identification or in-depth understanding. Identification was deemed more important, and while the *Gestapo Game* became a kind of passing fad, *Facing History* proved to be far more popular and lasting.

Facing History was made an “exemplary model education program” by the U.S. Department of Education in 1980. While it reflected concepts similar to those found in other curricula, its content was based upon student interest with a focus on other historical instances of genocide and human behavior using film, narratives, and first-person testimony. While critiqued heavily for its lack of Jewish focus by scholars such as Lucy Davidowicz, *Facing History* was the program of choice for many schools (91).

Americanization was necessary for Holocaust education to have any lasting place in U.S. schools. Recently, one of the often-used curricula is *Echoes and Reflections*, sponsored by the Anti-Defamation League, the USC Shoah Foundation Institute, and the Yad Vashem museum. *Echoes and Reflections* includes ten interdisciplinary lessons using primary resources including poems, literature and multi-media. The goal of the curricula is to encourage student interaction with the material in their own lives. The entire program includes teacher training as well as course material—something that is unique in American Holocaust education (*Echoes and Reflections*). Only eight states in the U.S. mandate Holocaust education (Callandra, Lang, and Baron). Widespread education, it seems, is in the hands of film and television.

During the 1980s and 1990s, the biopic—a movie biography—gained immense popularity. This was a reaction to the success of the mini-series *Holocaust* and the heavier influence of television than seen in previous years (and the advent of the VCR) (Baron 66). *Holocaust* was quickly followed by other television miniseries and films such as 1981's *Playing for Time* (discussed in the previous chapter), *Skokie* (1981) and 1983's *The Winds of War*, whose viewership was second only to that of *Roots* (Doneson 195). The Holocaust was even more a part of the American psyche and experience. Whereas the 1960s and 1970s were a time of social upheaval, the mid 1980s and 1990s became a time of self-reflection (Doneson 151).

The previous chapter showed that only a small number of films and plays created between 1961 and 1985 have *Aufseherinnen* as characters. This did not change much over the following fifteen years. The total number of Holocaust films, television movies,

and plays produced in the United States grew, but the number of *Aufseherinnen* within them did not.

With the desire to view the past in a better light, Holocaust films began to shift focus from the victims who perished in concentration camps to those who survived and to the ones who aided their survival (Mintz 35). In a sense, filmmakers sought a means to alleviate the reality of the Holocaust and to find a positive side. The rescuer, be it a Jewish victim or Christian savior, became the focus. This forced the *Aufseherinnen* to the backdrops of the movies or eliminated them altogether.

This chapter will focus on the films, television films, and plays produced from 1986 to 2000 and the *Aufseherinnen* depicted in them, in both lead roles and smaller parts. I will also examine the *Aufseherin* characters using existing current Holocaust film and literature theory and the generational expectations that controlled film production and success. This includes how these films and works of dramatic literature fit into the general categories I have placed upon their designated period. The years of this chapter reveal that despite the many films that openly explored humanity within *Aufseherinnen*, the characters were still easily ignored and swept under the rug. It was not until the mid to late 1990s that an *Aufseherin* would once again appear center stage, thanks to the only play (to date) with one as a leading lady.

The lack of the *Aufseherinnen* in major motion pictures, television, and dramatic literature was largely due to the growing backlash against feminism seen during the mid 1980s well into the 1990s. “As both neoconservatives and notable feminists questioned the usefulness of feminism and the state of contemporary womanhood, so the representation of women in popular culture displayed a similar anxiety...” (Thompson

32). The term “backlash” helps describe the struggle women faced with their own freedom. The backlash also led to the use of “post-feminism” to explain feminism of the 1990s , suggesting that the women’s movement had either achieved everything, or completely failed (Harrison 17). Women were told that they had won the battle of equal rights, but they were also warned that “the consequences of the success were unhappiness in the form of ‘burn-out’...and “man shortage”” (Thompson 32). Graham Thompson, author of *American Culture in the 1980s* uses *Fatal Attraction* (Glenn Close/Michael Douglas) as a prime example of how the modern woman was perceived: hardworking, successful, but anxiety-ridden and neurotic. Most of all, she was seen as a man-destroyer (33). Men had their own anxieties about their place in American society, and the products of film and television especially, were increasingly big-budget masculine, action thrillers (103).

The theatre, dealing with the cultural issues felt by both television and film, was also facing the decrease of public and critical attention it had in years previous. While feminist theatre groups such as the Split Britches Company (created in 1981) found success responding to the anxieties—especially when dealing with female sexuality—many playwrights and their audiences, it seemed, responded to the masculine anxiety in an entirely different way, creating success for the “man’s playwright”³ like David Mamet and Sam Shepard.

³ My own descriptor

⁴ His total includes documentaries and short films.

⁵ I arrived at these numbers via my own reading of Holocaust plays accrued as a result of research (using both online publishing databases including Samuel French and The Dramatist Play Service and collections in print including Alvin Goldfarb’s “Brief Bibliography of Holocaust Plays 1933-1997”) into published plays about the Holocaust.. .

The product of this backlash was a lack of strong leading ladies in the 1980s and 1990s. There were brief moments of “strength” in women in such films as *Alien* and *The Terminator*, but by the mid 1990s, these female heroes were little more than scantily clad hard bodies (18). The nostalgia for the “real” man, was a strong force to contend with. As such, the opportunity for an *Aufseherin* character was all but non-existent.

Films, Television Movies, and Dramatic Literature of 1986-1999

According to Lawrence Baron, author of *Projecting the Holocaust in the Present: The Changing Focus of Holocaust Cinema*, between 1985 and 2000, 130⁴ films about or alluding to the Holocaust were produced in the United States (25). Three of those films have *Aufseherinnen* in the cast. Sixteen full-length plays were published.⁵ Of these, one included an *Aufseherin* character. While the total number of productions regarding the Holocaust increased, the number that included *Aufseherin* actually decreased. Despite new information about female involvement within concentration camps, the subject remained mainly unexplored. In the following section, I discuss in chronological order the films/made-for-television films, concluding with the lone work of dramatic literature.

Triumph of the Spirit (1989)

The 1989 film *Triumph of the Spirit* followed the trend of the survivor biopic (biographical film). It was inspired by the story of a Greek Jewish boxer named Salamo Arouch, who was arrested and taken to Auschwitz–Birkenau. Shimon Arama and Zion Haen wrote the story behind the film. Andrzej Krakowski and Lawrence Heath wrote the screenplay, and Robert M. Young directed.

Triumph of the Spirit was the first American film to be allowed to be produced on the grounds of Auschwitz–Birkenau (*Triumph of the Spirit*). It received mixed reviews.

Janet Maslin of *The New York Times* called it “mundane,” stating that while the film did portray areas of concentration camp life not usually seen by audiences, it did so in a very generic way. Arouch’s experience was portrayed as no different from that seen in the many survivor stories already on film, including a 1962 foreign documentary about a boxer in Auschwitz (Maslin). Maslin applauded a few actors’ performances, including those of Willem Dafoe and Robert Loggia, who plays Dafoe’s father, but the interruptive film score overshadowed the brief moments of honest acting: “wringing emotion at every possible moment with weepy laments and ominous choral flourishes; few events in the film occur without the kind of musical accompaniment that pre-empts the viewer’s emotional response. Television routinely treats its audiences this way. Feature films of real gravity don’t have to” (Maslin1982).

Peter Travers of *Rolling Stone* called the film “earnest but woefully misguided.” Like Maslin, he applauded Dafoe’s disciplined performance, but that was not enough to save the film as it “emerges as another Holocaust Gothic—a fiction that trivializes unspeakable horror by adding entertainment elements. In the process, only convention is served” (Travers). More recent reviews of the DVD release have elicited similar responses. Dafoe, who played the lead character, Salamo Arouch, was quoted as saying, “It’s definitely not Rocky Fights the Nazis. Perhaps it didn’t go as far with its message as people would like or cover any new ground, but I look at it as a movie that’s a noble failure at worst” (Modderno).

The film’s plot focuses on Arouch and his experience as a boxer in Auschwitz–Birkenau. He is allowed to survive as long as he boxes for the amusement of the Nazi guards and commandants (who bet on the match outcomes), and wins. Should he lose, he

would be immediately sent to the gas chamber and his family would join him. He acknowledges his dire reality and it keeps alive through pure determination and skill (he was an Olympic boxer).

The *Aufseherinnen* in *Triumph of the Spirit* serve as a part of the background of Arouch's boxing scenes. In one specific scene, an *Aufseherin* is given a speaking role. Dorota Bialy-Wieczorek plays the character, credited as "S.S. Woman." Bialy-Wieczorek's *Aufseherin* character speaks in German (while several other characters of various nationalities speak in English). In many (but not all) American Holocaust films, the viewer cannot help but see the difference in "good" versus "bad" characters thanks to language choices. In such films

only Nazis have accents; at least they have stronger, or less appealing accents than the other protagonists. The concentration camp commandant in *Schindler's List*, for example, has an accent that sounds almost like a speech impediment, as does the lawyer who becomes a Nazi active in the extermination process in the U.S. television series, *Holocaust*. (Olin 7)

Filmmakers do this to make the Nazis "them" and more sympathetic characters "us" (Olin 7). In the case of Bialy-Wieczorek's character, audiences would have little choice other than to estrange the *Aufseherin*, who speaks in a language most Americans do not. Bialy-Wieczorek's brief scene occurs when a female prisoner is caught stealing and is subsequently whipped. The *Aufseherin* gives the orders to whip the prisoner but does not whip anyone herself.

The other scenes in which *Aufseherinnen* appear are boxing scenes. The female guards are interspersed within the crowd and appear to heartily enjoy the entertainment.

The boxing matches include pre-entertainment in the form of musicians or other performers (including a transvestite stripper). The *Aufseherinnen* are part of the Nazi crowd and no different from their male counterparts. The scenes are very brief, and the women could be missed if one was not looking for them-and most audiences likely were not. This appears to be the point for two reasons: first, Arouch is the central character; and second, the women are not singled out as women in the film. They are a part of the universal idea of the “Nazi,” rather than the many separations that existed in reality. The women are important only in the sense that they are like their male counterparts. Any other understanding or appreciation is unneeded. In some ways, this is a positive representation, placing male and female guards on the same plane, capable of committing the same crimes. This trend continued in what can easily be considered the best-known Holocaust film of the last three decades.

***Schindler's List* (1993)**

Likely no other film about the Holocaust except perhaps *The Diary of Anne Frank* is referenced in the United States today as frequently as *Schindler's List*. During its initial release in 1993–94, over thirteen million Americans viewed the film, which grossed nearly one hundred million dollars (*Schindler's List*). This initial viewership does not include the additional millions who have since seen the film on television and in video rentals purchased following its cinematic release. *Schindler's Ark*, a novel by Thomas Keneally, inspired the film, which Steven Spielberg directed. *Schindler's List* was written by Steven Zaillian.

Schindler's List received numerous awards, including Academy Awards and Golden Globe Awards for best picture and best director, as well as nominations for actor

Liam Neeson's performance of Oskar Schindler. The many awards go hand in hand with the enormous amount of praise the film received upon release. Critic Roger Ebert said the film was "brilliantly acted, written, directed and seen. Individual scenes are masterpieces of art direction, cinematography, special effects, and crowd control" (Ebert *Schindler's List*). *New York Times* reviewer Janet Maslin found the film to be the merging of a "pop mastermind with a story that demands the deepest reserves of courage and passion" that was brilliantly handled by a director who distilled "complex events into fiercely indelible images" (Maslin *Schindler's List*). Most importantly, she claimed that, "Mr. Spielberg has made sure that neither he nor the Holocaust will ever be thought of in the same way again" (Maslin *Schindler's List*).

Maslin is correct. There has not been a film before or since that has had such authority over the American understanding of the Holocaust.

Here is the biggest compliment paid to *Schindler's List*: It has transcended its status as a movie and had become a monument. Just at a time when remembrance of the Holocaust was becoming institutionally established (the Washington museum had opened its doors eight months before the film's premiere), reviewers express a widespread anxiety about the fading of the event within the collective memory of present and future generations...As a bulwark against this tide stands *Schindler's List*.

(Mintz 131)

The film has become a go-to memory for the Holocaust for the American public, thanks to its imagery, its realism, and its message of affirmation: individuals can make their own destinies (152).

