

Studying the Holocaust through Anglo-Jewish Literature – an Interdisciplinary Approach

This article is dedicated to Natasha and Ronald Harwood.



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A well-known Jewish historian once asked how “history and the learning from history can be put at the service of a humane education”. Three contemporary Anglo-Jewish plays and a short story, each dealing with a different aspect of the Holocaust, are an ideal starting point, particularly when complemented by historical research and meetings with survivors as well as excursions to synagogues, Jewish museums and war crimes documentation centres. Analysing and discussing these pieces of literature will not only improve our pupils’ communicative competence but also their intercultural competence.

Geschichte wird gemacht
und wir müssen uns der Verantwortung
stellen, die daraus folgt. /1/
Willy Brandt (Bet Berl College, Israel)

Those who fail to remember the past
are doomed to relive it.
George Santayana

1 Choice of texts

Around the middle of the 1990s there was a sudden spate of plays in Britain and America that had been inspired by the historical events of the period 1933 to 1945. According to the theatre critic Sheridan Morley /2/, it was Ronald Harwood who started this trend with his play *Taking Sides* in 1995 /3/. When Harwood’s *The Handyman* opened at the Minerva Theatre in Chichester in September 1996 /4/, another four plays, all dealing with aspects of the Holocaust theme, were being shown simultaneously on different stages in London. /5/ On the other side of the Atlantic, Arthur Miller’s latest play *Broken Glass* /6/ was set against the background of the events of 9 November 1938, the ‘Night of Broken Glass’ when synagogues and other Jewish properties were ransacked in a state-sanctioned pogrom in Germany.

This period of German history attracted the attention of Anglo-Jewish playwrights in Britain and America in the middle of the 1990s for a number of reasons: The Nazi terror, which Germany had unleashed on most of Europe, had come to an end fifty years earlier. Thus, in their preoccupation with the Holocaust, these dramatists were to a certain extent following a general trend. “The number of books, theatrical and film productions, artistic and musical creations related to the event, the attention given to the Holocaust in the periodical, even the daily press, is snow-balling, fifty years after the end of World War II.” /7/

Arthur Miller and Ronald Harwood, however, had motives for writing these plays that go

beyond this trend. What prompted Miller was the realisation that crimes, the likes of which nobody expected to witness again after the liberation of Auschwitz and Buchenwald, were being perpetrated again – albeit on a much smaller scale – in the heart of Europe in the late 20th century. Miller admits that he wrote *Broken Glass* against the background of the war in Bosnia: “Suddenly we were witness to the unimaginable. Daily the media were broadcasting the killings and executions right into our homes.” /8/ Ronald Harwood’s interest in this matter dates back to his childhood in South Africa. In 1945 the Jewish children of Cape Town were shown newsreel footage of the liberation of the concentration camps, and this experience was to have a lasting effect on him. He admits openly that it may have been his lifelong obsession with Nazism and the Holocaust that made him write *Taking Sides* and *The Handyman*. This obsession does not, however, make him pass easy judgement on the perpetrators, as an author of a lesser stature might have been prone to. On the contrary, even though his two plays raise questions of guilt and punishment, responsibility and evil, they are sombre reminders that we too might have behaved similarly had we been faced with the same dilemmas as his protagonists. /9/ One reason for choosing the three plays for classroom study lies in the popularity of *Broken Glass*, *Taking Sides* and *The Handyman* amongst theatre-going audiences in Britain, Europe, Israel and North America. For German pupils, they therefore take on a topicality that goes far beyond the inherent relevance of each of the three dramas. It is, after all, their country’s history that provides the impetus for the plays and the pupils may want to see how their country’s past is being dealt with outside Germany. This, together with the many different themes addressed in the plays, will make for thought-provoking discussions and debates in class. The choice of plays is rounded off by Bernard Malamud’s “The German Refugee”, a short story that is thematically related to the three plays.

2.1 Bernard Malamud, *The German Refugee*

Malamud's short story describes the tragic fate of a fictitious German-Jewish journalist, Oskar Gassner, who manages to escape from Nazi Germany six months after the November pogrom of 1938. Oscar settles in New York City but he has difficulty feeling at home in the New World. Oskar is Jewish but – as indicated in the title of the story – he is also German. He thinks in German, writes German, and even dresses like a German. English, which he has to come to grips with after his arrival in New York, is as alien to him as the harsh climate of the city.

Oskar is in a dilemma. He is to give a speech on "The Literature of the Weimar Republic" (20) /10/, but somehow he cannot bring himself to propagate German culture after all the terrible things Germany has done to him. To make matters worse, he feels intellectually paralysed since he looks upon his native language as a "filthy tongue." (24) "He hated the German language. He hated the damned country and the damned people." (24) Oskar is certain that "humanity ... does not grow long on German earth" (29). His hatred of all things German does not spare his wife either. She is not Jewish and after twenty-seven years of marriage he left her behind in Germany convinced that she "in her heart, was a Jew hater." (25)

In the end, Oskar commits suicide. The reader gets a first inkling of this tragic turn of events when the fictitious narrator of the story, Martin Goldstein, asks

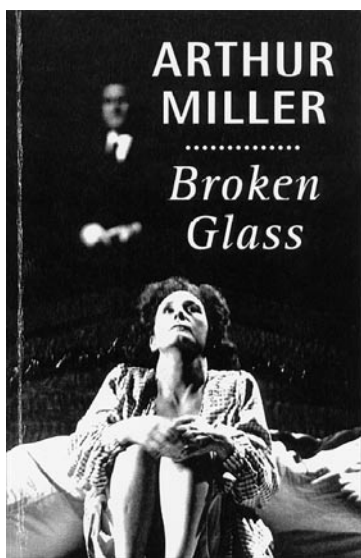
Could there be something more than a refugee's displacement, alienation, financial insecurity, being in a strange land without friends or a speakable tongue? My speculation was the old one: not all drown in this ocean, why does he? (27)

Whereas other exiles became successful, Oskar failed. There is a flaw in his character and this flaw is to prove fatal. Because of the atrocities committed by the Nazis, he is so full of hatred of all things German that his perception of the world around him becomes distorted. He becomes aware of his flawed perception at the end of the story but it is too late for him to make amends. In a letter from Germany he learns that his wife converted to Judaism out of a sense of solidarity with the persecuted Jews. Tragically, she, like many other Jews in Nazi Europe, was shot in Poland.

