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# Remember Gay Victims: An Exploration into the History, Testimony, and Literature of the Persecution of Homosexuals by the Third Reich and Their Effect on a Queer Collective Consciousness

Paul D. Vestal  
*The University of Montana*

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REMEMBER GAY VICTIMS:  
AN EXPLORATION INTO THE HISTORY, TESTIMONY, AND LITERATURE OF  
THE PERSECUTION OF HOMOSEXUALS BY THE THIRD REICH AND THEIR  
EFFECT ON A QUEER COLLECTIVE CONSCIOUSNESS

By

Paul David Vestal

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Approved by:

Dr. David A. Strobel, Dean  
Graduate School

Casey Charles, Chair  
Department of English

Katie Kane  
Department of English

Bryan Cochran  
Department of Psychology

*Remember Gay Victims: An Exploration into the History, Testimony, and Literature of the Persecution of Homosexuals by the Third Reich and Their Effect on a Queer Collective Consciousness*

Chairperson: Casey Charles

The persecution of homosexuals by the Nazis under National Socialism during the Second World War has historically been ignored and almost completely erased. However, within the past two and a half decades a significant number of historical, academic, sociological, and literary inquiries and works have uncovered this once forgotten past. Because of these investigations, the anti-homosexual actions inflicted upon gay men by the Third Reich have the ability to impact the continual creation of a queer collective memory and consciousness. Unfortunately, many queers do not know the historic connotations and denotation of the pink triangle—a symbol worn by homosexual males within the concentration camps—now so readily used by the queer community today as a representation of “pride.” By analyzing the history, testimonies, fictional account of gay persecution, and attempts of reestablishment in the usage of the pink triangle, this thesis seeks to establish the history of persecution of gay men as a solidifying piece of the queer collective consciousness. Such a collective consciousness will not only remember and commemorate those gay lives lost during the Holocaust, but it will also allow the queer community to have a viable political and social past and future that will allow such atrocities to occur “never again.”

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*The backward look behind the assurance  
Of recorded history, the backward half-look  
Over the shoulder, towards the primitive terror.  
Now, we come to discover that the moments of agony  
(Whether, or not, due to misunderstanding,  
Having hoped for the wrong things or dreaded the wrong  
things,  
Is not in question) are likewise permanent  
With such permanence as time has. We appreciate this  
better  
In the agony of others, nearly experienced,  
Involving ourselves, than in our own.*

-T.S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*

*Gay genocide, the once-and-for-all eradication of gay  
populations, however potent and sustained as a project  
or fantasy of modern Western culture, is not possible  
short of the eradication of the whole human species.*

-Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*

## ***INTRODUCTION:***

### REMEMBER GAY VICTIMS

“It takes time to make queer people.”

—Gertrude Stein, *The Making of Americans*

Displayed on the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum’s “Wall of Remembrance” are over three thousand tiles painted by American schoolchildren. Amongst these myriad of tiles rests one written presumably by a finger dipped in red paint giving the tile an eerie look of dried blood. The vibrancy of the red color of the small inverted triangle drawn in the center of the tile has faded—leaving, appropriately, a pink triangle (a symbol worn by gay inmates within the concentration camps) with the words “Remember Gay Victims” painted around it. Through its achromatizing proclamation, this tile represents the evaporating memory of the persecution of homosexuals during the Holocaust in past and current historical, sociological, and academic fields.

Yet, the tile also represents perseverance and the call for the need of a queer collective consciousness of this particular history before it fades into the realm of the forgotten past once again. Because of the pink triangle’s early reestablishment (or attempt thereof) to become a symbol of “pride” during the 1970s and early 1980s, most people live in ignorance of the pink triangle and its historical creation. According to Kai Hammermeister, “only about half of the adults in Britain, and a mere quarter of the United States, know that gays were victims of the Holocaust” (19). Thus, it is somewhat unsurprising that many queers today do not know its origins. One can perhaps see the positive implications that such a shift in symbolic meaning signals; however, by

forgetting the origins of the symbol queers are also forgetting what can be established as their historic and communal past.

Scholars such as Donald E. Hall claim that the Stonewall Riots can be considered as the main “marker” and “as a common reference point” as the “‘birth’ of the gay civil rights movement” and, thus, through extension the birth of a gay collective history (41).<sup>1</sup> To consider the 1969 riots as being such a “common reference point” erases the already once erased history of the persecution of homosexuals and the five to fifteen thousand deaths that resulted from this persecution during the Holocaust. Furthermore, such a marker would expunge from queer history the work of and then complete destruction of the first large gay civil rights movement (founded by the work of Magnus Hirshfeld) that was occurring in Berlin during the late 1920s and early 1930s. Forgetting such keystones in queer history is troublesome and leads many scholars like Klaus Müller to assert that “the situation is not yet safe [...] The decision to stop further destruction [the destruction of the history of the persecution of homosexuality] is not yet funded and can easily change once public attention has gone elsewhere. Much has already been destroyed” (Miller). Unfortunately, it seems as though public attention, especially queer attention, has moved on and forgotten the history of the atrocities that occurred in Germany and its occupied territories from 1933 to 1945.

But why, other than forgetting the death of countless gay men, should a reestablishment of the start of a queer collective memory and history be such a negative thing? In other words, why is it such a problem if queers can imagine or view acts of resistance to persecution as the beginning of their collective memory? Simply put,

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<sup>1</sup>Though Hall asserts it is “reductive” to boil the gay civil rights movement down to this one point—the Stonewall Riots—he does so nonetheless by calling it and then using it as the “marker” for the beginning of a collective queer history.

resistance may be only around a half a century old, but the persecution of same-sex desiring is centuries old and the discrimination of and maltreatment of queers still continues to occur today. As Erwin J. Haeberle asserts in his essay “Swastika, Pink Triangle, and Yellow Star,”

[I]t is clear that the Nazi persecution of homosexuals in general [...] did not constitute isolated and otherwise incomprehensible events. Instead, when seen in the context of still-prevailing social attitudes and governmental policies in many countries, they are merely sobering examples of excess. Their underlying causes are still waiting to be removed. (379)

By forgetting these “sobering examples of excess,” queers are forgetting and ignoring the fact that such atrocities have occurred and can occur again.