Schindler's List revisits the story of war profiteer Oskar Schindler, a member of the Nazi party, who manages to save over one thousand lives by using Jewish prisoners in his government-funded factory. Schindler bribes Nazi officers and falsifies prisoner identification papers in the process. "His" Jews are considered essential for the German war effort and are kept alive, saving them from almost certain death in both the Plaskow concentration camp and the Auschwitz–Birkenau extermination camp. Schindler saves both the elderly and the young. While initially creating his factory with slave labor for monetary purposes only, Schindler realizes how much he is helping in the process and tries to save as many people as possible. At the war's end, Schindler regrets not saving more lives. The film takes a few liberties with the life and work of the historic Oskar Schindler, but the message of the story is the same: "Whoever saves one life saves the world entire."⁶

The film's mood is set through lighting and color choice. Audience tension is built up using shadows and shifting images between Schindler as he attends a Nazi social gathering and the mass chaos of helpless Jews fleeing the ghetto. Within these scenes, the film's antagonist is also introduced. Throughout the over three-hour film Schindler, the image of good, is pitted against Nazi commandant Amon Goeth, the image of evil. Schindler, despite his dealings with the Nazi party and unexplained conversion to "the side of good" toward the end of the story, is held up as the fearless hero, while Goeth (who in real life did many of the horrible things depicted) has very few human qualities. This melodramatic dichotomy is a Hollywood tradition. "The movie relies on sentiment

⁶ From the Babylonian Talmud, which reads: And whoever saves a single life, the Bible considers it as if he saved an entire world. *Babylonian Talmud*. Seder Neziken: Sanhedrin.: 37a., *Come and Hear*. 5 Aug. 2003. Web. 10 June 2013. <http://www.come-and-hear.com>.

and manipulates its viewers, and is centered on a heroic individual who saves the day and delivers the necessary happy ending” (Mintz 139).

This film fits perfectly within the American need for true story of survival and heroism. Schindler, whether intended this way or not, becomes a reified ideal American hero, saving the helpless Jews from the Nazis just as the American army did during World War II.

The American audience will not accept—and certainly not accept with accolades – the story about the true fate of the overwhelming majority of European Jews. No more now than during the celebration of the victory over Nazism immediately after the war is the generality of American willingness to sustain an unmitigated and unrelieved vision of suffering and atrocity. (Mintz 152)

The audience is given the opportunity only to focus on the ones who lived, while the six million who perished remain nearly unmentioned.

The *Aufseherinnen* of the film are seen during scenes in the Auschwitz–Birkenau camp. Like many other films before it, *Schindler’s List’s Aufseherinnen* are viewed only in passing. Several can be seen during scenes in the Plaszow labor camp, as well as sporadically during train arrivals and departures. One *Aufseherin* is seen restraining a mother who has been separated from her child as a train arrives with prisoners for Auschwitz. Audiences view her only in profile in the few seconds she appears. A final appearance of *Aufseherinnen* occurs when “Schindler’s Women” are accidentally taken to Auschwitz–Birkenau to be gassed instead of to Schindler’s factory. *Aufseherinnen* lead the women into the gas chamber and shut the doors on them. Audiences are invited to

see the chambers through the eyes of the *Aufseherinnen*, as the camera peers through the peephole of the gas chamber, seeing the prisoners' cry and struggle inside.

All the scenes discussed here are very brief, and the *Aufseherinnen* within them are often only seen from behind or very briefly in profile. These women are not individuals but rather a part of the Nazi machine, and audiences view them as such. Unlike in *Triumph of the Spirit*, no *Aufseherin* here is even given lines. Appropriately enough, the only women of the entire film given any attention are quite powerless—which is exactly what the American male anxiety of the time would prefer. The only Nazi with whom audiences become intimately familiar is Amon Goeth (played by Ralph Fiennes), who torments and murders prisoners at will as the commandant of the Plaszow labor camp; but he also saves several prisoners when he “sells” them to work for Oskar Schindler. Everyone else represents the “them” of the film as the audiences represent the “us.” What matters is that Schindler is viewed as the hero of the story. In that sense, the film ends relatively happily.

X-Men (2000)

This film is the only one that may seem out of place in this study. A film about Marvel mutants is not usually included among Holocaust films, but this one should be. Tom DeSanto and Bryan Singer wrote *X-Men*, with Bryan Singer directing. *X-Men* won several science-fiction awards, including Saturn Awards for Best Actor (Hugh Jackman), Best Director, and Best Science Fiction Film. The film was lauded for its action and critiqued for its lack of real overall plot. Roger Ebert said that he “started liking the movie, while waiting for something really interesting to happen. When nothing did, I still didn't dislike it. I assume the X-Men will further develop their personalities if there

is a sequel, and maybe find time to get involved in a story” (Ebert *X-Men*). Thus far, there have been four sequels to this film.⁷

X-Men, based on the Marvel series of comics by Jack Kirby and Stan Lee that first appeared in 1963, follows the lives of mutants or humans with special powers, as they possess what is referred to as the “X-gene.” In his book *Film and the Holocaust*, author Aaron Kerner briefly explores the creation of the X-Men comics in terms of their connection to Jewish identity:

Based on the original comic book series by Jack Kirby and Stan Lee, both American Jews, the X-Men and some of their other comic books helped to negotiate the “feelings of Jewish anxiety,” that more than likely “fed the imagination,” Helena Frenkil Schlam observes, “but in America it also seemed natural to imagine a solution—the existence of all-powerful protectors for the vulnerable in society.” In the tradition of the Golem, the mutants (and other comic book superheroes) are figured as protectors of the community. (35)

When the original comics were first being created, Stan Lee (born Stanley Lieber) and Jack Kirby (born Jacob Kurtzberg) sought to create a back-story for the character of Magneto. Unfortunately, the Comic Code Authority of 1954 prevented them from creating a back-story that might encourage sympathy from readers. These rules were changed in the 1970s and Magneto’s Holocaust experience was introduced in 1978. “I endured one death camp...in Auschwitz,” Magneto declares. “I will not see another people fear what they do not understand and destroy what they fear” (Taylor xx).

⁷ These films include *X2* (2003), *X-Men: The Last Stand* (2006) and the prequel, *X-Men: First Class* (2011).

Magneto represents the groups of mutants who do not wish to cooperate with the non-mutant society that wants to control them. The other side, led by mutant Professor Xavier, believes that coexistence is the only means to peace.

The film was the first medium to present Magneto as a Jewish man. A brief glimpse of his experience is provided at the beginning of the film and this is where *Aufseherin* characters are also seen. The women aid in sorting the new arrivals to Auschwitz, one of whom is a young Magneto, then known as Erik Lensherr, who, as an adult, is played by Ian McKellen. The *Aufseherinnen* help to separate the young Magneto from his parents, causing him to erupt in anger and fear that is portrayed as he bends the wires of the heavy fence separating them. This is the first glimpse audiences have of Magneto's mysterious powers, and they begin to understand what has helped to shape Magneto's defensive personality.

The *Aufseherinnen* appearance is very brief. If one were not looking, these women would be easily missed. Mixed into the film's first scenes, they are placed as if to make the statement that the film acknowledges *Aufseherinnen* existed but were no different from their male counterparts—perhaps, even, that they were equal to them. In the grand scheme of the film, they are unnecessary. Apparently, Bryan Singer agreed, because this is the only *X-Men* film that portrays *Aufseherinnen* characters, despite the reappearance of the scenes of the young Magneto's arrival to Auschwitz in 2011's *X-Men: First Class*.

Angel: A Nightmare in Two Acts (1995)

Angel: A Nightmare in Two Acts by Jo Davidsmeyer is the only American piece of dramatic literature to date with an *Aufseherin* in a starring role. The title role is that of

Irma Grese, the now infamous “Beautiful Beast.” Irma Grese was born in 1923 to a farming family. Grese’s home life was rather unstable, as she lost her mother at age thirteen and did not get along with her father and stepmother. She joined the League of German Girls as a means of escape. Here she found acceptance. “The goal of the League of German Girls was twofold: first and foremost, to prepare the girls to be National Socialist mothers and, secondly, to provide them with the opportunity to be nurses in the field or ‘defenders of the homeland’”(Brown 18).

Grese left home at 14 and, after working in menial jobs, pursued a career in nursing. She trained in a facility near Berlin for approximately two years. Here she met Karl Gebhardt, a doctor and friend of Heinrich Himmler’s, who suggested that she consider the *Aufseherin* program at Ravensbrück. Grese began her guard training in 1942 when she was eighteen (Brown 30). At Ravensbrück, Grese was unique: she volunteered, whereas a large majority were conscripted. According to her biographer, Dan Brown, Grese was easily indoctrinated into the Nazi policies and “became so thoroughly identified with her position and the doctrine that supported it, that she lost almost all of what we would call civilized perspective and the moral restraint that accompanies it. In effect, she became her job” (30). Her training lasted three weeks. Afterward, she was considered to be a full-fledged *Aufseherin*. Grese was stationed at Ravensbrück for seven months as a guard before being transferred to Auschwitz–Birkenau in 1943.

Grese made a name for herself as a guard at Auschwitz–Birkenau, terrorizing prisoners at will. She also took a special interest in the work of Dr. Josef Mengele, nicknamed the “Angel of Death” who known for his medical experiments on twins,

dwarfs, and others. She was said to take pleasure in Mengele 's sadistic treatments and occasionally performed her own (Brown 50).

Grese was transferred back to Ravenbrück in January 1945 and finally to Bergen–Belsen in March 1945. She is generally associated with the camp at Bergen–Belsen. However, she was only at the camp for approximately one month before the camp's liberation. Her demeanor within the camp was no different from that during her time at Auschwitz–Birkenau. Grese continued to whip, beat, and torture prisoners as the mood took her. This ended on April 17, 1945 when the British military detained her (Brown 69).

During the Belsen war crimes trial (also referred to as the Trial of Josef Kramer and 44 others) beginning in September 1945 in which she and 44 other *Aufseherin* and Nazi leaders stood accused, Grese was the center of media attention. She kept herself well tailored with a new hairstyle and upheld a spirited attitude. This was most noticeable because the women around her were sullen, shapeless, and, according to some journalists, ranged from ugly to repellant (Brown 77). Grese's youth and appearance caught the camera's eye, but this was not enough to save her. Eyewitness testimonies and substantial evidence against her contributed to the death sentence she was given in November 1945. At age 22, Grese was hanged on December 15, 1945 (87–88).

Angel: A Nightmare in Two Acts has been performed several times following its publication, with only one professional production by the New Stage Company in 2006 that received mixed reviews. Philadelphia critic Jim Rutters called the production, “invigorating to watch” but with many flaws, including from the lead actress, Ginger Dayle, who looked the part, but could not seem to master the dual-sided Irma. Rutters

also shared his frustration with the script, saying that Jo Davidsmeyer (playwright) wrote a script that “refused to end” (Rutters). Other critics have called the play a “both compelling and frustrating dramatic work...” (Traiger). The play is challenging structurally, and the character of Irma is even more challenging to tackle.

The plot of *Angel: A Nightmare in Two Acts* focuses on the trial of Irma Grese in Lunberg, Germany. The play examines Grese’s experience. Davidsmeyer takes audiences/readers through specific trial moments, some scenes taken directly from trial transcripts, as well as turning the tables, by putting the British prosecutor on trial for allied “war crimes,” including bombings that killed civilians and the more or less allowing much of the destruction of the Holocaust. The final scene is Grese’s execution.

Davidsmeyer’s Grese is beautiful, clever, and obsessed with her appearance. She is seen frequently reapplying lipstick throughout the play. She is written as both cruel and alluring. In a sense, she is an *Aufseherin* representative of the female characters so often seen on screen during the 1990s (similar to that of the character Sharon Stone played in *Basic Instinct* (1992)). She demands attention, but we fear her. Grese, referred to by her first name in the script, opens the play. Irma welcomes the audience to Auschwitz–Birkenau. Audiences soon discover that this is a retelling of a survivor’s account of her own “welcome” to the camp (Davidsmeyer 5). The audience’s role is to be jurors, not only in charge of the fate of Irma Grese, but of their own personal doubts, as Grese’s character puts the Prosecutor and the Allied forces on trial for their role in not stopping the Holocaust when they could have. Davidsmeyer’s tactic is similar to that of Christopher Hampton’s in his play *The Portage to San Cristobal of A.H.*, in which a

fictional Hitler is captured in South America and speaks out against Allied actions during World War II.

Irma Grese (listed in the cast of characters as “Irma”) is in nearly every scene of the play. She is joined by opposing legal representation, “Prosecutor.” While the real-life British prosecutor Major L.S.W. Cranfield represented Grese, playwright Davidsmeyer insists that her character, Prosecutor, was not based on him but is an amalgamation of several men involved in the trial. Other characters within the play include Irma’s sister, Helene Grese, Holocaust survivor Olga Lengyel (based on the Belsen trial testimony of the real Lengyel), Dr. Josef Mengele, and various attorneys at the trial.

Most of Irma’s lines during the staged trial in the first half of the play are taken from her actual statements during the Belsen trials. Here, she tells the jury that she was “forced” to join the *Aufseherinnen* at Ravenbrück and tried to protest her being involved in anyway. This, as historians know now, is completely false. Irma volunteered for the position (Brown 30). Irma also denies harming prisoners to the extent to which she is accused. She says, “While at Auschwitz I struck female prisoners on the face with my hand. On the whole, however, I feel that I treated prisoners quite well considering the circumstances” (Davidsmeyer 10). Irma also denies playing any role in the selection of prisoners to go to the gas chambers and being the “worst S.S. woman in the camp.” Both of these accusations, according to eyewitness testimonies, were merited.