The tragic end of the German Jew Oskar Gassner illustrates two things that are of equal importance to both Germans and Jews: Firstly, as a result of the Holocaust, a German-Jewish

identity has become virtually impossible after 1938. /11/ Gassner suffers his fate because his Jewish identity has fallen victim to his self-hatred of the assimilated German part of his identity. Secondly, the 'German' in the title of the short story underlines how Germany – by persecuting, expelling or killing its Jewish population – also killed off, so to speak, a vital part of itself.

2.2 Arthur Miller, *Broken Glass*



The play *Broken Glass* is set in a Jewish neighbourhood in Brooklyn in November 1939. The action centres around Sylvia Gellburg, an attractive woman in her mid-forties, who discovers one day that she cannot move her legs anymore. The cause of the mysterious paralysis seems to be the November 9th pogrom in Germany. Sylvia reads about the events in the *New York Times*. She is mesmerised by a picture published in the paper that shows an elderly Jew who is being humiliated by the Nazis. The man reminds her of her grandfather. "One of the old men in the paper was his spitting image, he had the same exact glasses with the wire frames. I can't get it out of my mind." (32) Neither her sister Harriet nor her husband Phillip share her concern and fears for the Jews in Germany and Austria. Sylvia, for her part, is shocked by their callousness. "The streets are covered with broken glass!" (37), but the only reaction this draws from Harriet's is one of disbelief: "I don't understand it, they're in Germany, how can she be so frightened, it's across the ocean, isn't it?" (42) Phillip is equally unmoved. He looks upon the German Jews as arrogant and comes to the conclusion that the American labour

market with its "twelve million unemployed" (17) cannot absorb an influx of refugees.

When Sylvia's symptoms persist, Phillip turns to their family doctor Harry Hyman. The doctor is fascinated by Sylvia's mysterious illness and immediately sets about looking for possible causes of her paralysis. After his first meeting with Phillip, Dr Hyman is certain that, besides the events in Nazi Germany, there must be other causes a lot closer to home:

I have this unconventional approach to illness, Phillip. Especially where the mental element is involved. I believe we get sick in twos and threes and fours, not alone as individuals. (26)

Harry Hyman rules out any organic cause of Sylvia's paralysis. Instead, he focuses his attention on Phillip himself and his relationship with Sylvia. Soon we learn that Phillip feels ambivalent about his Jewishness. On the one hand, he brags about his son Jerome "being the only Jewish captain" (43) at West Point and about himself being the only Jew who works for the firm Brooklyn Guarantee. On the other hand, he does not want to be Jewish and reacts aggressively when people accidentally refer to him as Goldberg instead of Gellburg. Dr Hyman tells Phillip that he has adopted the behaviour of non-Jews in order to overcome his lack of Jewish identity. "You are very unusual – you almost sound like a Republican" (17) ... "I think you tried to disappear into the goyim." (102)

Not surprisingly, the Gellburgs' relationship has suffered as a result of Phillip's ambivalent attitude to being a Jew. As news of the persecution of Jews in Europe fills the American papers, Sylvia's fears about her husband come to the surface of her consciousness in the form of a recurring nightmare:

Well, I begin to run away. And the whole crowd is chasing after me. They have heavy shoes that pound on the pavement. Then just as I'm escaping around a corner a man catches me and pushes me down ... He gets on top of me, and begins kissing me ... And then he starts to cut off my breasts. And he raises himself up, and for a second I see the side of his face. I think it's Phillip. But how could Phillip be like ... he was almost like one of the others? (79)

Sylvia suddenly sees Phillip as an oppressive Nazi who is trying to deprive her of her femininity. Her conversations with Dr Hyman reveal that the Gellburgs' sex-life has been virtually non-existent for almost twenty years and that they had never even discussed this problem. Thus an unhappy marriage in a Jewish neighbourhood in Brooklyn shatters

like a pane of glass just as the German-Jewish relationship is torn asunder during the night of broken glass 6000 miles away.

At the end Sylvia is faced with a shocking realisation: “What I did with my life! ... A whole life. Gave it away like a couple of pennies – I took better care of my shoes.” (89) Thanks to Dr Hyman’s caring attention, Sylvia regains her self-confidence as “a Jewish woman.” (88) Miraculously, she regains the strength of her legs when Phillip suffers a massive heart attack and she tries to rush to his aid. Phillip’s belated realisation – “if I live I have to try to change myself” (107) is a timely reminder to the audience but it comes too late for him because he does not survive the attack. For Sylvia, however, Phillip’s death frees her of the physical and existential paralysis that he had caused.