Even Donald E. Hall asserts that “queers have often lived in ignorance of each other and of queer-relevant historical information from the near, as well as distant, past” (21). Furthermore, he proclaims that “there would be no popular and effective lesbian and gay rights movement today without a process of historical data-recovery, which opens up the possibility of affirming contemporary lives by looking backwards over time to find that we are not alone in our experiences of oppression and struggles for acceptance” (Hall 22).

The purpose of this text is to perform such a “historical data-recovery” in order that queer people may begin to understand, to remember, and to create (or recall) a major event in history as the beginning of a queer collective consciousness so that such the queer community can fight against prejudicial erasure and make sure that these atrocities may never happen again. According to Lutz van Dijk, “someone who does not have



access to his own history—biographically or historically—has a much harder time consciously and self-assuredly building his present. Many minorities have been stripped of their history; more than that, their existence has thus been denied as well” (Schoppmann 26). Chauncey, Duberman, and Vicinius further this point by asserting in their introduction to *Hidden from History* that

Because the history of homosexuality has been denied or ignored, omitted in formal historical instruction and given no place in the family-centered oral traditions available to other disenfranchised groups, gay people’s hunger for knowledge of their past is strong. Having struggled to create a public presence for themselves in the world today, they seek to reclaim their historical presence. For many, gay history helps constitute the gay community by giving it a tradition, helps woman and men validate and understand who they are by showing them who they have been. (12)

Thus queers—through a re-uncovering of their established history of persecution—may be able to become an even more viable political and social group of individuals within the present that will certainly help create a sustainable gay and lesbian civil rights movement.

Unfortunately, remembering the persecution of homosexuals by the Nazis in order to create a current and continuing queer collective consciousness is problematic. For one, as it has been alluded to already, the persecution of gay men by the Nazis was relatively ignored until the 1970s and early 1980s. The almost three decade long erasure of this history—either due to a mainstream/dominant culture homophobia or lack of interest or concern—that caused a gap between the events and the historical, academic, and

sociological exploration into the events has caused some rather large problems. For one, there is hardly any factual information (in the form of primary sources) left considering the treatment of gays. Though some researchers, mainly Günter Grau (see his text *Hidden Holocaust?*), have uncovered a plethora of Nazi documents that have revealed many of the horrifying atrocities committed against homosexual men, it is almost impossible to stitch together a completely cohesive account of the persecution of gay men by the NSDAP (the National Socialist German Workers Party).

Furthermore, since homosexuality—through the anti-homosexuality laws enacted by Paragraph 175<sup>2</sup>—remained illegal in both the German Democratic Republic in East Germany as well as the Federated Republic of Germany in West Germany, many homosexual men did not come out with stories of their abuse in the concentration camps for the fear of being re-incarcerated and re-victimized for their homosexuality. Though there is currently under a dozen firsthand accounts, it is truly a crime against gays that they continued to have to live in fear because of their homosexuality even after surviving the Nazi prisons or the labor and death *konzentrationslager*s (concentration camps: KZ for short).

Another anomaly concerning the persecution of homosexuals by the Nazis is that a significant portion of the queer community was left out of the persecution. Though several testimonials as well as historic renderings have asserted that gay men and transsexual men were sent off to prison or to the camps under Paragraph 175, lesbians are relatively left out in what perhaps can be described as a double erasure. Since the Nazi movement was essentially male dominated, women were already considered in general to be a lesser threat to the continuance and “cleansing” of the Aryan race.

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<sup>2</sup> See Appendix I.

Whereas the head of the *Shutzstaffel* (SS), Henrich Himmler, viewed homosexuals as a plague to the Aryan race, calling “homosexuality—a symptom of degeneracy which could destroy our race,” lesbians, as asserted by the first predominant historian on the subject, Richard Plant, “enjoyed a kind of legal immunity” (Rector 122; Plant 27). Since lesbians could still produce children for the Aryan race, lesbians were able to hide (as it were) under their biological features. As Frank Rector claims, “lesbians could and did produce obligatory children for the Fatherland” (115). Only those women who openly refused to birth children were arrested and sent to the camps. However, these women were classified as “asocials” or “antisocials” along with other “undesirables,” e.g. handicapped individuals, and wore a black triangle within the camps. Though the most current research has “uncovered only five cases of lesbians being sent to the concentration camps,” the black triangle began to be used by lesbians in London in the 1970s as a symbol of their own individual pride, solidarity, and their own persecution (Epstein and Friedman; Zoe 7).

Since lesbians were doubly erased by being viewed as completely inconceivable by the National Socialists as well as the few women who were actually sent to the camps, this sexual minority can also utilize the history of the persecution of gay men as part of their own history and employ it in order to belong or create a collective queer history of persecution and erasure. In fact, the work of Claudia Schoppmann proves that this utilization of the persecution of homosexuals with the lesbian plight is not a mere illusory combination of histories. In her text *Days of Masquerade*, Schoppmann provides firsthand testimonial accounts of lesbians living during the Nazi reign over Germany and their occupied territories. Though none of the accounts describe the persecution of a

lesbian for being homosexual (some of the testimonies were given by Jewish lesbians sent to the camps for their ethnicity), the testimonies do show that lesbian love did persist and exist within Germany during Nazi control. However, since the focus of this thesis is to explore persecution within the concentration camps of individuals based on their homosexuality, these lesbian experiences as well as other gay male experiences (that do not have to do with persecution) will unfortunately be left out.

Though my specific focus is inextricably linked to homosexual victimization, my intention is not to perpetuate the image of the homosexual as victim. Instead, this thesis argues that an analysis of the history, testimonies, and fictional accounts of homosexual persecution will allow for an undoubtedly resounding case that the persecution of homosexuals by the Nazis had and continues to have (or should have) a positive resonating effect on the queer community as a whole. Geoffrey J. Giles affirms this point when he asserts that “the crucial lesson of commemoration of the victims of Nazism is vigilance. Virtually no one today believes that there could possibly be a descent to that appalling level of violent repression against homosexuals. Germans in 1932, the year before Hitler came to power, felt much the same way” (18-19). This vigilance is only possible if the entire queer community remembers and utilizes this historic persecution of gay men as a point of queer collective consciousness. In this way, “vigilance” becomes the affirmation “never again.”