Irma’s character is not written as completely violent. In fact, she shows a tender side in several moments in the script. Most of these occur during conversations with her sister. Irma tells Helene, “When you graduate, then you will join me. It’ll be just you

and me and a whole world to discover. We'll dazzle them, and settle for nothing less than champagne every night," (Davidsmeyer 17). Another poignant moment offering insight into the heart and mind of Irma Grese occurs following an abortion she orders after she finds herself pregnant as the result of an affair with Mengele. In an odd, but insightful instance, Irma tells Olga, the doctor's assistant aiding in the abortion,

Did you know I wanted to be an actress? Ja! I thought that would be so grand. When I worked at the hospital they said I had the looks for it. I would have loved that. I always liked play-acting...To perform, to be anyone in the world, to create a beautiful image. Acting you can be anybody, do anything. For a flickering moment, you can be greater than yourself, be something different from yourself, better, more beautiful.(Davidsmeyer30)

Davidsmeyer provides her audience with more questions to ponder regarding Grese's behavior. Would she have been the same person under different circumstances? Was her cruelty innate or was it a product of her environment? The questions do not excuse Grese's actions, but they do add depth.

The genuine love she shows her sister and the rare moments of humanity she shows Olga are in direct opposition to the coolly malevolent attitude shown to everyone else. This is especially true in the play's second act, which takes place on December 6, 1945, in Irma's prison cell, after Prosecutor has become a part of Irma's world. She was hanged a little over a week later.

After a final meeting with her sister, Helene, Irma paces back and forth in her cell, contemplating her death and legacy. What happens next is scripted as a

hallucination/nightmare. Dr. Mengele appears in Irma's cell. He soon reveals Prosecutor, lying in a cot within the cell. Unaware of what is happening, Prosecutor scrambles around the cell, seeking an escape. There is none. This is his nightmare. The act progresses, and in a whirlwind of character reappearances and questions, Prosecutor is suddenly the one on trial. Irma becomes his prosecutor.

Your honor, it is the position of the prosecution that the Allied nations conspired tacitly to aid Germany in its final solution to the Jewish problem. By their inaction they enabled the Reich to proceed with the exterminations and thus should share equally in their punishment. Not one nation intervened to prevent Germany from interring Jewish citizens. Oh, they did protest, quietly. But ultimately, they did nothing. (Davidsmeyer 46)

Irma lambasts Prosecutor for Allied actions and inactions during the war, including not allowing for Jewish emigration and ignoring news of concentration camps. Joining in on the accusations is survivor Olga.

How brave you all were. You who attacked the monster with guns, and tanks, and planes. So easy to be brave with a nation behind you and a full arsenal. We should have met them with bullets? What bullets? We were thrown in the middle of hell with nothing but the clothes on our backs, and even those were stripped from us. (Davidsmeyer 48)

Prosecutor makes attempts to defend himself but the continued accusations by Irma and Olga drown out his voice.

Prosecutor's nightmare spirals out of control. As he stands ready to be executed, Irma opens up to him about her experiences in the camps and how she became so vicious.

Major it's not possible for anyone to understand who didn't daily live with the stench of the ovens. Well, let's just say that at the training camp at Ravensbrück I learned a great many things. They were very good teachers there. They could take anyone, ja, even a nice girl like me, and turn out obedient, zealous torturers of their fellow human beings. Anyone.

(Davidsmeyer 53)

While this is true for many *Aufseherinnen*, Irma admits to choosing her own path. Prosecutor, in his horror, recoils at the truths Irma shares. She was only a teenager when she began her crimes. "Adult madmen may have devised the extermination camps, but they were run by ordinary children," he states (Davidsmeyer55). "What did you expect, horns and pitch forks?" Irma responds. Finally, Davidsmeyer gets to the heart of the matter and the heart of the Koonz-Bock argument that changed the perception of the German woman. Prosecutor, flabbergasted, looks to Irma and says,

I want you to be some animal, some mindless beast. Anything but what you are: a beautiful young girl, standing before me, so vibrant. So alive and so obviously human. No horns, no cloven hooves. My God, something of the horror should show in that face, there should be evil behind those eyes. But it's a face like any other. No different than any of my friends, my wife, my daughter...like me. (55)

Prosecutor awakens from his nightmare after witnessing Irma's "execution." The nightmare is over for him and the audience. Irma remains as a background image, begging the audience to acknowledge her.

The character of Irma is challenging and intriguing. She is easy to hate, but difficult to ignore. Irma is alluring. Audiences, along with Prosecutor, realize that Irma is a normal human being who became someone capable of the horrible deeds she did. Above all, she was a woman--someone whose power of seduction gained media attention, but ultimately could not save her. The character truly represents the actresses of the years of this chapter: torn between the sexuality that could save their careers and the complexity that makes them strong leading ladies.

The play provides no closure. The journeys taken by both leads (Prosecutor and Irma) are convoluted. Audiences are asked to recognize the humanity in a killer, just as Daniel Goldhagen asks his readers in *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* to do, and the same humanity that Hannah Arendt discusses in *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. This humanity is what she claims led Eichmann and so many others to follow orders as if on auto-pilot, lacking the judgment to realize what they were doing (Arendt 133). *Aufseherinnen* were not the devil incarnate. They were ordinary women. It is in the ordinary that the real horror lies.

The *Aufseherinnen* of 1986–2000

The number of *Aufseherinnen* depicted in film, television, and dramatic literature from 1985 to 2000 is extraordinarily small considering the overall number of Holocaust film, television, and dramatic literature produced during these years. In comparison, chapter two contained more examples of *Aufseherinnen* on screen than are found in this

chapter. The decrease in chapter three is the direct result of the male anxiety that existed in America not only for Holocaust films, but for all works (Thompson 33). There was no place for an *Aufseherin* on stage or screen during these years, at least not without making her window dressing or the deceitful allure.

The overall focus of the film, television, and dramatic literature of this period in regard to *Aufseherinnen* characters fittingly belongs in the category of “swept under the rug.” The public sought out biopics and survivor stories. They wanted positive stories of rescue-and it was the men who did the rescuing. Women were merely victims, or extremely minor perpetrators. In *Triumph of the Spirit*, Salamo is a prisoner who saves his family with his boxing skills. In *Schindler’s List*, Oskar Schindler is the ultimate savior of hundreds of Jewish prisoners. *X-Men’s* Magneto is unsuccessful in his attempt to save his family but does save his own life thanks to his mutant genes. Several other films produced during this film without *Aufseherinnen* in the cast follow the same trend of positive rescue stories: *The Man Who Captured Eichmann* (1996), the made-for-television film *Miracle at Midnight* (1998), and the American remake of *Jakob the Liar* (1999).

One might think that the exception to being swept under the rug is the lone work of dramatic literature. The lead character of Irma in *Angel: A Nightmare in Two Acts* is the play’s protagonist and its antagonist. She is the play’s focal point and plays the “victim” in the first act before transforming into the “abuser” in the second. Yet despite her seeming authority, she is certainly not a character with real power. Like *Ilsa: She-Wolf of the SS*, Irma uses physical appearance and allure to maintain authority, but it is not enough to save her. This *Aufseherin* lead role is just another woman kept in her

“place.”. *Angel: A Nightmare in Two Acts* provides for better or worse the first significant exploration of who *Aufseherinnen* were—even if only through the experiences of one of the more notorious. After the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, the Holocaust film genre changed. Filmmakers explored the “gray zone” of the Holocaust and asked audiences to put themselves in the shoes of an *Aufseherin*. The 21st century brought the era of *The Reader*.

**Chapter Four: The Era of *The Reader*
American Film, Television, and Dramatic Literature 2001-2012**

What we feel isn't important. It's utterly unimportant. The only question is what we do. If people like you don't learn from what happened to people like me, then what the hell is the point of anything? (The Reader).

The terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon left a mark not only on the psyche of the United States' citizens, but also on the films produced. The Holocaust films produced in the United States prior to September 11, 2001, focused on stories of survival, heroism, and life in concentration camps (on a variety of scales). Yet, while films such as *Schindler's List* were touted for their exploration of the Holocaust, they had only skimmed the surface. The realities of the Holocaust (including but not limited to the actions of perpetrators including "ordinary" Germans, as well as Jewish uprisings) were much deeper, and, while European films had exposed several of these realities on film years before (e.g., *The Last Stage*[1947], *Kapo*[1959], and *Europa, Europa*[1990]), American stage and cinema were still catching up. The terrorist attacks on September 11th, 2001 changed this in a big way.

The attacks on 9/11 created an "understanding" of the Holocaust that had not existed before 2001. What developed was both positive and alarming. On one hand, popular culture products such as commercial films and television programs encouraged Americans to examine and question their government, the war, and the actions of terrorists. On the other hand, however, it also created what Bob Bachelor refers to as a "kind of placebo, enabling the people to feel good about the world around them without really confronting the issues directly" (Bachelor 4). Americans may feel that they

understand their world, but the realities are far different. Comparisons made between 9/11 and the Holocaust only worsened the placebo.

Following the 9/11 attacks, several references to the Holocaust were made in newspapers and public responses including Internet blogs and web pages (230). Terrorists were depicted as the new Nazis, and the Bush administration used references to the Holocaust as justification for entering a new war against terrorism (Buttsworth and Abbenhuis 181). Just as Theodor Adorno stated that poetry after Auschwitz was “barbaric,” author Don DeLillo, in his essay “In the Ruins of the Future,” declared the impossibility of writing after 9/11¹⁴. He writes, “In its desertion of every basis for comparison, the event asserts its singularity. There is something empty in the sky. The writer tries to give memory, tenderness, and meaning to all that howling space”(39). September 11th has become America’s Holocaust. What makes things more difficult is the fact that the Holocaust took decades to unravel on the big and small screen and there was no live footage of the carnage. Live footage was nearly all there was on 9/11 and the fallout. History was made live-and therefore it was nearly impossible not to be exposed to it (Sterritt 68). The exposure may have been made it difficult to comprehend the present-day events, but as film and television would prove, making a connection to other events in history (most especially the Holocaust) made this comprehension far easier. Considering the number of allegorical films produced following 9/11 (*The Sum of All Fears* (2002), *Gods and Generals* (2003), *Munich* (2005)) and a real lack of films making

¹⁴ Readers should note that Adorno changed his mind about poetry after Auschwitz in his 1973 book, *Negative Dialectics*, stating, “Perennial suffering has as much right to expression as a tortured man has to scream.”

specific reference to 9/11, it remains easier to use the placebo and avoid the confrontation and assume we already know the truth.

During these years, the Holocaust films, television movies, and dramatic literature produced in the United States, while still focused on individual stories, analyzed these individuals differently than was done previously. Holocaust films and television films of 2001–2012 examine those involved with the Holocaust from a different angle—an angle reflecting the struggle Americans faced with the aftermath of September 11. A sudden “connection” to the Holocaust (no matter how fragile) created a presumptive understanding of not only the victims, but perpetrators as well.

Much of the dramatic literature of this time frame examines the lives of survivors after the Holocaust (including such plays as *Silence* by Henry Myerson (2009), which tells the story of two Russians who survive the Holocaust and meet up after the war) and reexamines the lives of people we thought we knew (as found in *Anne Frank and Me* by Cherie Bennett (2002) in which a young girl from 1996 is “transported” back to the Holocaust and meets Frank while on a transport train). One unusual play *All Through the Night*, which will be discussed further in the chapter, focuses specifically on the Gentile women in Germany during the Holocaust and the choices they make—something akin to the exploration of Irma Grese in *Angel: A Nightmare in Two Acts*.

Films of the timeframe include an in-depth look at the life of Adolf Hitler in the television mini-series *Hitler: The Rise of Evil* (2003), and a controversial exploration of culpability in *The Grey Zone* (2001). The Hitler biopics examine the early life of Hitler as well as what psychologically may have led to his fanaticism in later years, including his life as a struggling artist and as a soldier during World War One. Once regarded as

the epitome of all that is evil, Hitler became humanized. As seen in films previous to it, it is the humanity of a “villain” that makes him so terrifying

The Grey Zone takes an examination of humanity a step further by questioning its audience members. Containing the most graphic depiction of the Auschwitz-Birkenau gassing buildings to date (2012). *The Grey Zone* explores the choices made by Jewish prisoners in privileged positions (253). The main characters are two *Sonderkommando* assigned to strip Jewish prisoners who will be gassed, as well as to carry away their bodies afterward. In return for doing this work, the *Sonderkommando* are given extra rations and a few more months to live in the camps. While working in the gassing facilities one day, the two men encounter a young woman who survived being gassed, and they struggle over whether to save her or kill her. The idea of what is right or wrong is put into question. Can saving one life redeem their aiding in the destruction of thousands of others? (This idea is the exact opposite of *Schindler’s List* that promoted “Whoever saves one life, saves the world entire.”).¹⁵ *The Grey Zone* dives into the realm of moral choices and confronts its audience with graphic imagery, asking them to decide what is right and wrong. Were these men murderers or doing a job to survive? While not popular at the box office, the film represents a huge step forward in the discovery of the areas of the Holocaust yet unexplored by American filmmakers. It was touted as a story no one had seen, and rightly so. The film trailer’s voiceover states it best: “We can’t know what we are capable of, any of us. How can you know what you’d really do to stay alive, until you’re asked? I know now that the answer for most of us is anything” (*The Grey Zone*).