2.3 Ronald Harwood, *Taking Sides*



Taking Sides is set in an office “surrounded by the rubble of a city flattened by Allied bombs” /12/ in the American Sector of occupied Berlin in 1946. It is against this sombre backdrop that the vanquished come face to face with the victors: Wilhelm Furtwängler, “one of the most famous conductors in the world” (18), is subjected to a gruelling interrogation by a U.S. Army officer, Major Arnold, as part of the denazification process. Arnold was chosen for the job for two reasons: He detests classical music, and he had never heard of Furtwängler. This, in the eyes of Arnold’s superiors, would ensure his impartiality. And it is with unrestrained zeal that he sets about preparing for the interrogation of the star conductor: “Jesus

Christ! Are we going to nail him! We’re going to nail him good and proper –” (18)

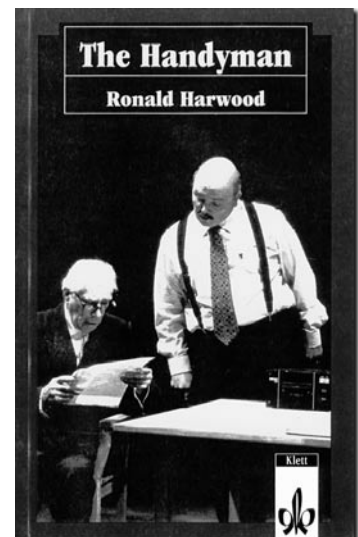
As far as Major Arnold is concerned, all Germans are “pieces of shit” (5) or “degenerates” (19). He knows because he saw Bergen-Belsen two days after it had been liberated and he is still haunted by the stench of burning flesh. Hence he conducts the case like a “criminal investigation” (5) in which he seems to be motivated less by a sense of justice than by a desire for retribution. Only few Germans are exempted from Arnold’s harsh verdict. One of them is his secretary Emmi Straube, whose father was involved in the 20 July conspiracy against Hitler.

Before the war Arnold had been a claims assessor for an insurance company and at times it seems as if he is treating Furtwängler like a client who has committed insurance fraud. He hopes to force the conductor into a confession by subjecting him to a barrage of abuse and humiliations. The gruff American major shows little patience with Furtwängler’s naive view – or excuse – that “art and politics should have nothing to do with each other.” (22) Emmi is deeply offended by the harsh treatment Arnold metes out to the star conductor. Arnold, however, is so narrow-minded and insensitive that he fails to understand what Emmi means when she accuses him of behaving like a Nazi. Three other characters appear on stage and serve as foils to Major Arnold and Wilhelm Furtwängler: Tamara Sachs as the widow of a Jewish musician whom Furtwängler was supposed to have helped escape from Nazi Germany; an American lieutenant David Wills, who is of German-Jewish origin and who was taken to a Furtwängler concert by his parents; and Helmut Rode, a second violinist in the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra and party spy in the orchestra. Rode is an opportunist, quick to turn any situation to his advantage. Weakness of character rather than ambition may have prompted him to be the party spy. Now, during the interrogation of Furtwängler, his former boss, he seizes the opportunity to save his own neck. In this instance, Helmut Rode offers his services to the major in a vain attempt at covering up his own membership of the Nazi party.

Unlike other famous German artists, Wilhelm Furtwängler did not go into exile after the Nazis came to power. He stayed in Germany because he had a mission: “My only concern was preserving the highest musical standards. That I believe to be my mission.” (23) Inevitably, he was looked upon as a prime representative of Nazi Germany both at home and abroad. A case of guilt by association, as

it were. But what is the extent of his guilt? Contrary to the title *Taking Sides*, Ronald Harwood refrains consciously from taking sides for or against Furtwängler. “I want members of an audience, after experiencing the play, to make up their own minds, to decide on guilt or innocence each according to his or her conscience, like a jury.” /13/ There are no easy answers and Furtwängler’s dilemma is expressed by no other person than David Wills, the German-Jewish U.S. army officer, whose parents perished in the Holocaust. It is he who confronts the self-righteous major with the gnawing question “I wonder how I would have behaved in his position?” (59) And it is this very question that Harwood would like us to ask ourselves.

2.4 Ronald Harwood, *The Handyman*



The Handyman is a two-act play that first appeared on stage in 1996. It is set in two locations: a country house in the county of Sussex and an investigation room at Scotland Yard in London. The plot is straightforward: a 78-year-old loyal handyman Roman Kozachenko, who has lived with a British family for more than fifty years, stands accused of participating as a member of the Ukrainian *miliz* in a massacre of 817 Jews. During the course of the play, the evidence against him hardens to such an extent that by the end his guilt is irrefutable. However, this play is not so much about the guilt or innocence of a Ukrainian immigrant, but about the application of a new law, the *War Crimes Act* of 1991 /14/. This Act makes it possible for British courts to bring charges against war criminals even if they had not been British subjects when the crimes were committed.

The law has been changed. When these men from Eastern Europe entered Britain just after the war, they could not be prosecuted for war crimes because they were not British citizens when the alleged crimes were committed. ... There is an element of what we lawyers call retrospective legislation of which I don't approve. (25)

This change in the law /15/ creates a dilemma from which the central issue in the play arises: Are old men to be prosecuted and sentenced for war crimes almost half a century after these crimes were committed?

In order to answer this question Ronald Harwood makes use of a number of male and female characters who represent different points of view in this debate. On the one hand there are Julian and Cressida Field, a well-to-do yuppie couple, who employ the accused Roman ('Romka') Kozachenko in their household. Julian is a banker in the city and he believes that with the help of a good lawyer the charges against Romka can easily be cleared. Cressida, a devout Catholic like Romka, is convinced of his innocence. She feels that it is unacceptable to subject a poor old man to the stress of a court case. "Guilty or not, poor old men should not be brought to trial for crimes they're alleged to have committed more than fifty years ago. ... I think we should forgive and forget, we're Christians, aren't we?" (77)

On the other side of the debate is Marian Stone, the lawyer defending Romka, whose personal sense of justice makes her emphasise the ethical aspects of the case:

If old men commit murder shouldn't they pay the penalty the same as anyone else? After all, murder is murder. /16/ And I don't think time has anything to do with it The morality of justice requires that wrongdoing is not condoned no matter how long ago it took place. (25/26)