J. Michael Clark also verifies the necessity for looking back at victimization in order to have a positive future. “[G]ay people must remember this past,” he states, “to strive for a very different future” (7). Beyond giving contemporary queers a collective history and consciousness that will allow for such atrocities to “never again” happen, the

testimonials and fictional pieces that will be explored will prove how homosexual love and dignity has withstood even the most extreme totalitarian government.

However, before the testimony or fictional accounts can be properly explored, a historical foundation must first be established. Thus, Chapter One will deal solely with the historical account of the persecution of homosexuals by the National Socialists. The chapter will relate the history behind the Third Reich's persecution of homosexuals as well as a brief history on the academic, sociological, and historical research on the persecution of homosexuals. Furthermore, the chapter will focus on how the treatment of homosexuals changed from pre-NSDAP control over Germany to the evolving laws and actions that the Third Reich took against homosexual men through Hitler's reign over Germany from 1933-1945. The chapter's main focus will be on the treatment of homosexuals in the camps and the tortures, including such practices as castration, sexual abuse, medical experiments, and hard labor, inflicted upon them there. I also consider the question concerning the number of men who perished in the camps because of their homosexuality.

Chapter Two will focus on testimonials given by gay men who were persecuted in the camps. Encompassing a discussion of the potential problems that underlie the genre of testimony will also be an analysis of videorecorded versus orally recorded (non-video) accounts and the problems and the benefits surrounding each type of these accounts. Through finding commonalities across all of the differentiating stories given by these gay men persecuted for their homosexuality, this chapter will seek to validate the historical accounts of abuse against gay men in the camps that is explored in Chapter One. Furthermore, Chapter Two will look into how these testimonials have merged history and

memory together in order to catalyze, inform, and establish a queer collective history and consciousness.

Positive and negative aspects of the genre of “gay Holocaust literature” will be the central focus of Chapter Three. In order to delimit the notions of the invalidity of these works, I examine the historical accuracies and inaccuracies of these texts, the extent of exaggeration and dramatization of events, and whether or not such historic fallacies necessarily call for the dismissal of the text in question. The chapter will seek to illustrate how the genre of gay Holocaust literature demonstrates homosexual love and dignity and how such representations positively affect a queer collective memory and consciousness.

Chapter Four will examine *Bent*, the most famous and mainstream gay Holocaust fiction piece. Focusing primarily on the character Max, I will investigate the struggle that moves Max from the abjection of his homosexuality through the use of pain towards expressing homosexual love and dignity and the acceptance of his homosexual identity. Illustrated through a reading of Martin Sherman’s text, I will illustrate how Max’s struggle affects a contemporary queer collective consciousness.

The conclusion to this thesis explores the history of the pink triangle and its effect on a queer collective memory and consciousness. Through analyzing and exploring the triangle’s reuse as a symbol of pride during different gay movements in the 1970s and 1980s as well as its current usage, the conclusion will seek to determine whether or not the pink triangle has really evolved from its original use as a marker for homosexuals and whether or not the queer community should still use the symbol as one of pride or even as one of remembrance and commemoration.

Overall, this thesis intends through establishing a history of the persecution of homosexuals by the Nazis as a keystone in a queer collective memory and consciousness to show how queer love has been able to survive such horrible atrocities in the past. The communal remembering of these atrocities will allow for the queer community to be a stronger, more viable political unit that has and will continue to survive through any type of persecution and discrimination. Though the tile at the United States Memorial Museum may continue to fade away, its message will resonate and be employed through a collective queer consciousness. Thus the resounding proclamations of “remember gay victims” and “never again” become inextricably intertwined within the prospectus of a solidified queer future.

## **CHAPTER ONE:**

### **THE HISTORY OF THE PERSECUTION OF HOMOSEXUALS BY THE THIRD REICH**

*It is not necessary that you and I live, but it is necessary that the German people live. And it can only live if it can fight, for life means fighting. And it can only fight if it maintains its masculinity [...] Therefore we reject you [...] anyone who thinks of homosexual love is our enemy.*

-National Socialist Party statement, published May 14, 1928

Five years after liberation, in 1950, Eugen Kogon published the English translation of his account of the Holocaust in his text *The Theory and Practice of Hell: The German Concentration Camps and the System behind Them*. Kogon, who was “a political opponent of the Third Reich [and] was interned in the Buchenwald concentration camp from 1939 to its liberation,” gives one of the first reported accounts of homosexuals within the concentration camps (Rector 141). In his text, Kogon asserts that the men who wore pink triangles were consigned

[T]o the lowest caste in camp during the most difficult years. In shipment to extermination camps, such as Nordhausen, Natzweiler, and Gross-Rosen, they furnished the highest proportionate share, for the camp had an understandable tendency to slough off all elements considered least valuable or worthless. (43-44)

Though many contemporary scholars such as Wolfgang Röll have criticized Kogon’s work since he neglected to cite the over “150 reports by former prisoners of the Buchenwald camp” that he used “extensively” for information beyond his own recollection within the camp, Kogon’s brief statements concerning homosexual men within the camps are applauded by historians such as Günter Grau for being “even if only



superficially [...] deal[ing] with the prisoner with the ‘pink triangle’ in the concentration camps” (Röll 5). Kogon’s statement concerning the fate of those homosexual prisoners becomes even more important because for the next thirty years nothing more was ever researched or articulated within the historical or academic fields.