¹⁵ As stated in the previous chapter, this is from the Babylonian Talmud, which reads: And whoever saves a single life, the Bible considers it as if he saved an entire world.

Were these films and plays trying to ask the “hard” questions, or were they explaining what Americans already thought they knew? The latter is more likely. Perhaps the most telling information is within Holocaust education. As discussed in chapter three, Holocaust education in the United States did not officially develop until after the airing of the mini-series *Holocaust* in 1978. Interest in the Holocaust grew further following the release of *Schindler’s List* in 1993.

The proliferation of Holocaust films, television series, and dramatic literature in the United States has hurt and not helped twenty-first century Holocaust education in the U.S. According to scholar and teacher Simone Schweber, what was once “Holocaust awe” has now become “Holocaust fatigue” (Schweber 48). Schweber, who has taught the Holocaust to high school and college students for over fifteen years states that, “In fact, it may be the case that students’ senses of knowing a lot about the Holocaust and being “sick of it” are reflections of their having been overexposed rather than actually knowing much about the event—overexposed to its horrors but not overexposed to its explanation” (53). Alexander Karn, professor at Colgate University agrees, describing the fatigue within undergraduate Holocaust education, where students are interested in the content, but don’t find it relevant to their own lives—a phenomenon that is both the result of overexposure and how the subject is taught (Karn 222). If the entire subject of the Holocaust has become passé, what of the *Aufseherin*? Do Americans, like Schweber’s students, already know what we need to know?

As in the previous chapters, the films and sole work of dramatic literature studied here will track how the idea of the *Aufseherin* has changed based on the (American) zeitgeist. The *Aufseherinnen* of these years represent a core human level of the

Aufseherin character—one not seen until the years of this chapter. These characters make difficult choices and are fallible (and are shown as such). Most importantly, these characters represent the perpetrators U.S. citizens knew better than ever before. This culminates in the 2008 production of *The Reader*, with an *Aufseherin* (played by Kate Winslet) as a lead role.

The number of *Aufseherinnen* in a film and dramatic literature did not significantly change following the 1990s. This is still the result of uncertainty about the role of a woman in the United States. On the one hand, women were gaining more positions of power, and technological advances such as social media had given women the opportunity to connect to the world around them as never before. At the same time, however, those advances continued to hold women down. This included what, according to Gail Collins, was considered a “boy crisis,” which included publications reporting the lack of males in universities. While “women’s failure to realize their potential had been regarded as a regretful shortcoming, the failure of boys seemed to be seen as a threat to civilization itself” (Collins 456). The perceived “threat,” however, was an overreaction. Female figureheads within major fields remained very small in number, and the difference in pay between male and female professions was growing, not shrinking (458). One of the biggest struggles was within the female identity. The 21st century allowed for more identity choices (career woman, mother, etc.), but it was still the traditional feminine identity that was considered to be the most acceptable (Milestone & Meyer 93). Post-feminism (a “movement” begun in the late 1980s and 1990s that supported the idea that feminism had accomplished all it wanted to accomplish), according to Katie Milestone and Anneke Meyer, was to blame.

This post-feminism asserts that feminism has misled women into thinking they can have it all... The post-feminist narrative promises to counter this by encouraging women to ‘come home’, which literally means bringing women back to a conventional femininity where they find fulfillment...(93).

The end of a perceived need for feminism had, in fact, begun to unravel everything second-wave feminists sought to achieve. It was no longer just a struggle for equality with the male population, but a struggle with other females.

Popular culture and the media, more than anything else, have constructed the idea of a woman of the 21st century and what she is “fit for” in this country. Masculine behavior is still what is preferred, especially for positions of authority, but, if women are too masculine, they are criticized for not being feminine enough (Mavis). The opposite can be true as well, as women who are considered “too pretty” are often not taken seriously. As Paul Mavis notes,

Women leaders fare no better when depicted on screen.... The hugely popular TV series *The Apprentice* constructs women ...with the media scrutinizing women contestants primarily around their femininity, relationships and attractiveness rather than their business or leadership capabilities. (Mavis)

In American popular film, the romantic comedy thrived, focusing on a single woman’s desire to find her perfect man. Films like *The Wedding Planner* (2001), *The Wedding Date* (2005), and *The Proposal* (2009) reinforced the idea that female identity was still

very much dependent upon male opinion (Milestone & Meyer 92). Even films with strong female characters (*Life or Something Like It* [2002], and *Mona Lisa Smile* [2003]) saw that strength diminished, presenting women with a devotion to their careers as perpetually unhappy (100). Powerful women like the character played by Meryl Streep in *The Devil Wears Prada* (2006) seems almost male-portrayed as “extremely tough, inconsiderate, ambitious and ruthless, to the point of being caricatures” (102).

Aufseherinnen provide excellent examples of women acting in an otherwise “male” role: Nazi. While there is a desire for a deeper understanding of how ordinary men became killers, there is still a reluctance to accept the same outcome for women (Vronsky 373). The information exists, thanks to scholars like Claudia Koonz and her groundbreaking book, *Mothers in the Fatherland*, as well as more recent scholarship by Elizabeth Heineman (1999), Daniel Brown (2004), and David Guba (2010), but the research is still rather limited-reflected in the fewer presentations of *Aufseherinnen* within the popular media.¹⁶

Yet quality and not quantity is what is more significant about the years of 2001–2012. These years saw the most thorough study of the *Aufseherin*’s psyche and, for the first time, produced a major motion picture that reached audiences in numbers never seen before. Even if American audiences were not familiar with the term “*Aufseherin*,” over four million people saw one on screen in 2008. She was the title character in *The Reader*.

Films, Television Movies, and Dramatic Literature of 2001-2012

¹⁶Heineman is the author of “What Difference Does a Husband Make? Women and Marital Status in Nazi and Postwar Germany.” Brown is the author of both *The Beautiful Beast* and *The Camp Women*, and Guba authored “Women in Nazi Germany: Victims, Perpetrators, and the Abandonment of a Paradigm.”

According to *The Historical Dictionary of Holocaust Cinema*, between 2001 and 2012, forty films/made-for-television films about or alluding to the Holocaust were produced in the United States (Reimer and Reimer). Three of those films have an *Aufseherin* in the cast. Of the seven¹⁷ plays published, only one contains an *Aufseherin*.

This chapter will focus on the films, television miniseries and dramatic literature produced between the years of 2001 to 2012 and the *Aufseherinnen* represented within them, in both lead roles and smaller parts. I treat these works in chronological order, beginning with the 2003 Showtime movie biopic *Out of the Ashes*, the first (and only) film produced in the United States to include a portrayal of the notorious Irma Grese. The lone work of dramatic literature, *All Through the Night*, will be discussed last.

Out of the Ashes (2003)

Out of the Ashes is a made-for-television movie (produced by Showtime) retelling the story of a Hungarian Jewish doctor named Gisella Perl. The film, based upon a memoir written by Perl entitled *I Was a Doctor in Auschwitz*, was directed by Joseph Sargent, and written by Anne Meredith, who won a Writers Guild of America award for her contribution (*Out of the Ashes*).

Josh Friedman of the *Los Angeles Times* called the Showtime (an American cable and satellite television network) film an “inspiring story at its heart” with a “potent cast headed by Christine Lahti” that makes it stronger than “usual docudrama fare” (Friedman). Lahti, who plays Perl, was lauded several times for her portrayal.

¹⁷ I arrived at these numbers via my own reading of Holocaust plays accrued as a result of research (using both online publishing databases including Samuel French and The Dramatist Play Service and collections in print including Alvin Goldfarb’s “Brief Bibliography of Holocaust Plays 1933-1997”) into published plays about the Holocaust. .

Dr. Gisella Perl (obstetrician) survives Auschwitz-Birkenau by working for the Nazi doctors, performing surgeries as demanded, and giving abortions to prisoners whose lives were saved as a result. Perl later moves to the United States, where she tries to continue her career as a doctor, only to find that her European license and her experience are not enough to qualify her for a license to practice in the United States. American immigration officials also accuse her of working with the Nazis after learning of her past when she applies for U.S. citizenship. Similar to what is seen in *The Grey Zone*, Gisella Perl is depicted as part of the “gray area” of Holocaust survival. Faced with difficult questions of morality and choice, Perl retells her story as she remembers it, defending her innocence.

Perl recounts her experiences as a young Hungarian doctor prior to her imprisonment in Auschwitz, succeeding not only as a trustworthy obstetrician, but as a woman in a male-dominated field. Perl talks about her time working for Dr. Mengele and the many horrifying experiments she witnessed and aided. This she admits to. Yet, while she may have helped to destroy lives, Perl was a key factor in saving them as well. As a skilled gynecologist, she had experience giving women abortions. Pregnant women in Auschwitz-Birkenau were condemned to the gas chambers. There was no place for babies in Auschwitz-Birkenau, and Perl, acutely aware of the situation, performed illegal abortions on desperate women who found themselves pregnant. If these women could survive the camps, they could go on to have healthy babies later in their lives. There was no choice for these women, and Perl risked her own life to save theirs without any anesthesia or equipment.

The decisions Perl made were certainly difficult for many people, including Perl herself. The questions asked of her by the U.S. immigration agents are very American: are the lives she saved equal to those she helped destroy? How could a doctor, trained to heal, so willingly aid in the destruction of so many? These questions are particularly controversial in the United States, where abortion is consistently a hot-button issue. The debate—much of it motivated by religious views—is essentially based on the consideration of a fetus as a human life. In Europe, abortion is increasingly more controversial (and new court rulings have created stricter laws); however, most European nations allow for abortions to be available “on demand” for the first twelve weeks gestation and later if the child had severe handicaps or it will save the life of the mother (Ethics Guide). This certainly was what Perl was doing, that is, saving the life of the mother. Do the U.S. immigration service (INS) and Showtime audiences have a right to judge Perl’s actions when they have never known such horror and are biased by their own views?

The real Gisella Perl recalls this horror working as a camp doctor in her memoir. The conditions were horrendous and equipment nearly non-existent. She was told specifically not to worry about medical instruments in the “hospital” because she wouldn’t have any (Peleg588). As recounted in her memoir,

“Dr. Mengele told me that it was my duty to report every pregnant woman to him,” Dr. Perl said. “He said that they would go to another camp for better nutrition, even for milk. So women began to run directly to him, telling him, ‘I am pregnant.’ I learned that they were all taken to the research block to be used as guinea pigs, and then two lives would be

thrown into the crematorium. I decided that never again would there be a pregnant woman in Auschwitz.” (Brozan)

Working with what she had, Perl performed abortions. Perl recalled other prisoner-doctors and herself also saving as many patients’ lives as possible by changing diagnoses from something that meant immediate execution for the prisoners to something less serious (Perl). One of the most difficult situations Perl discusses is also one of the grayest of moral gray areas: cannibalism. Most specifically, Perl remembers the chaotic Bergen-Belsen food distribution and the actions of desperate prisoners:

The narrow streets between the blocks were full of skeleton-like men and women who crept around in the dirt searching for a drop of water, a bit of food, until utterly exhausted they sat down beside one of the mountains of corpses to die. Those who had enough vitality left to want to live resorted to cannibalism. They opened the bodies of the recently dead and ate their livers, their hearts, their brains. (Perl)

These prisoners, in an effort to survive, did the unthinkable. Perl, as a doctor in Auschwitz-Birkenau, had to choose whether or not to do what she considered unthinkable.

Thanks to its Showtime cable affiliation, the film was freer to discuss openly such themes as abortion and the moral choices of prisoners such as Perl without having to deal with censorship that would have resulted should the film have been produced for a commercial broadcast television network (like NBC’s 1978 *Holocaust* miniseries).

Christine Lahti was drawn to the story of Gisella Perl years before she would be asked to play her on the small screen. She was drawn to the complexities of the character

that maintained courage throughout the government probing. “We all wanted to explore the gray tones,” Lahti said, “what we call the ‘choiceless choices’ – things she had to do to survive but things that were not so honorable” (Pogrebin). Lahti stated that she had little trouble becoming Dr. Perl on screen because she could connect to her. Her portrayal was not one of heroism. Instead, Lahti explored “what this survivor had to do in order to survive. What do you do with those memories and that loss?” she continued, “How do you justify your life after living through something like that?” Lahti found it difficult to escape the spirit of Dr. Perl after the film’s production was finished. “It took me several months to recover,” she said. “When I got back to my life, I could take nothing for granted ever again” (Pogrebin).