It is in the confrontation between these two women that the play reaches its dramatic climax. Marian argues in favour of giving Roman Kozachenka a fair trial in a British court. "This trial, if we get that far, may demonstrate our society's revulsion to the crimes of which Mr Kozachenko and others may be accused." (26) She is opposed to forgiving and forgetting on the grounds that we are duty-bound to those who perished in the Holocaust:

We are not the ones to forgive. Only the victims can forgive. ... And how dare we forget this most terrible event in human history? We forget it at our peril. Because if we forget it, it'll happen again. And if we forget it we allow those who now deny it to triumph. (77)

Thus cornered, all Cressida can do is accuse Marian of being revengeful – after all this woman is married to a Jew – and to deny that the Holocaust ever happened. "How do we know it really happened. ... How do we know that all these millions were murdered at all. ... We deny it. That's our defence." (80)

This thought-provoking play is based on the true case of Szymon Serafinowicz, which was covered extensively in the British press /17/. As in *Taking Sides*, the play does not give any answers but leaves it to the audience to answer the many questions for themselves.

3 Why study German history with the help of Anglo-Jewish plays?

At first sight, it may seem odd for teachers to want to confront pupils with the darkest chapter of their country's history in their English lessons. After all, they have to deal with the period 1933 to 1945 in their history classes anyway /18/. In grades 10 to 13 at German schools the topic is obligatory, but as a recent survey /19/ in the German weekly *Die Woche* shows, this educational measure has not had the desired effect. The knowledge of 14 to 18-year-olds of the events leading up to the Holocaust and the Holocaust itself is said to be patchy. The writer Walter Kempowski notes with regard to pupils at German *Gymnasien* "that even graduates have little knowledge of basic events and facts of the Nazi period." /20/ This ignorance can be attributed to two facts: firstly, the events of the Third Reich are far removed in terms of time from the experience of the pupils; secondly, the lessons are taught in too abstract a way. It appears that the sober language of historians and statisticians is inadequate as a means to convey the enormity and cruelty of the event.

How, then, is it possible for teachers to make the unfathomable fathomable? How can they help their pupils learn the necessary lesson from history that traditional teaching methods have failed to achieve? How can we, as Moshe Zimmermann demands, "put history and the learning from history at the service of a humane education?" /21/ An attempt to get a step closer to realising this goal was made by studying the four texts with pupils in Germany. All four literary works have one thing in common: all of them deal with fictional or semi-fictional characters who find themselves in dilemmas that will affect the pupils emotionally and thus trigger off feelings of empathy or dismay, compassion or anger,

doubt or certainty. The literary texts, by adding a human dimension to history, make a distant period come alive. This need not be at the expense of historical accuracy. Since the past was on the authors' minds when writing the plays and short story, an obvious step to take is to bring additional background materials into the classroom in the form of history books, newspapers, the Internet /22/ or authentic historical sources /23/. Excursions to synagogues, Jewish museums or Nazi war crimes documentation centres, meetings with Jewish survivors, films and documentaries, visits to the theatre, they all of them can help to make the unfathomable become a bit more comprehensible.

There are a number of reasons why the three plays and the short story lend themselves to approaching history via the medium of literature. Firstly, they are all outstandingly well written and they raise issues that pupils can relate to. Their value also lies in the fact that the pupils will be studying works that are being read or watched by native speakers in the English-speaking world. By analysing them and talking about them they will – as a matter of course – be improving their *communicative competence*. Even more important, though, is the *intercultural competence* they will be acquiring: the four works do not tell the German pupils about their country's history from the point of view of the Germans, which, as Andrew Gimson argues, may have become bogged down in educationally counter-productive concepts of collective guilt:

There is endless discussion of the Holocaust, but so much of it is abstract and so little has anything to do with what individual Germans did or saw. Personal guilt is evaded in the vain attempt to reach a more comprehensive view. It is a debate about the phrasing of the guilty verdict the Germans feel compelled to pass on themselves as a whole. The notion of collective guilt is recognised to be unjust, but is replaced with a sense of collective shame that is almost as oppressive. /24/

Germany and its history between 1933 and 1945 is depicted in the four works of fiction through the eyes of three internationally known authors. We are invited to eavesdrop on the characters and their dilemmas, which are painstakingly orchestrated with great theatrical ingenuity for readers or theatre audiences in the English-speaking world. For our pupils this means looking at their nation's history from a fresh perspective that may be different from what they are accustomed to. In the process, new fields of vision will be opened up to them, ensuring

that they arrive at a less complex-ridden attitude towards their nations seemingly “unmasterable past” /25/

Teaching young Germans new perspectives seems all the more important in the light of acrimonious disputes that have recently been taking place between prominent non-Jews and Jews in Germany. It was inevitable that during the controversy over how adequately to commemorate the victims of the Holocaust in contemporary Germany, old wounds were torn open again. While there are some who would like to see an end to the “everlasting presentation” /26/ of Nazi crimes, and who have had their fill of Germany’s Nazi past, there are others who warn against “escaping into normalcy.” It is this group which demands that “the world the victims were torn from be reconstructed with the help of historical research so as to preserve it in our collective memory.” /27/

Non-Jews are often unaware that commemorating past events has a long tradition in Judaism. Jewish feasts and festivals such as *Passover*, *Sukkoth*, *Chanukah* and *Purim* illustrate this very clearly. It is thus only natural that thoughts in the Jewish world should turn to the victims of the Holocaust on *Yom Hashoa*. Literature, too, has a role to play in this process of remembering. For young non-Jewish readers, it may be particularly interesting to explore the varied and highly sensitive manner in which a tragedy brought about by their own nation is being dealt with in contemporary Anglo-Jewish literature. If we are lucky, our pupils will be left deeply moved and infinitely wiser after studying the texts. /28/ Furthermore, by studying their country’s past they will not fall victim to the danger George Santayana expresses so aptly in his credo: “Those who fail to remember the past are doomed to relive it.” We cannot revive the dead but by making our pupils delve into the most tragic chapter of their country’s history, we can ensure that discrimination on the grounds of race and creed will never be tolerated again in Germany.