Fortunately, after the Stonewall Riots and gay civil rights movements began to emerge in more publicly visible and affirmative ways, western scholars became interested in an event in history that was becoming forgotten and erased. Major research by historians such as Rüdiger Lautmann and Frank Rector were first published in Germany in the late 1970s and then reprinted in English translation during the early 1980s by the *Journal of Homosexuality* and the publication house Stein and Day, respectively. Though Lautmann’s research still holds as a mainstay in the study of the persecution of homosexuals during the Nazi control over Germany, Rector’s text, because of its overly political slant and its refusal to conceal its biases, is used less and less in more contemporary scholarship. However, Lautmann and Rector’s texts—along with the more widely used and cited *The Pink Triangle: The Nazi War against Homosexuals* by Richard Plant (published in 1986)—are generally considered as the founding texts in this field of study. Yet it would be completely unwise not to note that the testimony given by Heinz Heger, first published in 1972, preceded all of these historical, social, and academic studies. In fact, Heger’s text, *The Men with the Pink Triangle*, is rather heavily used as the basis of information for Rector’s text. Lautmann’s work, which Plant asserts “offered the first truly reliable statistics on the persecution, arrest, imprisonment, and fate of German and Austrian homosexuals,” can still be seen to be affected by Heger’s text. Lautmann readily uses Heger’s testimony as firsthand witness proof to substantiate his

statistical findings as well as his exploration into the persecution of the pink triangle inmates.<sup>3</sup>

Though there has been further historical and academic research into the persecution of gay men by the Nazis, Lautmann, Plant, and Rector's text are repeatedly cited by almost every well-researched article. It is an unfortunate fact of history, however, that new research on this subject is relatively hard to uncover. As the years pass and the Holocaust moves further and further into the past, it becomes increasingly difficult to find and substantiate new research or ideas on what occurred during that period. Furthermore, since the Nazis were very meticulous in destroying almost all of their records pertaining to the camps, primary evidence has always been hard to come by (Plant 153). Against all odds, the three aforementioned scholars have done well to present in their own way a rather linear and constructed view of the history of the treatment of gays in Germany during the years of National Socialist control.

Before the war, Berlin was a contemporary utopia of sexuality. Beyond being home for the burgeoning art movements such as Dadaism, Berlin was "the best of worlds and the worst of worlds, where cultural life was the most creative in Germany's history, where creativity in all fields of human endeavor was simply outstanding" (Rector 19). Such a flourishing cultural life led Berlin to be a melting pot of all types of people.

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<sup>3</sup> This text uses an English translated and condensed version of Lautmann's pioneering text *Homosexuality and Society* which was published under the title "The Pink Triangle: The Persecution of Homosexual Males in Concentration Camps in Nazi Germany" in *The Journal of Homosexuality* 6.1/2 (Fall/Winter 1980/81): p141-160. Heinz Heger's testimonial is cited over five times in this short piece.

Though homosexual intercourse was still illegal based on Paragraph 175 of the Penal Code established in 1871, homosexuality was common and, for the most part, accepted in the large city. The acceptance of homosexuals in Germany is clearly demonstrated through the work of Magnus Hirshfeld, who was able through constant petition to get both the Social Democrats and the Communists (together these two groups held the majority in Germany's parliament) to "vote in favor of bringing before the Reichstag a bill to strike down Paragraph 175" in 1929 (Plant 49). Homosexuality was well on its way to legality, until the National Socialist German Workers Party over took the majority of seats in the Reichstag and the bill to erase Paragraph 175 was basically shoved aside.

Once Hitler was elected Chancellor in January of 1933, a crack down on homosexuality began. On May 6, 1933, Magnus Hirshfeld's Institute of Sexual Research was vandalized and its large archives of books and photographs became the fuel for the first book burning by the Nazis (Plant 210). By the summer of that same year, Ernst Röhm (or Roehm), head of the *Sturmabteilung* (storm troopers; the SA) and an unabashed homosexual, had his troops raid gay bars.<sup>4</sup> These raids lead to the closing of many gay bars, all of which had to close by law in 1935.

Though the National Socialist German Workers Party made it clear through most of their publications that they considered homosexuality a moral and degenerating threat against the German Aryan race ("anyone who thinks of homosexual love is our enemy"),

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<sup>4</sup> Ernst Röhm, prior to his death in 1934, did not have to fear, like most non-pederasty committing homosexuals, persecution based on his homosexuality. Considering that Hitler issued a statement declaring that the SA "is not an institute for the moral education of genteel young ladies, but a formation of seasoned fighters. The sole purpose of any inquiry must be to ascertain whether or not the SA officer...is performing his official duties...his private life cannot be an object of scrutiny unless it conflicts with basic principles of National Socialist ideology," one can clearly see how Röhm could follow orders from the *führer* to close bars of "moral degeneracy" (which also included those of Jewish ownership) while still being a homosexual himself because his own personal life was not placed under "scrutiny" (Plant 61). Nevertheless, Röhm is an anomaly and his homosexuality, in part, did eventually lead to his death.

most homosexuals did not see the onslaught of the totalitarian regime of the Nazis as a threat to them. As Richard Plant asserts, “at first the Nazi attacks against homosexuals were interpreted by many gays solely as prompted by anti-Semitism” (52). Other gays felt no need to worry because Hitler’s right-hand man was Ernst Röhm. Though the SA may have raided gay bars throughout Berlin and the rest of Germany, Röhm was still a highly visible member in the homosexual circles. However, this was all to change on the night of June 28, 1934.

That night has become known throughout history as “The Night of the Long Knives” and, called in Rector’s text, “The Blood Purge” or “The Röhm Purge.” Whatever the name for the bloodbath, the purge, which lasted from the night of June 28<sup>th</sup> until July 3<sup>rd</sup>, “saw Adolph Hitler wreck the SA militia and order the shooting of its chief Ernst Roehm” (Plant 54). Over the course of these days, “Ernst Roehm’s associates [some academics have considered them as Röhm’s homosexual lovers within the SA] are murdered together with three hundred men not connected with his organization. Roehm is executed two days later” (Plant 211). Frank Rector asserts that the purge was not due to Röhm’s “distasteful habits but because Roehm was plotting to seize power, make himself head of the Army, and form what would have been, incidentally, a homosexual government” (55). However, homosexuality within the ranks of the SA was nonetheless the predominant reason given to the German public for this brutal attack on Hitler’s own army. Plant furthers this point when he reveals that “homosexuality within the SA was used by Hitler as a ploy so that he could pose as the moral leader of the Nazi Party and Reich” (67). Furthermore, after the purge, Hitler conferred one of his only public opinions on homosexuality when he issued the directive that “I therefore require all SA

commanders to take the utmost pains to ensure that offenses under Paragraph 175 are met by immediate expulsion of the culprit from the SA and the Party” (Bleuel 219).