There are several *Aufseherin* characters in this film but the most significant is the character of Irma Grese (played by Nina Young). Perl is requested to attend to an *Aufseherin* who needs an abortion. This woman, she learns, is Grese.

In her memoir, *I Was a Doctor in Auschwitz*, Perl writes of her impression of Grese and the experience of giving this terrifying woman an abortion. “She was one of the most beautiful women I have ever seen. Her body was perfect in every line, her face clear and angelic and her blue eyes the gayest, the most innocent eyes one can imagine. And yet, Irma Grese was the most depraved, cruel, imaginative sexual pervert I ever came across” (Perl 61). Perl describes how Grese would visit during surgeries just to watch human suffering, getting some sadistic pleasure from the experience (62). Satisfied with Perl’s ability as a surgeon, Grese informed her that she was to perform an abortion on her, as she had become pregnant. The operation had to be an absolute secret. This was risky for both Perl and Grese:

I knelt on the floor and began to operate. There was absolutely no doubt in my mind that this was going to be the last professional act of my life.

We were both

breaking the rules. Should anyone find out about it, it would mean the end of her career as an S.S. woman. I would be sent “left” [to the gas chambers]. We were both equally guilty in the eyes of her superiors. (63)

Grese had the option of killing Perl on the spot if she was inclined to. After all, Grese had revealed a secret that would end her career had it been publicized. She also showed Perl a few moments of weakness, as she put herself in Perl’s hands. Grese was deprived, but, at that moment, she was vulnerable. Despite her fears of the worst, Perl survived her camp experience, keeping Grese’s abortion a secret until she had the freedom and safety to share it.

Young’s brief appearances in the film are memorable. Her cold, sullen expressions countered with a make-up-enhanced face create additional (albeit exaggerated) reasons that she could be labeled “The Beautiful Beast.” Make-up was heavily discouraged in Nazi Germany. The ideal beauty was one without chemical enhancement (Sarti21). In this American movie, however, audiences who are more accustomed to the ideal beauty standards of the present day may not make the connection between a make-up-less actress and an ideal beauty. This is an idea that is also present in the previous chapter’s discussion of *Angel: A Nightmare in Two Acts*, whose Irma Grese character is seen applying lipstick frequently. In her actual trial, Grese wore no makeup, but tried to maintain her good looks by priming her hair(121).

Despite the added aesthetic elements to the character of Grese, audiences are provided with a glimpse of a woman who, while criminal, was also very human and fallible. Nina Young gives Grese a softer side than other *Aufseherinnen* portrayed in earlier films. She is far from likable, but she is (even in the smallest way) a sympathetic character during the abortion sequence. The beastly side to the “Beautiful Beast” was in how human she really seemed.

***The Reader* (2008)**

There is no other American film to date that better explores the life and personality of an *Aufseherin* than *The Reader*. The film should be noted for this exploration not only of the life of an *Aufseherin*, but for the other complicated social issues, including illiteracy and the imbalanced relationship between an older woman and young man. *The Reader* gives audiences a glimpse of the choices an average *Aufseherin* had to make and the people they were forced (or chose) to become.

Originally a German novel by Bernhard Schlink, *The Reader* was translated into English in 1997. Schlink’s purpose in writing the novel was to explore the feelings of guilt held by the post-war generation of Germans coming to terms with the mistakes their parents made during World War II (Roth). The book gained immense popularity in the United States after Oprah Winfrey placed it on her “Oprah’s Book Club” list in 1999, and, according to Schlink scholar William Donahue, over the last fifteen years, *The Reader* has “garnered more critical attention from American than from German scholars” (Donahue 4). This attention has led to the book becoming a standard in many American German college programs. Donahue believes that one of the big reasons that Schlink’s

novel (and the subsequent film) has become so popular in America is because the American audience views *The Reader's* main character (an *Aufseherin*) not as “the great enigma of evil from which we shrink in horror and incomprehension, but a virtual textbook example of the sociological conception of criminality, which we tend to embrace” (54). In other words, *The Reader* presents an exploration and explanation of human behavior in the Holocaust.

The plot of the book and its subsequent film revolves around the relationship between a young man who falls in love with an older woman and the journey the two characters take together as their relationship deepens. It is later revealed that the older woman, Hanna Schmitz, had served as a camp guard during World War II.

The book's movie rights were sold to Miramax films in 1998 (Roman). To date, *The Reader* is the only American film that focuses on the life of an *Aufseherin*. It provides both examples of life within concentration camps as well as the life of an *Aufseherin* following the war. The film (released in 2008) was written by British playwright and director David Hare, and directed by Stephen Daldry..

The Reader was released in theatres in 2008 to a limited audience and worldwide in 2009. Like *Schindler's List* before it, the film earned several Academy Award nominations, including Best Actress (won by Kate Winslet), Best Director, and Best Picture. Critical reception of the film was mixed. Roger Ebert called the film “powerfully (if not confusingly) told in a flashback framework and powerfully acted”(2008). Ann Hornaday of *The Washington Post* also found the film to be an “engrossing, graceful adaptation of Bernhard Schlink's semi-autobiographical novel...with equal parts simplicity and nuance, restraints and emotion” (Hornaday).

The New York Times's Manohla Dargis, on the other hand, questioned the film's attempts at creating sympathy for a former camp guard:

You could argue that the film isn't really about the Holocaust, but about the generation that grew up in its shadow, which is what the book insists. But the film is neither about the Holocaust nor about those Germans who grapple with its legacy: it's about making the audience feel good about a historical catastrophe that grows fainter with each new tasteful interpolation. (Dargis)

Other critics agree with Dargis and have questioned the film's focus on Schmitz's illiteracy rather than on her acts as camp guard. For example, as Ron Rosenbaum notes

so much is made of the deep, deep exculpatory shame of illiteracy— despite the fact that burning 300 people to death doesn't require reading skills—...Lack of reading skills is *more* disgraceful than listening in bovine silence to the screams of 300 people as they are burned to death behind the locked doors of a church you're guarding to prevent them from escaping the flames. Which is what Hanna did, although, of course, it's not shown in the film.

Still others choose to focus on the somewhat erotic relationship between the young boy and an older woman. What seemed to matter is not that Schmitz was a camp guard, but that she was a seductive woman who could not read. According to *Chicago Tribune* film critic Michael Phillips, "Even though Winslet can adjust, brilliantly and almost imperceptibly, any character's emotional temperature, Hanna remains a knotty abstraction, not a dimensional being."

In an interview with Pop Entertainment.com, Kate Winslet described the process she went through in order to transform herself into the Schmitz character:

I had to educate myself a little more about the Holocaust; and I had to educate myself a lot about the role of an SS guard, about which I actually knew very little. And I'm not embarrassed to say that, because I think that's the case for many people of my generation. Once you see documentary footage of the camp, you read anything on the Holocaust, you can never un-see those things, you can never un-hear, un-read them. I'm still absolutely haunted and traumatized by so much of what I saw during the preparation process. At a certain point I just had to stop, because I thought, "I have what I need now; I get it. I really get it."

(Balfour)

When asked about the film creating sympathy for Schmitz' character, Winslet replied,

I knew it wasn't my job to make an audience sympathize with her, humanize her, or warm her up. I had to make her a person; I had to make her real; and I had to be 100% committed to conveying the honesty of every single emotion in order to give the audience the opportunity to understand her if they wanted to, feel any level of sympathy if they wanted to. The most exciting things for me, personally, is if the audience feels morally impure, if they feel any degree of sympathy towards her, that's what is interesting. That means that is getting some kind of new perspective; it is raising questions for people (Balfour).

Raising questions and providing new perspectives are exactly what *The Reader* accomplishes—even if the audience doesn't fully realize it. Roger Ebert sums this up perfectly in his review of the film:

Some complain we don't need yet another "Holocaust movie." None of them think the movie may have anything to say about them. I believe the movie may be demonstrating a fact of human nature: Most people, most of the time, all over the world, choose to go along. We vote with the tribe.

(Ebert *The Reader*)

Popular actress Kate Winslet (known for her roles in *Titanic*, *Quills*, and *Finding Neverland*) played the role of Schmitz, an illiterate, working class trolley car operator who captures the attention of a teenage boy named Michael. Their love affair in the beginning of the film is quickly overshadowed by the news that Schmitz was a camp guard at Auschwitz. *The Reader* gives an audience the opportunity to become familiar with actions of female camp guards and their courtroom trials upon being caught after the end of the war. In Schmitz's case, the trial comes many years after her time as camp guard. An older Michael, now a university student, learns of her involvement by accident. Michael must put the relationship he shared with Schmitz in the past into question.

While most of the film focuses on the relationship, both sexual and intellectual, between Michael and Schmitz, it is within the trial's flashbacks that audiences understand not only what choices Schmitz made, but why she made them. Schmitz and her fellow *Aufseherinnen* are put on trial for their actions while in Auschwitz and a women's camp near Krakow, Poland. The major event for which Schmitz's fate is placed in the balance

occurred during an evacuation of prisoners toward the end of the war. Fellow *Aufseherinnen* and Schmitz were guarding a group of prisoners locked in a church in a small Polish town. Things were going as planned until the town was bombed by Allied forces, leaving the women to deal with the prisoners left inside a now burning and still locked church. No one unlocked the building and all the prisoners burned to death. Schmitz insisted that the entire event was chaotic and the women didn't know what to do, insisting on the "what would you have done" approach; yet she does not deny her actions, unlike the other women on trial.

JUDGE: The first thing I am asking is why did you not unlock the doors.

SCHMITZ: Obviously, for the obvious reasons. We couldn't.

JUDGE: Why couldn't you?

SCHMITZ: We were guards. Our job was to guard the prisoners. We couldn't just let

them escape.

JUDGE: I see. And if you let them escape you would have been blamed, you would have

been charged. You might have been executed.

SCHMITZ: No! If we had opened the doors there would have been chaos! How could we have restored order? It happened so fast. It was snowing, the bombs, the flames...there were flames all over the village. Then the screaming began and got worse and worse. And if they came all come rushing out. We couldn't just let them escape. We couldn't. We were responsible for them!

JUDGE: So you did know what was happening? You did know? You made a choice.

You let them die rather than risk letting them escape.

SCHMITZ: (has no answer).

Schmitz is the only *Aufseherin* on trial who admits to what she did (though she doesn't fully have a grasp of what it means), and, as a result, the other women gang up and place blame for the church fire on her.

The formal report of the incident—a document that places all responsibility for the church fire on the female guards—seals Schmitz's fate, and she “confesses” to having written it, thus accepting responsibility for the fire and those who died needlessly.

Audiences know, however, that Schmitz is illiterate and couldn't possibly have written the report—yet her pride prevents her from admitting this, and she accepts a guilty verdict instead. In just a few scenes, Schmitz becomes not only a perpetrator but also a victim. Her actions were horrible, but she was certainly not the only one to blame for the prisoners' deaths. Her inability to admit to her own personal shortcoming, the one thing that could essentially save her, condemns her. Her fellow guards are given four years, three months in prison. Schmitz is given life in prison. Even if she didn't write the report, was she still guilty of not unlocking the church? Yes. There is no question about those actions. Yet, how guilty was she? This is the question on Michael Berg's mind and presented to the audience as well. As Professor Rohl (Michael Berg's law professor who was responsible for the class's attendance at the trial) states:

Societies think they operate by something called morality. But they don't.

They operate by something called law. You're not guilty of anything merely by working at Auschwitz. Eight thousand people worked at

Auschwitz. Precisely nineteen have been convicted, and only six for murder. To prove murder you have to prove intent.

Schmitz may not have fully understood what she was a part of as a guard, and yet she had control over whether hundreds of women and children lived or died. That much she admitted, choosing not to use the “ignorance” plea that has (rightly or wrongly) been used by not only the fellow guards in her fictional trial, but real-life *Aufseherinnen* on trial as well (Donahue 107)..