4 How to approach the texts in class

4.1 Thematic similarities

The four texts can, of course, be read and studied individually. Because of their thematic similarities, however, they lend themselves to being done in pairs, threes or even fours. *The German Refugee* and *Broken Glass*, for example, are based on the dramatic events that occurred

in central Europe in the years 1938 and 1939 /29/. Both works use different parts of New York for their settings: in *The German Refugee* it is Manhattan, in *Broken Glass* it is Brooklyn. There are other similarities: the two protagonists, Oskar Gassner and Phillip Gellburg respectively, both fall victim to events that are being played out thousands of miles away but are so powerful that they can still traumatise people with devastating consequences in places that are seemingly safe. In both cases the events in Germany serve as catalysts that plunge the two characters into an identity crisis. Equally interesting is the commentary the short story and the play make on attitudes towards accepting refugees. What we learn does not seem to tally with the image of a nation that – on the Statue of Liberty – promises to be a safe haven to the “huddled masses yearning to breathe free.” America’s immigration policy during the 1930s and 40s was particularly restrictive, caused partly by a latent anti-Semitism amongst Americans, and partly by worries that the influx of highly educated, well-trained refugees would have a negative impact on the American labour market /30/.

The theme of emigration and exile addressed in *The German Refugee* is also at the centre of Ronald Harwood’s *Taking Sides*. Unlike the fictitious journalist Oskar Gassner, Wilhelm Furtwängler decided not to emigrate. By staying in Germany, however, he laid himself open to the accusation of collaborating with the Nazis. Consequently, during the denazification of Germans after WWII he was classified as a

“Mitläufer” or hanger-on. The theme of collaboration of a much more serious nature is also at the centre of *The Handyman*. The interesting twist, however, is that the play dramatises the issue of the prosecution of war crimes more than 50 years after the event, a late legacy of the Holocaust that caught up with Britain in the late 1980s. The question of whether or not to prosecute old men under the *War Crimes Act* can be seen as a belated form of British *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* /31/, not unlike the *Verjährungsdebatten* /32/ that Germany kept experiencing from time to time, during the 1960s, 1970s and 1990s. Britain’s willingness to bring old men to justice for war crimes forces the audience to subject their own conception of a humane society to a kind of litmus test.

4.2 Suggestions for teaching the texts

If two or more of the above texts are to be covered in class, it is recommended that teachers follow the order as suggested in the table below. The progression of the inner squares follow the chronology of the events dramatised in the short story and the three plays. For ease of reference, the information in the three outer sections lists thematic key areas that are closely connected with one or more of the texts. One can use this table to plan interdisciplinary research projects, topics for debate, destinations for excursions, or any other activities that lend themselves to being done in conjunction with the themes dealt with in the texts.

Prelude to the Holocaust		After the Holocaust	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deteriorating situation in pre-war Germany • Jewish life and customs • Search for refuge • America’s response to the influx of Jewish refugees • Jewish immigrants in the US 	1 Broken Glass Setting: Brooklyn 1938–39 Theme: Treatment of Jews in pre-war Germany and its traumatic effect on a Jewish marriage in N.Y.	4 The Handyman Setting: England 1996 Theme: Moral questions relating to the pursuit of war criminals fifty years after the end of WWII	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crime and punishment • Revenge and forgiveness • Victors’ justice? • A statute of limitations on war crimes? • Collaboration vs. emigration
	2 The German Refugee Setting: Germany and New York 1938–39 Theme: Refugee’s escape from Nazi Germany and his inability to cope with life in exile.	3 Taking Sides Setting: Berlin 1946 Theme: Role of the artist in a totalitarian society; relationship between art and politics	
Collaboration vs. emigration Collaboration with Nazi rulers vs. active resistance			

Table 1: Chronology of the texts and key themes

4.3 Suggestions for interdisciplinary teaching units /33/

a) Interdisciplinary teaching projects

Texts	Topics
BG,GR,TS,TH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The historical background and its treatment in works of (semi-)fiction Judaism (beliefs, customs, festivals) U.S. immigration policies in the 1930s and 40s Relations between Jews and non-Jews in our town / village before 1945 Discrimination, incarceration, expulsion and killing of Jews in central Europe
GR, TS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emigration and exile of Jewish artists 1933–1945
TS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Music and art during the Third Reich
BG	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Yiddish words in German and English
TH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hitler's 'helpers' outside Germany's borders Comparison of <i>The Handyman</i> with the film <i>Music Box</i>

b) Activities/Projects/Excursions

Texts	Activities
BG,GR,TS,TH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meetings with Jewish survivors of the Holocaust Survivors of the Shoah: Interviews with survivors on CD-ROM /34/ Former concentration camps in our vicinity Collection sites for the transportation of Jews to concentration and extermination camps Documentation centres for Nazi war crimes Jewish museums Synagogues/former synagogues

c) Topics for essays

Texts	Topics
BG, GR,TS, TH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Writing the unwritable? Is the Holocaust a suitable subject for fiction? Can pupils in Germany benefit from British and American plays dealing with Germany's history between 1933 and 1945?
GR, TS, TH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Write a review of the plays.
BG, TS, TH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Imagine you could correspond with the playwright about his play. What questions would you want to put to him?

d) Topics for discussions/debates /role plays

Texts	Topics
TH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This house believes that there should be a statute of limitations on the prosecution of war criminals.
TS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This house takes sides against Wilhelm Furtwängler for the role he played in Nazi Germany.
TS/TH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mock trials of Wilhelm Furtwängler and Roman Kozachenko

Table 2: Suggestions for teaching the texts

5 Bibliography

• Primary texts:

Harwood, Ronald: *Taking Sides*. London: Faber and Faber 1995.
 Harwood, Ronald: *The Handyman*, London: Faber and Faber 1996.
 Malamud, Bernard: *The German Refugee*. In: *Great Immigrant Stories*. Model Interpretations by Rudolf F. Rau, Stuttgart: Klett 1993.
 Miller, Arthur: *Broken Glass*. Frankfurt: Diesterweg 1997.
Taking Sides and *The Handyman* have both been published as annotated school editions by the school book publishing

houses Moritz Diesterweg and Ernst Klett respectively:
Taking Sides: 3-425-04038-3
The Handyman: 3-12-575220-5
 • Other plays that deal with Germany's history between 1933 and 1945:
 Flannery, Peter: *Singer*. London: Nick Hern Books 1989.
 Kops, Bernard: *Dreams of Anne Frank. A Play for Young People*. London: Methuen 1997.
 Norton-Taylor, Richard (ed.): *Nuremberg. The War Crimes Trial*. With additional documentary material compiled by Nicolas Kent and Richard Norton-Taylor. London: Nick Hern Books 1997.

Samuels, Diane: *Kindertransport*. London: Nick Hern Books 1995.
 Sobol, Joshua: *Ghetto*. London: Nick Hern Books 1989.
 • Secondary texts
 • Emigration and Exile:
 Barron, Stephanie: *Exil. Flucht und Emigration europäischer Künstler 1933–1945*. München und New York: Prestel 1998.
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 Prieberg, Fred K.: *Trial of Strength*. London: Quartet Books 1991.
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Survivors of the Shoah. *Überlebende des Holocaust berichten. Erinnern für Gegenwart und Zukunft*. CD-ROM. Berlin: CVK 2000.

• Films

Wilhelm Furtwängler: *Romantiker aus Passion*. Documentation about Furtwängler's role during the Third Reich (SFB 1985)

Wilhelm Furtwängler: *Deutscher Lebenslauf*. Documentation about Furtwängler including interviews with Ronald Harwood (SWR 2001)

Music Box (1989): Gripping film starring Jessica Lange and Armin Müller-Stahl as a Hungarian immigrant to America who finds himself accused of crimes against humanity that he is said to have committed in his home country at the time of the Holocaust.

Taking Sides (2001): German, French, British and Austrian co-production. Director: Istvan Szabo. Script: Ronald Harwood. Starring Harvey Keitel as Major Steve Arnold and Stellan Skarsgård as Wilhelm Furtwängler.

• Internet-Links

Simon Wiesenthal Center
<http://motlc.wiesenthal.com/pages/>
<http://www.wiesenthal.com/>

Yad Vashem
<http://www.yadvashem.org.il/>
United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
Washington DC

<http://www.ushmm.org>
Facing History and Ourselves
<http://www.facinghistory.org>

The Mechelen Museum of Deportation and the Resistance

<http://www.cicb.be/shoah/welcome.html>
The Topography of Terror Foundation, Berlin
http://www.dhm.de/ausstellungen/ns_gedenk

KZ Mauthausen-GUSEN
<http://linz.orf.at/orf/gusen/index.htm>
<http://www.mauthausen-memorial.gv.at>

The Ghetto Fighter's House
<http://www.gfh.org.il/>

The Anne Frank House
<http://www.annefrank.nl/>

Jerusalem Post
<http://www.jpost.com/>

Jewish Chronicle
<http://www.jchron.co.uk/>

Interviews mit Ronald Harwood

Letter written by Leonie Pawlita
to Ronald Harwood /28/

Leonie Pawlita, Villingen, 17/4/98

Dear Mr Harwood,

I have read your play "Taking Sides" in an extra curricular activity offered by Mr Volz. He told me that it would be possible to write to you and to ask a few questions, which is very kind of you.

In my opinion it is very important to face up to this dismal period of German history which is dealt with in your play and to ask questions. Unfortunately, many Germans, especially the war generation, suppressed and still do suppress this part of our history. Therefore I think that especially we, the "young Germans", have the duty to come to terms with this problem as we have to live with its aftermath. In a way we are the heirs of the former offenders. Consequently, we have to make sure that this does not happen again. Nevertheless, the question of how to determine and how to treat offenders, accomplices, hanger-ons or even the innocent still remains very difficult. In addition, I think that this problem is timeless. Therefore I liked your play because it deals with this problem. Moreover, I really enjoyed reading and working with it. A major reason for this is your choice of characters: Arnold, the ordinary, uncultured but conscientious man, Rode, the opportunist, Tamara Sachs, the mad and confusing woman and finally Wilhelm Furtwängler who seemed to develop during the play - in Act I he seemed to be rather arrogant and in Act II he seemed to be more human, showing feelings. A further point is the way Major Arnold talks, in other words his use of coarse language and how he talks to Emmi. All this lightens up the actual serious and difficult subject, which I think is very important for a play because it makes it also entertaining.

I hope you won't mind if I put some questions to you:

- What made you write plays that refer to the Third Reich like "Taking Sides" or "The Handyman" (which we are going to read soon, too)?
- Why did you choose Furtwängler as the protagonist of your play?
- Why did you choose a musician and not an actor or an author who did not leave Germany either?
- Do you have then any special personal relation to music, especially to German classical music?
- Which of the characters apart from Furtwängler are based on fact?
- Did you have documents of Furtwängler's interrogation when you wrote the play? And if so, are there any basic differences between them and your play? What did you add?
- Did you want to make people favour one of the main characters over the other? Did you want them to "take sides"? Or is it your aim to show people that it is hard to "take sides" and that one should be open? - I ask this question because I personally did not "take sides". Your play made me rather think about judging people like Furtwängler as David Will says nearly at the end of the play: "I wonder how I would have behaved in his position? I'm not certain I'd have 'acted courageously'."