Frank Rector claims that “the persecution of homosexuals [...] did not become a ‘Final Solution’ until the Röhm Purge” (25). However, Rector’s statement is a bit over exaggerated. Most scholars agree that though there may have been a desire to cleanse homosexuality from the German people there was no official final solution such as in the case of the Jews. Harry Oosterhuis agrees with this point when he affirms that throughout the entire Nazi rule over Germany, “in contrast to the ‘holocaust’ of the Jews, the persecution of homosexuals was not wholesale or systematic” (248). Gregory Woods also attests to this fact: “homosexuals were never [...] included in the ‘final solution’ (*Endlösung*)” (247).

The Röhm purge also revealed a commonly used method of vilifying the enemy by homosexualizing them. Hitler was able to hide his true fears of a military coup by attacking Röhm’s sexuality. The Nazi party also attempted to defend itself against having its own political momentum hindered by foreign news accounts of homosexuality within the National Socialist Party. One political cartoon<sup>5</sup> prior to his murder showed Ernst Röhm “checking out” his ranks of very fit, young German boys clad in tight pants that left little to the imagination. Plant explains, “the technique of homosexualizing the enemy, employed by some emigré authors, can be understood as a thirst for revenge” (15).<sup>6</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick also speaks to this point when she proclaims that

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<sup>5</sup> Shown in the photographic montage portion of Lothar Machtan’s text *The Hidden Hitler*. See the suggested further reading section for publication information.

<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately, homosexualization is still used against the Nazi party as a way to discredit their movement. Frank Rector continually includes unsubstantiated reports of Hitler’s homosexuality in his text as a way to discredit Hitler further. However, there are some more contemporary studies on the life of Hitler (mainly Lothar Machtan’s work *The Hidden Hitler*) that attempts to prove through interviews and other types of primary information that Hitler was a homosexual. However, it is up to an individual reader’s

[I]t should be unnecessary to say that the fantasy of Nazi homosexuality is flatly false; according to any definition of homosexuality current in our culture, only one Nazi leader, Ernst Roehm, was homosexual [...] What seems more precisely to be true is that at any rate German facism [...] emerged on a social ground in which ‘the homosexual question’ had been made highly salient [...] the status of [such] a ‘question’ necessarily both records and aggravates the endangeredness of any group. (*Tendencies*, 49-50n)

Nevertheless, the already overly masculinized Nazi party had to attempt to dispel such homosexualization or homosexual question of their movement in order to sustain themselves as a viable political unit.

Nevertheless, after the purge homosexual men began to understand that circumstances were changing in Germany. Ironically, a rather significant number of homosexual men (though there are of course no numbers or statistics to be found) “joined the armed forces [b]ecause Himmler’s [the founder of the Gestapo and, later, the head of the *Shutzstaffel* (SS) who oversaw the coup and destruction of the SA] Gestapo agents had no jurisdiction over the military;” thus the armed forces allowed gay men a “safe refuge” (Plant 80). Furthermore, of the tens of thousands of men who were imprisoned under Paragraph 175 during the Nazi control of Germany over “70 percent of the men sentenced [...] served their sentences, were released, and then drafted into the *Wehrmacht*, where they aided Germany’s domination of Europe” (Heineman, 37).

Though many gay men, such as Albrecht Becker (featured in the documentary *Paragraph 175*), were able to escape persecution and imprisonment by joining the army,

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own assessment to find whether or not there are truths in such research and what the ramifications may be to the queer community if such theories are true.

a significant number of homosexual men were not so lucky. However, many problems emerge when considering the legal codes that made homosexuality illegal under the Third Reich. One year after the Night of the Long Knives, Paragraph 175<sup>7</sup> was extended so that

The existence of an intercourse-like act was no longer required. Nor was it necessary, therefore, to prove that a criminal act had taken place—it became impossible to stop proceedings by means of the law. A “sex-offence between men now designated not only intercourse-like acts but any kind of self-gratification in the presence of another man [...] Ejaculation was not required to complete a criminal offence. (Grau 64)

Furthermore, the revision of Paragraph 175 “permitted convictions for simple masturbation and indeed even the slightest of homosexual advances” (Giles, *Why Bother?*, 8). Since the new law was left ambiguous, “it was not possible to tell from the paragraph itself what the law understood to constitute ‘indecentry’” (Giles, *Why Bother?*, 9).

Later in 1936, it was determined by the courts that an act was no longer necessary to arrest a person for homosexuality: an individual could be arrested for “intent” alone (Plant 214). The lawyer Rudolph Klare furthered the legality of such ridiculous notions when he wrote a book to classify same-sex felonies that can be constituted as “indecentry” under Paragraph 175. His nine point criterion for homosexual felonies is as follows<sup>8</sup>:

1. Simple contemplation of desired objects (abstract coitus)

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<sup>7</sup> See Appendix I, part 2.

<sup>8</sup> As reported in Richard Plant’s text; page 113.

2. Plain touching (which might lead to hyperesthesia, erection, and ejaculation, orgasm)
3. Petting, embracing, kissing of the partner with results of similar to above
4. Pressing of (naked) penis to any part of the partner's body. Such as thigh, arm, hand, etc.
5. Pressing of two bodies against each other with or without friction
6. Rhythmic thrusts between knees or thighs, or in armpits
7. Touching of penis by partner's tongue
8. Placement of penis into partner's mouth
9. Pederasty or sodomy (placement of penis in anus)<sup>9</sup>

Paragraph 175 was not the only law that was used to arrest and then to persecute homosexuals. Considering the law dealt only with men over the age of 21, Paragraphs 174 and 176 dealt with acts of “seduction,” defined as homosexual acts with minors from fourteen to twenty or with a dependent” (Lautmann, “The Persecution,” 144). However, as Lautmann noted in his research, of 250 pink triangle inmates whose “documentation is more or less complete,” only ten percent of inmates were convicted under either Paragraphs 174 or 176 whereas seventy-six percent of the inmates were arrested under Paragraph 175 (Lautmann, “The Persecution,” 144-45).