Here is where *The Reader* shares a resemblance with real-life war crime trials, including the Madjanek War Crimes Trial of 1975 to 1981. This trial was the first and only trial of *Aufseherinnen* in a German court and of women such as Hermine Braunsteiner Ryan, a former guard who, like Hanna Schmitz, admitted her guilt, but not fully. “I bear some guilt, but I am no murderer,” she stated (107). In this instance, Ryan used her age at the time (19) and low level in the camp hierarchy to excuse her behavior. Yet Ryan’s behavior far exceeds Schmitz’s in terms of depravity. Ryan was known for beating children with a riding whip, kicking prisoners with steel-capped boots for small infractions, and outright murdering them (107). Ryan’s connections to the film are not due to her actions, but rather to her statements in court. She displaces her own guilt because her place in the camp hierarchy was never one of power. If *Aufseherinnen* had no authority, they could not be convicted.¹⁸

The film also enhances Hanna Schmitz’s sympathetic character by focusing on the gender struggle that she faces. Not only was gender a problem in the hierarchy of

¹⁸ In Ryan’s case, her plea was ineffective, and she was sentenced to life in prison. Other women also on trial, however, received considerably shorter sentences (fewer than twelve years) and some were acquitted. For more information, see <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Holocaust/WarCrime40.html>.

concentration camps, but it also becomes an issue within the relationship between Schmitz and Michael Berg. Even though she is the older woman, stronger in theory, Berg is the one who ultimately gains control, both as a male and an educated person. While some critics question the sexual relationship, the created gender imbalance somehow makes the relationship acceptable. Berg is still a male figure with male power. He flaunts the relationship when out in public. Hanna does her best to conceal it. Berg has the power to serve as a character witness for Hanna during the trial and provide proof of her illiteracy, but he fails to use it.

During Schmitz's imprisonment, Berg has all the control, not only choosing to connect with her, but also picking out what books to record for her, and when to send them. He also refuses to write to her, despite pleas from Schmitz to do so, leaving her feeling helpless. Finally, Schmitz's suicide in the film, according to William Donahue, is also a matter of a hopeless love affair and a male figure claiming final power, a key difference between the film and novel. As Donahue notes,

In the novel, we are invited to believe that Hanna's suicide follows, in substantial part, from her reading of the classics of Holocaust literature. She seems, through her newfound literacy, to have finally grasped her guilt...and thus carries out this measure of justice as a sentence she pronounces on herself, the one she said no one else (except for the dead) had a right to render.... But Daldry [director] gives us a woman who kills herself because she sees that there is no future with Berg.(171)

Schmitz the perpetrator becomes Schmitz the woman who has no choice but to try to survive in a patriarchal society. Her gender overshadows her agency. This, says

Donahue, is the way in which the film, “by virtue of the images it directly proffers, as well as those it triggers by way of intertextual allusion, renders Hanna ‘guilty, but not as guilty as it seemed’” (175). In the end, the guilt is not what is important to the film. *The Reader* is a love story at its heart.

The real question that *The Reader* poses to its American audiences is this: are we prepared to face a film with a “willing executioner” who is female without her being sexualized or overshadowed? Like the many films that came before it, if *The Reader* is any model, the answer is still no.

***Inglourious Basterds* (2009)**

The darkly funny pulp film *Inglourious Basterds* provides an interesting examination of the years of the Holocaust through the eyes of American outlaw-types who travel to Germany to murder as many Nazis as possible. The term “pulp,” first used to describe a genre of literature in the 1930s, describes films with larger-than-life characters, lurid subject matter, and lots of action(Pulp). *Inglourious Basterds*, an excellent example of pulp, was written and directed by Quentin Tarantino. The film was nominated for several Academy Awards including the categories of best director, best original screenplay and best film, and won one Academy Award for best supporting actor Christoph Waltz.

Tarantino, who is known for his work in the pulp genre including such films as *Pulp Fiction*, *Kill Bill*, and *Reservoir Dogs*, weaves a tale of two plots to assassinate Nazi leaders. One is led by a Jewish-French cinema owner and the other by a group of Jewish Americans known as the “Basterds.” The film opened on August 21, 2009 and was well received by audiences worldwide. It had grossed over 300 million dollars by December

of 2009 (*Inglourious Basterds*). Critic Roger Ebert called it a “big, bold, audacious war movie that will annoy some, startle others and demonstrate once again that he (Tarantino) is the real thing, a director of quixotic delights...he provides World War II with a much-needed alternative ending. For once the basterds get what’s coming to them” (Ebert *Inglourious Basterds*).

New York Times critic Manohla Dargis did not get as much joy out of the film as Ebert did. While she applauds the casting of Christoph Waltz (Colonel Hans Landa) as a Nazi villain, Dargis felt that the film was unbalanced. Waltz’s character did not have an equal but opposite force to contend with. Waltz becomes the star attraction and the otherwise vulgar representation of Nazism falls short. Kenneth Turan of the *Los Angeles Times* agreed with Dargis, writing, “The chapters of *Inglourious Basterds* at first focus on...plot strands one by one, but by the time they all come together in a finale that rewrites history with a particular Tarantino flourish, it is hard to care what happens to anyone in them” (Turan).

When asked about his process in an interview by Rotten Tomatoes, an online movie database and review tank, Tarantino said,

Well, on this movie there’s one real big roadblock, and that’s history itself. And I expected to honour that roadblock. But then at some point, deep, deep, deep into writing it, it hit me. I thought, wait a minute: my characters don’t know they’re part of history. They’re in the immediate, they’re in the here, they’re in the now, this is happening. Any minute, they’re dead. And you know what? What happens in this movie didn’t happen in real life because my characters didn’t exist. But if they had, this

could have happened in real life. And from that point on, it simply had to be plausible, and I had to be able to pull it off. (Sordeau)

It seems that, like Kate Winslet's reponse to her character in *The Reader*, director Tarantino felt he knew his characters so well that he could alter history for the sake of entertainment.

The plot of the film focuses on the characters of Shoshanna Dreyfus (played by Melanie Laurent), a young Jewish-French woman who escapes from a farmhouse where she was hiding while Nazis brutally murdered the rest of her family, and the "Basterds," a small group of Jewish-Americans who take it upon themselves to wreak havoc on any Nazi they encounter. The group is led by First Lieutenant Aldo Raine (Brad Pitt) who urges his compatriots to obtain at least one hundred Nazi scalps.

The beautiful and spiteful Shoshanna convinces a Nazi filmmaker to premiere his propaganda film in her theater, providing a perfect opportunity for her to enact revenge. Raine and his crew learn of the premiere and devise a plan to enact some revenge of their own. By the end of the premiere (and the end of *Inglourious Basterds*) the movie house explodes from a planted nitrate bomb, killing everyone inside, including Adolf Hitler.

Aufseherinnen make their first and only appearance in the La Louisiane scene of the film where several Nazis and two allied spies enjoy time in a French restaurant/pub. These women are seen drinking and having a good time with fellow guards. Similar to the public boxing scenes in the film *Triumph of the Spirit*, the *Aufseherinnen* in the La Louisiane scene are depicted as nearly identical to their male counterparts, as they enjoy drinks and the spirit of the pub around them. When a spy is revealed among the group, chaos ensues and the majority of the guards and officers within the room are slaughtered,

the *Aufseherin* included. This is the last time that *Aufseherin* are specifically seen in the film. As in so many films before it, this one deploys its *Aufseherinnen* as background, and it would fit thematically better with the films from the 1990s rather than 2000s. Yet this subtle glimpse is important still, because while the scene is short, these women represent *Aufseherinnen* as they may have behaved outside of the camps—and this is the only film in this study that offers such a depiction. *Inglourious Basterds* also makes an inadvertent statement: women were a part of the reality of the Holocaust, even in an alternate reality.

All Through the Night (2010)

The lone work of dramatic literature published between 2001 and 2012 is *All Through the Night* by Shirley Lauro. This play is a surrealistic work that follows the lives of German non-Jewish women from their teenage years to adulthood during the years of the Holocaust. Each character makes specific choices that shape their lives as they struggle with marriage, motherhood, and employment.

All Through the Night has been performed several times, with its premiere at the Chicago Jewish Theatre in 2005. Other professional performances include the Traveling Jewish Theatre in Berkeley, CA in 2006 and the Ensemble Studio Theatre in New York City in 2007. The play received mostly negative reviews during its professional performances. Gwen Orel from *Backstage* online called it, “confusing and messy.” Orel writes that some of the intertwining stories “fascinate...but none are developed in depth” (Orel). Elyse Sommer of *Curtain Up Review* writes, “playwright Shirley Lauro, in an attempt to paint a true portrait of Gentile German women caught up in the Hitler period,

has cooked up a mix of surrealism and realism, that had me headed for the exit after a tedious first hour” (Sommer).

Despite the negative reviews, the play is worthy of mention because it contains four characters that represent the average German woman discussed in the first chapter. Each character grapples with how to live within the Third Reich, and just as so many did in real life, one of the characters chooses the path of an *Aufseherin*.

The future *Aufseherin*, Gretchen, is an obedient student who easily follows the rules of National Socialism. Her aptitude for Nazism makes her an ideal candidate for working as an *Aufseherin* in Ravensbruck, but she is hesitant to become one after witnessing the violence that was destroying her friends and family. Seeing an opportunity to survive the war, Gretchen reluctantly joins the *Aufseherinnen* and learns under the wing of *Oberaufseherin*. Her new position requires sacrifices—including arresting former classmates. In one particular scene, Gretchen arrests Angelika for hiding a Jewish baby in her bakery, calling it a crime of high treason (Lauro 74). Soon after, in an attempt to impress *Oberaufseherin* who wants to see her 200% Nazi loyalty, Gretchen forces former classmate Friederike to lick food smashed on the ground (79).

While these brief scenes suggest Gretchen has no redeemable quality, a different side to her character is also apparent, as she learns of her brother’s death. Sobbing, Gretchen seeks some comfort from *Oberaufseherin*.

GRETCHEN: I—I didn’t think it will happen to him –I....

OBERAUFSEHERIN: What did you picture? He was attending maybe a Songfest in a beer garden? We are at war! Leave this area now!

GRETCHEN: He was the only brother...

OBERAUFSEHERIN: All families sacrifice! This is the way it goes! Two brothers I have already lost! You have some special exemption? Get up! Stop sniveling!

GRETCHEN: But –

OBERAUFSEHERIN: *Mein Grossvater, Vater. Bruders!* All officers! All sacrificing their lives for the greater Germany! Take pride! This *Bruder* of yours dies a Hero—a Patriot—a sacrifice for the higher cause!

GRETCHEN: But his last leave? He wanted out! He said, “Our own officers are handing us from trees if we complain one word! We’re losing the war!”

Gretchen’s realization that what she and other Nazis are doing is all for naught angers *Oberaufseherin*, but is the reality of the situation. Soon after, the American soldiers overtake the area and both Gretchen and *Oberaufseherin* are arrested.

Oberaufseherin is given an innocent verdict after her powerful friends provide forged documents proclaiming her innocence, while Gretchen (who was more or less forced to join) receives a prison sentence for crimes against humanity.

All Through the Night contains brief, often very over-the-top scenes that are chaotic and difficult to follow. The characters are hardly known. Yet credit is still given to Lauro for at least attempting to give a voice to these German women—no matter how confusing that voice may be.

The *Aufseherinnen* of 2001-2012

The *Aufseherinnen* of this most recent decade as portrayed in film, dramatic literature, and television films are an eclectic group. The works of which they are a part are equally eclectic. In the mix are films such as *The Reader* that are significant in showing one of the roles *Aufseherinnen* played during World War II including the

courtroom trials that followed, and *Inglorious Basterds* that showed an alternate reality that included *Aufseherinnen* interacting with their male counterparts. Somewhere between the strategies of these two is *Out of the Ashes*, providing a glimpse of the infamous Irma Grese in a film biopic of a woman who had a very personal experience with the real Grese. *All Through the Night* provides a brief example of a choice made by a German woman as she lives during the years of the Third Reich—a choice not made by the other characters. Where does that leave this decade in the overarching Holocaust film theme of these years?

The works of this chapter have done the best to date of exposing the human side of the *Aufseherin*, and none better than *The Reader*, but despite this, audiences should not feel that this film epitomizes who *Aufseherinnen* were. Hanna Schmitz (like every *Aufseherin*) is a complicated woman, with an equally complicated past. The audience must decide for themselves if she fully understood what her job was asking her to do and is thus guilty of the crimes; if she is a sympathetic character, regardless of the slant of the film; or if there is such a thing as absolution for Schmitz. These are the decisions that audiences must make for all *Aufseherinnen* – realizing that perhaps they (unlike Kate Winslet and her understanding of Schmitz) do not “get it” quite yet.

Chapter Five: In Conclusion
The *Aufseherinnen* of 1961-2012

In the real world, good and evil are inseparable; the only valid categories are right and wrong, and those are determined by history, by human consciousness and human choice. (Teresa de Lauretis)

The purpose of the previous chapters is to provide a definitive list of American films, television films and mini-series, and works of dramatic literature that have *Aufseherinnen* in the cast, and to look at the *Aufseherin* persona with an eye to how her portrayal affects the historical perception of their role in the Holocaust. The study also explores more deeply the effects of the Americanization of the *Aufseherinnen* and what that means for the future of Holocaust representation and education in the arts. This type of study has not been undertaken before, and while the films, mini-series, and works of dramatic literature may have been written about previously, they have not been explored in regard to their inclusion of the *Aufseherinnen*. This examination was begun with the hope that a specific pattern would emerge in the way *Aufseherinnen* have been portrayed since 1961. The results are not so straightforward.