It would be really kind if you could answer some of my questions.

Thank you very much.

Yours, Leonie.

RONALD HARWOOD

22 April 1998

Dear Leonie Paulita

Thank you so much for your letter.

Let me say at once that I am genuinely moved by the knowledge that you and your colleagues, young Germans, are studying two of my plays. My only hope is that the time and effort will prove in some way rewarding.

I want also to tell you how impressed I am by the excellence of your English. It makes me feel rather humble because, not being well-educated, I have no other languages apart from English. It is true I know a dozen or so words in most European tongues and can even say 'thank you' in Japanese but this, as you will instantly understand, is not the same thing. You, on the other hand, display a proper and profound gift and that is a wonderful accomplishment.

Now, to your letter and the interesting points you raise. I suspect that some young Germans feel the compulsion to bear the guilt of the past because their immediate forefathers suppressed, as you say, not only the atrocious history but also their part in it. If only the war generation had bared its collective soul to the world, admitted culpability, sought atonement and forgiveness, then, I think you and your generation would not feel so burdened. No one has yet explained, not to me at least, how a civilised nation could sink to such depravity. But I do not believe this to be solely a German phenomenon. The behaviour of the Poles, the French, the inhabitants of the Baltic states does not bear too much scrutiny. Some of these views may become clearer after you have read *The Handyman*.

And so to answer your questions as best I can:

You ask why I have written plays that deal with the Third Reich. You must understand that I am a Jew, born in South Africa in 1934. Most of my early childhood was infected by the Second World War. Then, in 1945 or thereabouts, the Jewish children of Cape Town were taken to a cinema to see the terrible newsreel footage of the extermination camps. This had a profound and lasting effect. So, the answer to your question is that I am, now a little less than I once was, obsessed by the Holocaust. This obsession is sometimes unbearable, at other times under control. When it becomes unbearable, then I seem to be compelled to write about it, hence the plays. (And, incidentally, a few years ago, a novel called *Home*.)

I chose Furtwängler because his case is ambiguous. I am sick to death of plays, films and books which deal with the subject in black and white – bad Germans and good Allies. I am only interested in the grey areas and Furtwängler's case was decidedly grey.

I have used musicians as symbolic characters before. (in my play, *Another Time*, the chief protagonist is a concert pianist but is actually a somewhat autobiographical figure.) I have done this because music is a universal art which does not rely on translation. And, it must be said, there are countless works that deal with actors and authors, for example, *Mephisto*, a magnificent film, directed by the Hungarian director Istvan Szabo who, it seems likely, will direct the film of *Taking Sides*. (I am shortly to start writing the screenplay.)

I have always loved music and, yes, especially, German classical music. My mother, who was a deeply cultured woman, used to take me every week to the symphony concerts in Cape Town. Beethoven, Mozart, Schubert, Brahms et al were as much part of my cultural education as Shakespeare and other great English writers. Music has always played a central role in my life. My wife is a good amateur pianist – I also play the piano but very badly indeed – and my youngest child, Alexandra, is a gifted composer who studied at the Juilliard School in New York.

None of the other characters are based on fact.

A transcript exists of Furtwängler's cross-examination at the denazification tribunal in Berlin. On the whole, I was extremely faithful to his views and arguments, reproducing them as accurately as I could. Of course, I had to edit and develop his statements but never, I think, did I distort them. (Furtwängler's widow, Elisabeth, who is still alive and who has seen the play both in English and German, supports me in this.) The main addition, however, comes at the end of the play when Furtwängler asks Major Arnold, 'What kind of world do you want etc.?'

I called the play *Taking Sides* because I was determined *not* to take sides myself. To this day, although I have been asked on numerous occasions, I have never told anyone whose side I am on and I intend to remain silent on this subject to my dying day. I wanted the audience to think for itself because I am weary of playwrights lecturing and haranguing playgoers with political tracts and propaganda. But you are absolutely right about David's line at the end of the play. ('I wonder how I would have behaved in his position etc.?') That is the question I most wanted asked – and answered as honestly as is humanly possible.

Thank you again for writing.

*Love sincerely
Ronald Harwood*

Ronald Harwood's answer to Leonie

<http://www.hsverlag.com/>

Bausteine der Landeszentrale für Politische Bildung BW

<http://www.lpb.bwue.de/publikat/baustein.htm>

<http://www.lpb.bwue.de/publikat/27jan/27januar.pdf>

• Other addresses for excursions:

Former Synagogue in Freudental:

Pädagogisch-Kulturelles Zentrum Strombergstr. 19, 74392 Freudental

<http://www.surf.to/pkc>

Nazi War Crimes Documentation Centre:

Zentrale Stelle der Landesjustizverwaltung Schorndorferstr. 58, 71638 Ludwigsburg