Overall, during the period of National Socialist control over Germany, the most current research shows it can be “reasonably estimated [that] the number of males convicted of homosexuality from 1933-1944 [is] between 50,000 and 63,000, of which nearly 4,000 were juveniles” (Plant 149). However, these numbers are still rough

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<sup>9</sup> Plant reports that “this catalogue was not inclusive enough for the Nazi ideologues. Later, courts decided that a lewd glance from one man to another was sufficient grounds for prosecution” (113).



estimates. As pointed out by Richard Plant, the Gestapo's and the Gestapo's Department II's (The Federal Security Office for Combating Abortion and Homosexuality) numbers of men convicted under Paragraph 175 greatly fluctuated by some 13,000 men for the same period (Plant 149). Thus, it becomes rather difficult to discern the true numbers of men convicted under Paragraph 175 by the Gestapo because even the Gestapo could not keep their numbers accurately. Furthermore, Plant's estimations do not include those homosexual men or suspected homosexual men who were never given a trial. As it is represented in almost all of the testimonials, gay men were hardly ever given a trial after arrest. They were simply asked to report to the Gestapo, tortured into signing a confession, and then thrown into a prison or concentration camp.

These statistics also do not include those homosexuals arrested prior to the Nazi takeover of Germany. Paragraph 175 had been on the books for sixty-two years prior to the National Socialist domination; thus many homosexuals had previously been arrested and their records were on file in police stations across Germany. These records allowed for the Gestapo, in October of 1934, to send out a secret letter "to police departments throughout the country, ordering them to submit lists of all men known to be, or to have been, homosexually active" (Plant 211). With these lists, it was relatively easy for the Gestapo to re-arrest or re-imprison these men even if they had not committed any further infractions against Paragraph 175.

However, there are also problems in considering who was arrested as being a "homosexual" after the Nazi party expanded the law so that a mere touch, glance, or thought could be deemed an offence against Paragraph 175. Since no evidence was necessary at all to arrest men under Paragraph 175, "from the start, alleged offenses

against Paragraph 175 were used as a ruse to arrest people whose politics displeased those in power” (Plant 109). Furthermore, the Nazis “used the charge of homosexuality as a pretext to rid the regime of suspected opponents. These campaigns were directed against the youth movement, the Catholic Church, and the armed forces” (Plant 125). Thus, the Nazis, who were threatened by the homosexualization of their own movement, also used accusations of homosexuality in order to eliminate their own opponents.

This hypocrisy exemplifies once again how homosexuality was negatively used to slander political opponents. National Socialist and other German Nazi citizens were able to incriminate and, for the most part, abolish their enemies based on unsubstantiated reports (because they did not need to be substantiated) of infractions of Paragraph 175. Thus, it becomes even harder to discern how many men were actually arrested and wore the pink triangle in the concentration camps because of their “real” homosexuality.

Though throughout the Nazi era over ten thousand men were convicted under Paragraph 175 each year, the number of pink triangle men sent to the camps is a significantly lower figure (Lautmann, “The Persecution,” 145). According to Lautmann’s study, “a considerable percentage of all pink-triangle prisoners had been convicted previously for homosexuality” (145). One can assume, therefore, that most of the pink triangles in the camps were “true” homosexuals because they were previously convicted or imprisoned under the original version of Paragraph 175 in which a case of actual homosexual activity was necessary in order for prosecution.

In his groundbreaking study, Lautmann and his team focused on the pink triangle inmates incarcerated in the Bushenwald, Dachau, Flossenbürg, and Mauthausen because

these four camps retained the most intact material concerning pink triangle inmates (Lautmann, "The Persecution," 142). Furthermore, Lautmann asserts that "according to the experts of the International Tracing Service, only in [those four camps] were pink-triangles to be found in more than insignificant numbers" ("The Persecution," 142). Though Lautmann's statistical findings on the persecution of gay men are only based on 1,572 surviving documentary accounts from these concentration camps, his research agrees with most scholars in their claims that the pink-triangles were treated significantly worse than other minorities within the camps. His research supports such contemporary claims by Klaus Müller that "a pink triangle meant harsher treatment in the camps. Gay men suffered a higher mortality rate than did other relatively small victim groups" ("Introduction," 13)

Lautmann furthers such statements by asserting that "the homosexual inmates found themselves on the level accorded the most contempt, at least when compared with nonforeign [*sic*], non-Jewish inmates [...] The homosexual prisoners, generally bereft of power and largely disorganized, remained at the bottom of the camp stratification. Their social position explains their liquidation" ("The Persecution," 158-9).

Once in the camps, homosexual men were labeled with a pink triangle. This distinguished the group from other inmates who wore the following colored badges:

Red- Political Inmates

Black- Asocial or Antisocial Inmates

Green- Criminals

Yellow- Jewish Inmates

Purple- Jehovah Witness Inmates

## Brown- Gypsy Inmates

However, the complete symbolic system was not always so clear cut. As noted in one of the testimonies, the first recorded marker for homosexual inmates was a large “A,” which stood for *arschficker* (ass-fucker) stitched onto yellow bands (Lautmann, “The Persecution,” 148). Other previous markers included a blue bar (as described by Pierre Seel in his memoir); “large, round, black dots; and a large 175 drawn on the inmate’s back” (Lautmann, “The Persecution,” 148). Later, the pink triangle—most likely colored as such to illuminate and display a breach in normative gender roles— became the most widely used and accepted form of marking homosexual inmates. However, even once the marker had been established it was still differentiated from other prisoners. Heinz Heger noted in his memoir how the pink triangles in his camp were enlarged so that they were more visible from a distance than any other prisoner’s patches (Heger 67).