The sought-after easily identifiable pattern among films, television films, and dramatic literature does not exist. One particular work is not necessarily a direct result of a previous work. However, there is significant evidence that suggests that the cultural views of a time period play a direct role in the kind of *Aufseherinnen* to put on film or the stage.

Over the course of this study, three results have emerged. First (and the most apparent), the *Aufseherinnen* are generally underrepresented in entertainment media.

While there are specific films and plays (namely, *The Reader*, *Angel: A Nightmare in Two Acts*, and the *Playing for Time* film and play) that include *Aufseherinnen* in lead roles, their small number in comparison to the total number of Holocaust films, mini-series, and plays produced over the years is unfortunate. The underrepresentation is due largely to the context in which the women worked historically. *Aufseherinnen* were placed within women's camps to guard a camp's female prisoners, while their male counterparts oversaw both men and women.

Most of the artistic productions about the Holocaust are male-dominated. Even when there are women in large roles within these productions, they are still no competition for the male roles. This is both a positive and negative occurrence. It is positive in the sense that the historical accuracy remains consistent. *Aufseherinnen*, while given some power, were low in the camp hierarchy. The negative (and obvious) side of underrepresentation is that audiences to date have not had much of a chance to explore who the *Aufseherinnen* were in the scope of the Holocaust. Their involvement and open acknowledgement of crimes during the Holocaust wasn't fully recognized in the United States until the mid 1980s, but, since then, there has been no increase in films and plays with *Aufseherin* roles.

This has had a large impact on the United States population, who often get history lessons from popular entertainment. For example, if *Schindler's List* had an *Aufseherin* in a lead role in its cast, the American public more than likely would have become more interested in who these women were. After all, the character of Amon Goeth received a great deal of attention. *Schindler's List* itself spawned what is now known as "The Year

of the Holocaust.” What might have happened had there been a movie as powerful as *Schindler’s List* with an *Aufseherin* role with the power and presence of Goeth?

The second result of the study reveals that, compared to their male counterparts, the *Aufseherinnen* of the big and small screen and stage are portrayed with more humanity. They are not the Amon Goeths who represent a more sinister and “classic” Nazi. The characters are shown in their positions of power, but these positions are abused less than their male counterparts. Their authority is almost always kept in check and they have multi-dimensional personalities that include moments of honest human weaknesses and choices. While the Nazi character can easily be (and has been) portrayed as the epitome of all that is evil, these women are not shown in that light. Perhaps this is because of the lack of true understanding of what their roles actually were in concentration camps. More likely, however, is the difficulty American audiences face, accepting women as anything more than a nurturing, weaker character sex.

There are two major examples to support this statement. First, the character of Maria Mandel in *Playing for Time* (both play and film) is shown as a woman who seems troubled in her role as *Oberaufseherinnen*. She is never shown causing physical harm to anyone and she was truly distraught over the loss of the young boy she chose to keep with her. Yet the actual Mandel was notorious for her cruelty, and in reality could easily be portrayed as the monster so many prisoners deemed her to be.

The second example is the character of Hanna Schmitz in *The Reader*. Schmitz is equally troubled as the character of Maria Mandel. She served as a camp guard, following orders without questioning what the orders might mean. These actions might make Schmitz seem cold-hearted. After all, she shared responsibility for the deaths of hundreds

in the church fire. Yet she was not a character audiences feared or hated. There was no opportunity for that impression to take hold. *The Reader's* Schmitz is someone with weaknesses that break her down into nothing more than a middle-aged prisoner, dependent on the kindness of an old friend and lover. Audiences feel sorry for her, even unintentionally.

The third result of this study is, perhaps, the most important. The number and quality of American films, television movies, mini-series, and dramatic literature about or including *Aufseherennin* is the direct result of how Americans saw women. Just as American Holocaust films have become Americanized, so has the *Aufseherin*. She becomes who the American public sees the average U.S. woman to be. During the 1970s, for example, the *Aufseherin* made the most memorable appearance in a sexploitation film. This directly reflected the anxieties over the Women's Movement within the United States. Ilsa was a demonized woman "on top" and she had to be destroyed. During the mid 1980s and nearly the entire decade of the 1990s, the *Aufseherin* was all but ignored, a direct response to the disappearing female roles in feature films and other media. In 1988, for example, roughly thirty-three percent of roles in American major motion pictures were given to women. By 1989, that number dropped to twenty-nine percent (Lundin). Between 1990 and 2006, speaking roles for women dropped further to twenty-seven percent (Facts). Because the United States has adapted *Aufseherinnen* to fit the perception of women during any given period, any real understanding of who and what these women were is compromised. To ignore this perception is to ignore the reality of any artistic field. Audiences have been trained to view the subjects in a certain way; that is, with the male gaze—a term used by feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey, who argues

that film provides visual pleasure through voyeurism and identification with the on-screen male character, therefore sexualizing and objectifying female characters. In that respect, the way *Aufseherinnen* are perceived by American audiences has more to do with these characters' sex than with their actions within concentration camps.

Considering how very few actual *Aufseherinnen* have been prosecuted as a part of war crime trials, this result makes sense. Despite the numerous war crime trials that occurred following the end of World War II, only approximately sixty of the over 3600 total *Aufseherinnen* trained at Ravensbruck (roughly 1.6%) were ever tried in war crime courts between 1945 and 1949 (Female Nazi War Criminals). Twenty-one of this total were sentenced to death and executed. Over 20,000 male Nazi war criminals were tried between 1945 and 1949. 5,025 males were charged within the Western-occupied region of Europe, with 806 executed (War Crimes Trials).

The twenty-one included Maria Mandel and Irma Grese (discussed in chapters two and three, respectively), as well as Juana Bormann and Dorothea Binz who are unrepresented in American works, but briefly acknowledged in the British film *Pierrepoint: The Last Hangman*. Bormann worked in both Auschwitz-Birkenau and Ravensbruck, and was given the nickname "the woman with the dogs" because of the pleasure she allegedly got when her dogs attacked defenseless prisoners, which Bormann denied ever having done (Juana Bormann). Bormann insisted on her innocence, denying every claim against her. The courts and the evidence, however, told a much different story, and she was convicted as a part of the Belsen Trial of 1945 and hanged. There are others who committed similar atrocities but were never held accountable.

The remainder served minor jail sentences, were acquitted, or simply disappeared into post-war German society. The search for *Aufseherinnen* who were never tried continued after World War II and was led by the Nazi hunter Simon Wiesenthal. One of the most recent *Aufseherinnen* deported to Germany in 2006 for crimes during the Holocaust was Elfriede Lina Rinkel, a U.S. citizen who hid her past from her family for over fifty years (Harding).

Those *Aufseherinnen* who were free women after the end of World War II blended back into society. Some former *Aufseherinnen* seem remorseful for their actions, while others (similar to Uta Hagen's character in *The Boys from Brazil*) insist that they did nothing wrong, following orders for the sake of their country.

Alison Owings, author of *Frauen: German Women Recall the Third Reich*, interviewed one such woman, Frau Fest, a former camp guard who insisted she was innocent (though, of course, Claudia Koonz, the first American to question the culpability of any *Aufseherin*, would disagree). Fest was twenty-four when she was assigned to work at the Allendorf concentration camp and munitions factory. Fest initially told Owings that the atmosphere at Allendorf (a sub-camp of the Buchenwald concentration camp in Germany) was relatively good, with only a small number of guards who may have been cruel to prisoners (Owings 322). For Fest, the cruel guards were bothersome—not because they were particularly rough with prisoners, but because they lacked the “class” that she expected of *Aufseherinnen*.

Subsequent interviews with Frau Fest revealed that conditions at the camp were far worse than she had initially described. Guards were, in fact, incredibly vicious and the environment for prisoners was highly dangerous. This did not affect how Fest behaved in

the camps, however as she claimed to regard Allendorf as a job that had to be done. “It was simply war and our men at the front needed munitions. And if they didn’t have any, they couldn’t shoot and the others could. For us, that was simply a matter of course, as strange as it now sounds” (328). When asked about prisoner conditions, Fest stated that it was not her place to judge and she could not have done anything about it anyway, adding that “at times, young people such as herself did not have the information, the overview, ‘perhaps not the interest either’ to know what really was going on” (328). Frau Fest spent two years as a prisoner following the war and was put on trial, where she was acquitted.

Because the number of *Aufseherinnen* actually convicted of crimes was so small, and so many, like Fest, blended back into society, they drew little public attention. Audiences within the United States had very little opportunity to understand these women and the position they held.

The *Aufseherinnen* and American Holocaust Secondary Education

As discussed in chapter three, there was a major expansion and exploration of Holocaust education following the airing of the 1978 miniseries *Holocaust*. Since then, the amount of Holocaust curriculum available has also increased. One of the more popular options, *Facing History*, is an excellent example of how Americanization can be used to teach students about human behavior, using the Holocaust as its focal point while incorporating more current events. This process is exactly what a more recent film (*The Reader*) and work of dramatic literature (*Angel: A Nightmare in Two Acts*) appear to be doing as well. They are asking audiences to put themselves into the shoes of the *Aufseherinnen*. From this perspective, the Americanization of the *Aufseherinnen* is not a negative occurrence. In fact, it is beneficial for students to examine perpetrators not as

evil entities, but as ordinary people like themselves who proved capable of horrible deeds (Feinstein 62).

The problem, however, is that as of 2008, a majority of secondary educators who teach the Holocaust (as the curriculum is not nationally mandated) use three main and unsurprising sources: *The Diary of Anne Frank*, Elie Wiesel's *Night*, and *Schindler's List* (Fallace 156). These three popular works are certainly educational, but they only expose students to one or two perspectives. The resources are not enough to explore the behavior of any of the perpetrators, and clearly not the underrepresented *Aufseherinnen*. Even if the resources expand to include *The Reader* or *Playing for Time*, students would see the *Aufseherinnen* on an Americanized surface level. If Holocaust education continues to use film and literature as teaching tools, another option must be considered: the exploration of European Holocaust film.

European Film

The United States is not the only country that has produced works with *Aufseherinnen*. Outside of the United States, there have been one Italian (*Seven Beauties*), two British (*Pierrepont: The Last Hangman* and *Battle of the V-I*), and two Polish (*The Last Stage* and *Passenger*) Holocaust films with *Aufseherinnen* in the cast, one produced as early as 1947.

Of these films, the releases from Poland are the most significant for two reasons: first, they feature *Aufseherinnen* as integral characters. Second, their early production years provide the very first glimpse of who and what an *Aufseherin* was, because people who knew all too well produced them. This, of course, does not necessarily mean that the depictions were not manipulated.

The Last Stage (also referred to as *The Last Stop*) was released in 1947 and was directed by Wanda Jakubowska, a survivor of Auschwitz-Birkenau. The film's plot was based upon Jakubowska and another prisoner's experiences in the camp and revolves around Jewish prisoner Martha and Polish prisoner Helena as they struggle to survive within the camp and to resist their captors.

Several scenes were filmed within Auschwitz-Birkenau, using its original structures and including former prisoners in the cast, as well as German prisoners of war as extras (Loewy 179). *The Last Stage* was one of the first films produced anywhere that depicted life in a concentration camp, and the first to show the now-infamous train arrival at Auschwitz, later seen in such films as *Schindler's List* and *Sophie's Choice*. As a result, *The Last Stage* is often referred to as the "mother of all Holocaust films" (Haltorf 7).

The creation of *The Last Stage* was full of complications. Mainly, according to scholar Hanno Loewy, the complications arose as a result of the changes Jakubowska had to make to her original screenplay. The original screenplay had far more scenes of prisoner torture and abuse in a documentary-styled layout, but Jakubowska was asked to remove many of these scenes by the film's producers and add a narrative so that audiences could cope better (Loewy 181).

Critics of *The Last Stage* are quick to point out its pro-communist message (Jakubowski was a proud Communist), and the flaws within the film's structure, especially the "happy" ending. The realities of Auschwitz-Birkenau, even if shown in a greater way than ever before, had to be softened, and the relationships and camaraderie of prisoners elevated (Haltorf 16).

The *Aufseherinnen* within the film are quite different from those seen in American films. In fact, one of the main criticisms of the film is that the Nazi characters were stereotypically portrayed, bordering on the “grotesque: repulsive, sadistic, lacking human qualities” (18). This was likely due to not only Jakubowski’s incredible closeness to the realities of the camp and thus obvious emotionally charged perception of the camp guards, but also the inherent anti-Fascist/pro-Communist message that required the black-and-white differentiation between good and evil. To her credit, Jakubowski states in the film’s introduction that *The Last Stage* represents only a “small fraction of the truth” (Haltorf 27). Jakubowski’s film ultimately “strives for an impossible goal of representing a truthful reality about the camp while faithfully following the tenets of the communist ideology” (28). For better or for worse, *The Last Stage* had become the model for future films depicting concentration camps and showed the *Aufseherinnen* on screen for the first time.