Anmerkungen

- 1 "History is made by humans and we have to live up to the responsibility this entails." (My translation)
- 2 Sheridan Morley, 'Appalling Manners', *The Handyman* (Chichester), in: *The Spectator*, 5 October 1996, p. 64.
- 3 Ronald Harwood, *Taking Sides*, London: Faber and Faber 1995.
- 4 Ronald Harwood, *The Handyman*, London: Faber and Faber 1996.
- 5 Cf. the bibliography for titles of these plays.
- 6 Arthur Miller, *Broken Glass*, Frankfurt: Diesterweg 1997.
- 7 Speech by Professor Yehuda Bauer, *Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust*, 26 January 2000.
- 8 Helmut Polixa: „Die plötzliche Lähmung.“ ("Sudden Paralysis") In: *Kultur-Scheinwerfer*, published by the town of Villingen-Schwenningen, March 1998, p. 30 (My translation).
- 9 See "Introduction" in: Ronald Harwood, *The Handyman*, Stuttgart: Klett 2000, pp. 4–6.
- 10 Bernard Malamud: "The German Refugee". In: *Great Immigrant Stories*, pp. 18–33. Edited by Rudolf F. Rau, Stuttgart: Klett 1993.
- 11 Cf. Ricarda Hartwich-Reick, „Umfrage unter jungen Juden: Antisemitismus gehört für jeden Dritten zum Alltag“. In: *Allgemeine Jüdische Wochenzeitung*, 18. 4. 1996. In response to the questions about their own identity 28% of 130 Jewish youngsters living in Germany replied that "even though they considered themselves part of Jewish culture they were firstly and foremost German. More than a third denied this claim. A further third was undecided." (My translation) Also see: „Zwischen allen Stühlen: Jüdische Jugendliche über ihr Leben in Deutschland. 'Meine Zukunft ist hier.'“ In: *Allgemeine Jüdische Wochenzeitung* 12. 4. 2001.
- 12 Cf. stage directions to *Taking Sides*, p. iii.
- 13 See Introduction to Ronald Harwood, *The Handyman*, Stuttgart: Klett 2000, p. 5.
- 14 See David Cesarani, *Justice Delayed. How Britain became a refuge for Nazi war criminals*, p. 8–9.
- 15 Ibid. pp. 225–46, Chapter 10: "The Struggle for the

- War Crimes Act” describes how this change in British law was debated in the House of Commons and House of Lords.
- 16 Recent court cases against a 79-year-old German, Alfons Götzfrid, or the 86-year-old French man, Maurice Papon, demonstrate that Germany and France are prosecuting crimes against humanity in the same way as Britain. Cf. „Bei der Erinnerung kommt mir das Kotzen.“ In: *Stuttgarter Zeitung*, 28. April 1999; „A Nation Goes on Trial. Maurice Papon didn't hate Jews. He just did his job.“ In: *Newsweek*, 20 October 1997.
- 17 Cf. articles that appeared in the British press, for example, „84-year-old is first Briton charged with war crimes.“ In: *The Daily Telegraph*, 14 July 1995; „Suspect's death 'must not stop war crime hunt.'“ In: *Jewish Chronicle*, 15 August 1997.
- 18 Cf. 'Curriculum for Grammar Schools' in: *Kultus und Unterricht*. Official Newsletter published by the Ministry of Education in Baden-Württemberg. Lehrplanheft 4/1994. Grade 10: National socialism: How national seduction and terror, p. 430–31; Grundkurs 13: The national socialist dictatorship, p. 641; Leistungskurs 13: socialism destroyed democracy, p. 659–60. (My translation)
- 19 Helmut Holzzapfel, „Lernen im Land der Täter. Warum wissen Jugendliche so wenig über die NS-Zeit?“ In: *Die Woche*, 10. 7. 1998, p. 30.
- 20 In: Uli Fricker, „Haus des Erinnerns“, in: *Südkurier*, 15.12.1998, p. 2.
- 21 Moshe Zimmermann, „Jenseits der Schuldzuweisungen“. In: *Allgemeine Jüdische Wochenzeitung*, 6. 8. 1998, p. 1.
- 22 Cf. suggestions made by the late Ignaz Bubis, „Den Holocaust erfahrbar machen: Zeitzeugen in Unterricht und Internet“, in: *Forum Bildung. Kontroversen und Neuansätze zu Fragen der deutschen Bildungspolitik*. Frankfurt: Institut für Bildungsmedien 1999, pp. 122–125.
- 23 See the bibliography for a selection of additional materials to go with the four literary works.
- 24 Andrew Gimson, „They Still Won't Mention the War.“ In: *The Spectator*, 21. 11. 1998, S. 24.
- 25 Cf. Charles S. Maier, *The Unmasterable Past. History, Holocaust, and German National Identity*, Cambridge (Mass.) and London: Harvard University Press 1988.
- 26 Phrase used by the German writer Martin Walser during a controversial speech he gave on the occasion of being awarded the 'Friedenspreis des Deutschen Buchhandels' in Frankfurt on 11 October 1998. (My translation)
- 27 A remarkable speech was given by Fritz Stern, the winner of the 'Friedenspreis des Deutschen Buchhandels 1999'. His views contrast sharply with those expressed by Martin Walser the year before. Cf. Fritz Stern, „Erinnerung aufheben“ (”Preserving memories“). In: *Allgemeine Jüdische Wochenzeitung*, 28 Oktober 1999. (My translation)
- 28 The 19-year-old pupil Leonie Pawlita wrote a letter to R. Harwood and got an answer.
- 29 Walter Bingham, „The horrendous night that shattered lives like glass,“ in: *London Jewish News*, 10 November 2000. Also see the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's web site for an excellent teaching pack on the 9 November 1938 pogrom.
- 30 Cf. Alan M. Kraut, „From Foreign Shores“, (Diagram), In: *American Studies Newsletter*, Number 25, September 1991, pp. 4–5.
- 31 German term for 'coming to terms with one's past'
- 32 Debate about a statute of limitations on war crimes. See Hella Pick's *Simon Wiesenthal. A Life in Search of Justice*, pp. 207–210, on the difficulty of persuading the German government under Chancellor Helmut Schmidt not to introduce a statute of limitations in 1979.
- 33 The abbreviations refer to the four texts: GR – *The German Refugee*; BG – *Broken Glass*; TS – *Taking Sides*; TH – *The Handyman*.
- 34 The CD-ROM *Überlebende des Holocaust berichten. Erinnern für Gegenwart und Zukunft*. Cornelsen Verlag, Berlin 2000, is an excellent interactive source of information for research into the history of the Holocaust. Background information about the causes of Nazism and a historical timeline are complemented with excerpts from films and documentaries. It is, however, the interviews with survivors of the horrors of the Nazi regime that make this unique CD an invaluable resource for research or teaching.