Once in the camps, homosexual inmates were treated with great hostility. Both “in articles about the concentration camp and in official papers [...] they are referred to as ‘Homos,’ ‘175-ers,’ ‘*warm Bruder*’ (queer), ‘*Sittenstrolch*’ (faggot), ‘*schwules Arshloch*’ (queer asshole), or ‘*Arschficker*’” (Lautmann, “The Persecution,” 148). These slang insults were not used solely by the SS guards of the camps. In fact, “homosexuals were brutally assaulted, sexually abused, and frequently murdered by other inmates” (Plant 128). Prejudice, it appears, did not give way to tolerance or empathy from other inmates.

Perhaps the most despicable torture gay men had to endure was sexual abuse. In almost every account given by survivors, sexual abuse towards gay men was a commonality in the camps. Though Himmler enacted laws making any homosexual activity by SS guards punishable by death, many gay men found themselves used for

sexual pleasure by the guards (Plant 219). The *kammeradschafts polizei* (kapo or capo), who were inmates themselves but ran the bunks and made sure that their inmates did what was ordered, also sexually abused gay men. Gay men who became essentially sex slaves for these men were known throughout the camps as *piepels*. In many of the testimonial accounts it becomes clear that one way a gay man could survive in the camp was to find such a kapo. This is due to the fact that the kapos traditionally provided their “boyfriends” with extra food and protection. However, the psychological ramifications of having to sexually sell oneself out in order to live can certainly be said to be devastating. Such *piepels* disappeared for the most part once the majority of the camps began to incorporate brothels.

Beyond sexual abuse, the pink triangle inmates were subjected to the worst type of tortures. As Plant notes in his text, homosexuals “could be doubly scapegoated, as ‘incurably sick’ and therefore candidates for mercy death, or as ‘congenitally criminal deviants,’ to be reeducated in the camps” (112). Part of reeducation included mandatory visits from homosexuals to the brothels. Since holes were drilled into the walls of the rooms, SS guards could watch to see if the gay men could copulate with the women. Furthermore, “any pink triangle prisoners deemed ‘cured’ by virtue of their consistent good conduct in the brothel were then sent to the Dirleanger penal division [a division of men sent to the front lines of the Russian battle front to die a ‘hero’s death’]” (Heger 100-1).

Another way a homosexual prisoner, such as Friedrich-Paul von Groszenheim (whose experience will be retold in the testimonial chapter), could be reeducated was to consent to castration (Weishaupt and Jeanrond). Günter Grau asserts in his study on the

matter that “the indications for compulsory castration in sex offences [such as homosexuality] were considerably widened between 1933 and 1945. For the first time in German legal history judges were given the power to order compulsory castration [...] ‘voluntary submission’ to castration was not allowed at first” (246). However, later on (as researched in a study by Geoffrey J. Giles), “those arrested were sometimes promised leniency if they agreed to their own castration. And indeed the Ministry of Justice explicitly ordered voluntary castration as a prime factor in the consideration of appeals after sentencing” (“The Most Unkindest Cut,” 46). In totality, from the years 1934-41, Giles’ report estimates that at least 2,156 homosexuals underwent castration (“The Most Unkindest Cut,” 47). However, Giles asserts that “the use of castration, rather than sterilization, which would have had the same effect of procreative ability, reveals one of two things. Either there was a total misconception about the nature of homosexuality, in as much as all gay people were assumed to be potential child molesters or at least seducers of youth” (“The Most Unkindest Cut,” 57).

Nevertheless, castration was not a ticket to freedom as gay men were led to believe. As Grau proclaims, “it is very likely that in previous years [before 1939] homosexual men—especially those sentenced to penal servitude followed by preventative detention [a Nazi euphemism for the concentration camps]—had already consented to the severely mutilating operation. One could say that they hardly had any other choice” (247). Furthermore, Giles asserts that the procedure led to high rates of suicide amongst those men who underwent the operation and, therefore, “the suspicion then grows that the police authorities who were so vigorous in prosecuting homosexuals saw the use of castration much more in a terms of punishment” (“The Most Unkindest Cut,” 57).

Beyond castration, the men who wore the pink triangles were subjected to medical experimentations. Like the convoys to the extermination camps, Kogon also asserts that homosexuals were the most likely members of the Buchenwald concentration camp to undergo medical experiments (270-2). Plant notes that one particular doctor, an endocrinologist named Carl Varnet, within the Buchenwald camp chose only to experiment his hormonal concoctions on homosexuals (175). Most of Varnet's research related to that of castration, since he was keen on analyzing and compounding research on the hormone levels of castrated homosexuals (Plant 176-8). However, Plant asserts that Varnet's "experiments brought illness and death to the subjects and had no scientific value" (175). Though no records remain to show the types of inmates used in the other camps, based on the fact that in Buchenwald only homosexual inmates were used, it can necessarily be thought that homosexual inmates were also used in "tests involving malaria, high-altitude simulation, and underwater tanks" that occurred in other concentration camps (Plant 178).

Those gay men within the camps who survived or escaped castration and the medical treatments did not have a better life. In camp, the pink triangles were often given their own barracks. Lautmann attests that "homosexual inmates, once grouped together, could be subject to special repression in addition to the already generally fearful condition in the camps" ("The Persecution," 148). Heger portrays such "special repression" when he illustrates how gay men had to sleep with their arms outside of their blankets and the lights were left on in the bunker at all time so that nothing could happen between gay men (36). Furthermore, any type of "comradeship" between gay men was avoided at all costs. Lautmann claims that "any group-forming or contact between

homosexual inmates immediately raised the suspicion of the guard personnel” who would then take lengths to punish those individuals (“The Persecution,” 149).

Far worse than their fate inside the camp, homosexual men were commonly detailed to hard labor work outside of the camps. Homosexuals were frequently used in the clay pits (or so called “death pits”) which held a high rate of mortality for the workers subjected to the gruesome and dangerous job of filling bins up with clay and then pushing them up a steep incline to the top of the pit.