The second Polish product is the film *Passenger (Pasazerka)*, an unfinished film released in 1963. *Passenger* is based upon the radio drama *Passenger from Cabin 45* by Zofia Posmysz-Piasecka. Posmysz-Piasecka based her radio drama on an encounter with a German tourist whose voice reminded her of an *Aufseherin* she had known in Auschwitz-Birkenau (Mazierska 3). The success of the radio drama led to a request to have the drama put on film. Posmysz-Piasecka helped to write the screenplay and, after a failed television version, production began on the 1963 motion picture (3).

Andrej Munk directed the film, but died in a car accident during production. Thus, Polish director and friend Witold Lesiewicz, who included a voice-over to explain his methods, pieced the film together to be released to the public. The film has a

documentary style (mainly because of the additional voice-over) and tells the story of Liza, a former *Aufseherin* at Auschwitz-Birkenau, who is on vacation with her husband on a cruise ship, where she sees Marta, a former prisoner. Marta's appearance causes Liza to tell her husband the truth about what she did as a guard in the camp. The majority of the film's scenes are a part of the flashbacks that Liza experiences. "It is a study in the nuances of complicity, with the guard, a woman not wholly evil but in no way good, reliving memories of Auschwitz" (Ross).

Liza gives the audience two different versions of what happened at the camp—one that she tells her husband (a distorted version that borders on blatant lies) and one that she keeps to herself. Audiences learn (from the "real" version) that Liza saved Marta's life several times while in the camp, yet she did not do it out of care for her, but rather out of the desire to use Marta for her own devices. *Aufseherin* Liza is portrayed as someone who is loyal to the Nazi party, and not, as she tells her husband, someone forced to take part. According to Ewa Mazierska, who wrote the introduction for the liner of the film's DVD, *Passenger* is

not so much a film about the reality of concentration camps, as about the power of memory to immortalize and distort what happened there.... The change in Liza's memories, from deceitful to more truthful, suggests that it is difficult, if not impossible, to escape one's past (7).

Similar to *The Last Stage*, some of the film's scenes were filmed at Auschwitz-Birkenau (3). Oddly enough, the two films share something else: an actress. Polish actress Aleksandra Slaska, who played an *Aufseherin* in *The Last Stage*, also starred as Liza in *Passenger*.

The most impressive part of Posmysz-Piasecka's creation is its proliferation and longevity. *Passenger*, which began as a radio drama, was transformed into several types of media, including the aforementioned television film, a feature film (that was a part of the Cannes Film Festival in 2006), a novel, and an opera (debuting in England in 2011 and awaiting its U.S. debut) (Ross). No other Holocaust work has had such success and certainly no work with an *Aufseherin* in a lead role has had such an impact.

Notable Differences

European films are tools for comparison to delineate the differences that exist between *Aufseherinnen* portrayals. While American *Aufseherin* portrayals reflect the changing perception of women in popular culture, European versions are more politically motivated. *The Last Stage*, the first product with *Aufseherinnen*, is a good example, with stereotypical camp guards that promote the anti-Fascist and pro-Communist agenda of the writer, director, and producer.

Another example, *Seven Beauties* (1976), showcases an obese, almost grotesque *Aufseherin* (played by the director, Lina Wertmuller) and the near-bestial sexuality that lies at the heart of Pasqualino, the protagonist's, or rather anti-hero's, survival. The *Aufseherin* is one of the characters that gives a voice to the political (albeit satirical) undertones of the film when she says, "You disgust me. Your thirst for life disgusts me. You have no ideals. You have found the strength for an erection, that's why you'll survive. All our dreams for a master race—unattainable." Despite Fascism's attempts, there will never be success because at its heart is flaccidity. The film's entire message is pro-individual, as the masses, in either Nazi or resistance form fall apart. Yet the individual suffers, too. Pasqualino is not a likable character. He's a womanizer and a

murderer. He survives by doing what he feels he must, but audiences may find it hard to root for a man who is as deplorable as his captors. That is, so it seems, another point that the director Lina Wertmuller has made: in the end, we are all depraved; in the end, all is hopeless.

A more recent comparison is the 2005 British film *Pierrepoint: The Last Hangman* that tells the story of Albert Pierrepoint who, from 1933 to 1955, was England's designated executioner. The *Aufseherin* characters sentenced to be hanged (Irma Grese and Elizabeth Volkenrath) are portrayed as almost emotionless. Pierrepoint fulfills his duty with professionalism and compassion, doing his very best to create as little pain as possible. This professionalism is maintained as he executes Nazi criminals—an act for which he was highly praised by the British public both in the film and real life. Pierrepoint's compassion is driven by his belief that the condemned deserved to hang, but once executed, their punishment was complete and their souls were innocent (*Pierrepoint: The Last Hangman*). The *Aufseherinnen* in the film are not weak characters to be pitied. They are criminals with a punishment to endure—and they do.

None of the *Aufseherinnen* in these European films are sexualized in the way Americans might expect. They are not likable or beautiful characters. They are not strong women who have to be “punished” because of a “weakness.” These *Aufseherinnen* are political manifestations coming from a place of appropriated (perhaps “Europeanized”) truth. These works, using the words of Polish cinema expert Marek Haltof, portray “not representative, but mythologized reality” (16). They function as political messengers, and given the survival rate of such films that date back to 1947, their mythologized reality delivers. Time will tell if the same will be said of their American counterparts.

European Dramatic Literature

The search for dramatic literature regarding the Holocaust that also contain *Aufseherinnen* proved challenging. As of this writing, I have found only one play written in English (though there are a few operas and radio plays in Polish and German). This work has yet to be published and its only performances were in February and March 2013 at a small theatre in Dublin, Ireland. *Aufseherin*, by new playwright Sean Conroy, focuses on six former *Aufseherinnen* as they wrestle with their consciences and question their personal responsibility in the concentration and death camps.¹⁹ The lone review of said piece is mixed. Gillian Hopper of *entertainment i.e.* (an online publication) called Conroy's work "an intriguing observation of Nazi Germany and the scarring realities of Hitler's regime." Unfortunately, she also says that the work "failed to wholly captivate the audience beyond its opening statements" (Hopper). This review is remarkably similar to the reviews of American plays *Angel: A Nightmare in Two Acts* and *All Through The Night* (chapter three and chapter four respectively). In all three plays, the playwrights' attempts are admired, but the final result is lacking. Nevertheless, the *Aufseherin* still manages to capture the attention of contemporary playwrights in Europe, with a pace matching American playwrights: slowly and sporadically.

¹⁹ I have not read this play, but provide the plot summary given by the Backloft Theatre's website. This summary and play information is found at <http://thebackloft.blogspot.com/2013/02/aufseherin.html>.

Final Observations

Readers may wonder why, after four chapters of mainly film analysis, that there are so few works of dramatic literature. This matter is likely a combination of the newness of the idea of woman as perpetrator in the Holocaust and the difficulty faced by playwrights writing about the Holocaust in general. Holocaust dramatic literature has a great deal of pressure placed upon it. Robert Skloot, Holocaust scholar and editor of *The Theatre of the Holocaust* anthologies, believes that Holocaust plays must, all at once, accomplish five things: pay homage to the victims, educate audiences, induce an empathetic response, raise moral questions, and draw historical lessons (Skloot 14). This is a great deal to ask of any work, be it a play or film. Under these requirements, playwrights are likely to avoid the topic altogether. It's no wonder the subject of the *Aufseherin* is sparingly explored. The Holocaust appears to be held in too high of reverence on the American stage. Americanization has not had the effect on dramatic literature that it has on film. Perhaps it needs to have that effect in order for the American Holocaust drama canon to increase.²⁰

While Americanization is often perceived as a negative thing, this is not always the case. Thanks to Americanization, the U.S. has an interest in the Holocaust and there is such a thing as Holocaust education. Thanks to Americanization of the *Aufseherin*, discoveries are being made about female involvement in the Holocaust. While overall understanding may be slightly skewed, and is slow developing, the fact that such works as *The Reader*, *Angel: A Nightmare in Two Acts*, and *Out of the Ashes* exist at all is

²⁰ It would be naïve to suggest that this is the only reason. There are no clear-cut answers as to why so little has been written for the stage in comparison to what is produced on film. I do, however, believe this is one of the major causes.

enough to reinforce the positive outcomes within the Americanization of the Holocaust. The women are there to be seen, even if not entirely understood. One therefore has to weigh the difference between truly understanding the *Aufseherinnen* and knowing such women existed in the first place. The jury is still out.

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Appendix A

American Holocaust Films/Made for Television Movies
(List does not include documentary films and short films)
(An asterisk denotes *Aufseherinnen* Characters)

1945-1960

The Stranger (1946)
The Search (1948)
The Juggler (1953)
Singing in the Dark (1956)
The Diary of Anne Frank (1959)
Exodus (1960)

1961-1985

Judgment at Nuremberg (1961)
The Pawnbroker (1964)
The Diary of Anne Frank (television film 1967)
The Only Way (1970)
The Day the Clown Cried (1972)
**Ilsa: She-Wolf of the SS* (1974)
The Hiding Place (television 1975)
The Man in the Glass Booth (1975)
Marathon Man (1976)
Holocaust (television miniseries 1978)
**The Boys from Brazil* (1978)
The House on Garibaldi Street (1979)
**Prisoner of Paradise* (1980)
**Playing for Time* (1980)
The Diary of Anne Frank (television 1980)
Remembrance of Love (1982)
Genocide (1982)
The Wall (1982)
To Be Or Not To Be (1983)
Kaddish (1984)
**Sophie's Choice* (1985)
Wallenberg: A Hero's Story (1985)

1986-2000

The Attic: The Hiding of Anne Frank (television 1988)
Hanna's War (1988)

Enemies, a Love Story (1989)
Pursuit (1989)
Music Box (1989)
**Triumph of the Spirit* (1989)
Max and Helen (1990)
Alan and Naomi (1992)
The Witness (television 1992)
**Schindler's List* (1993)
Leni (television 1994)
And Many Happy Returns (1995)
Voices of the Children (1996)
The Empty Mirror (1996)
The Man Who Captured Eichmann (1996)
Mother Night (1996)
The Substance of Fire (1996)
The Ring (television 1996)
Warsaw Story (1996)
A Call to Remember (television 1997)
Visas and Virtue (short film 1997)
Apt Pupil (1998)
Miracle at Midnight (television 1998)
Pola's March (1998)
The Devil's Arithmetic (1999)
Jakob the Liar (1999)
The March (1999)
**X-Men* (2000)
Shadows (2000)
Edges of the Lord (2000)
Sugihara: Conspiracy of Kindness (2000)

2001-2012

Anne Frank: The Whole Story (2001)
Conspiracy (television 2001)
The Grey Zone (2001)
Haven (2001)
Uprising (television 2001)
**Out of the Ashes* (television 2003)
The Singing Forest (2003)
Hitler: The Rise of Evil (television 2003)
Everything is Illuminated (2005)
Forgiving Dr. Mengele (2006)
**Inglourious Basterds* (2006)
**The Reader* (2008)
Defiance (2008)

The Courageous Heart of Irena Sendler (television 2009)
Esther's Diary (2010)

Appendix B
American Holocaust Plays
(An asterisk denotes *Aufseherinnen* Characters)

1945-1960

The Diary of Anne Frank (1956)

1961-1985

Incident at Vichy by Arthur Miller (1964)

After the Fall by Arthur Miller (1964)

Throne of Straw by Hal and Edith Lieberman (1975)

Cold Storage by Ronald Ribman (1977)

Resort 76 by Shimon Wincelberg

The Survivor and the Translator by Leeny Sacks (1980)

Playing for Time by Arthur Miller (1985)*

The Model Apartment by Donald Margulies (1988)

1986-2000

Remember My Name by Joanna Kraus (1989)

Sight Unseen by Donald Margulies (1991)

The Substance of Fire by Jon Baitz (1993)

Broken Glass by Arthur Miller (1994)

Angel: A Nightmare in Two Acts by Jo Davidsmeyer (1995)*

A Shayna Maidel by Barbara Lebow (1998)

Contact With the Enemy by Frank Gilroy (1999)

Magda and Joseph by David Eliet and Yaffa Eliach (1999)

The Spirit of Life by David Eliet and Yaffa Eliach (1999)

Denial by Peter Sagal (1999)

And Then They Came For Me: Remembering the World of Anne Frank (2000)

The Chosen by Aaron Posner and Chaim Potek (2000)

Insurrection: Holding History by Robert O'Hara (2000)

2001-2012

Anne Frank and Me by Cherie Bennett (2002)

Chaim's Love Song by Marvin Chernoff (2005)

The Milliner by Suzanne Glass (2008)

Silence by Henry Myerson (2009)

The Goldman Project by Staci Sweeden (2009)

All Through the Night by Shirley Lauro (2010)*

Our Diamond by Clint Miller (2011)