Lautmann notes how in Buchenwald, many gay men were assigned to the building of “Dora,” which later became the underground concentration camp Mittelbau (“The Persecution,” 151). Over 10,000 Dora workers had to excavate a mile-long tunnel, which included the “digging, laying explosives, leveling floors, pouring concrete, [and] laying rails (Lautmann, “The Persecution,” 151). Of the 10,000 inmates, homosexuals accounted for eleven percent of all the workers, whereas political prisoners accounted for three percent, and Jehovah Witnesses one percent (“The Persecution,” 151).

One of the most gruesome work details delegated in the extermination camps was also regulated to the pink triangles. Homosexual prisoners, as well as others, were assigned as *kommandos*, a job that entailed running the crematoriums. These work squadrons had to shovel out the remains of those victims murdered in the crematoriums as well as set fire to mass grave sites (which most likely still contained some living persons). These *kommandos* were later flung into the fire pits themselves so that the Nazis could retain the secrecy of their mass genocide of people.

Lautmann attempts to further illuminate the fact that homosexuals were used mostly for hard labor. He notes in his research how “a series of reports shows that the



pink-triangle inmates in other camps [...] were intentionally placed in the most taxing work commandos” (Lautmann, “The Persecution,” 152). In a statistical analysis of prisoners given “light” work in the camps, only a sixth of one percent of homosexual inmates were listed under this regiment.

Within the camps, homosexuals did not have any extra comforts. Beyond the abuse of SS guards and other prisoners, “it is reported of several camps and for several periods that the prisoners with the pink triangle received more brutal extra punishments than did the other groups” (“The Persecution,” 153). As reported by Lautmann,

In Dachau, for example, a homosexual inmate who had made the waves with his ‘effeminate,’ ‘queen’-like behavior, got the ‘tree,’ that is he was hung from a pole with his hands behind his back. In Sachshausen all those previously convicted under paragraph 176 spent their first three months in the stockade company.  
(153-4)

Since these accounts only brush the surface of the treatment of homosexuals in the camps, further examples of the persecution of homosexuals within the camps will be illustrated in the testimonial chapter.

Unfortunately, one of the problems concerning the history of the persecution of homosexuals is the fact that the total number of victims has fluctuated throughout the years. Christopher Isherwood, a close ally of Magnus Hirshfeld who later wrote on the works of the institution, is quoted by Gore Vidal as saying that “Hitler killed six hundred thousand homosexuals” (Plant 43-44; Vidal 213). Isherwood’s estimation of homosexual victims is clearly taken from a misunderstanding of Kinsey’s reports on homosexuality. Isherwood, who thought there to be at least six million Jews murdered by the Nazis (a

number also rather hard to believe considering the fact that “on the eve of World War II, there were fewer than a quarter-million Jews in Germany”), obviously used the inflated perception (garnered from a misreading of Kinsey’s research) that ten percent of the population is homosexual. Thus, it can be understood how Isherwood, though wrong, came up with this initial number (Giles, *Why Bother?*, 2).

Later, as quoted by J. Michael Clark, the Protestant Church of Australia reported an estimated “220,000 homosexuals were killed during the Third Reich” (31). A further reduction in numbers of homosexual deaths is revealed in Heger’s testimony, when he asserts that “scarcely a word has been written on the fact that along with the millions whom Hitler had butchered on grounds of ‘race,’ hundreds of thousands of people were sadistically tortured to death simply for having homosexual feelings” (118).

Lautmann’s research drastically decreases the number of deaths. He estimates that only five to fifteen thousand pink triangle inmates were incarcerated in the camps (The Persecution, 146). Of these inmates, Lautmann’s research showed that “of the homosexual prisoners, 60 percent died, 26 were liberated, 13 percent were released, and 0.4 percent escaped” (“Enemies of the State,” 348). These figures prove that the death rate of homosexuals was higher than any other non-Jewish group imprisoned in the concentration camps (“Enemies of the State,” 348). However, Lautmann’s research only focused on certain concentration camps. Considering the fact that records do not remain for all of the Nazi camps or those prisoners who died during police custody, transportation, or in prison, the exact number of homosexuals who met their fate in the camps will never be known. However, most contemporary researchers estimate the

number of homosexual deaths in the camps to be “somewhere between 5,000 and 15,000” (Plant 154).

Though the official estimate of deaths has dwindled down significantly, it is important not to overestimate the deaths into sensationalized numbers. To do so would be both a disservice to the historical and academic reliability concerning the persecution of gay men and expose such research to possible negative interpretation. Even in its lowest and most accepted numbers, the mass death of men due to their homosexuality is an excruciating example of homophobia in contemporary history. Yet, unfortunately, the persecution of gay men in Germany did not cease after liberation.

After Germany’s surrender in May 1945, the country was divided into two parts: the German Democratic Republic (East Germany) and the Federal Republic (West Germany). Each of the newly established governments kept Paragraph 175 on the books. Thus, gay men who were persecuted and victimized by the Nazis still had to live in fear of continual persecution. This fear led to the silence of many gay men who survived the camp and can be considered a contributing factor to why the persecution of homosexuals was not researched for years after liberation.

The laws against homosexuality (except for cases of pederasty) were stricken from the law books in the Federal Republic in 1969 and “the new GDR criminal code of 1968 fully revoked Paragraph 175” (Röll 2-3). However, even as these laws overturned the illegality of the actions of which the men with the pink triangles were persecuted under the Third Reich, the Reparations Act (*Wiedergutmachung*), since it was established on June 29, 1956, did not recognize homosexuals as victims of the Nazi regime (“Enemies of the State,” 356). As described by Lautmann, the Reparation Act for

Those Persecuted under National Socialism “says nothing about the principally illegal nature of all referrals to the concentration camps: it excludes ‘nonpolitical’ categories such as Gypsies, homosexuals, criminals, antisocial elements, and those ‘who were persecuted for security reasons’ [...] Individuals who fall into the category of the ‘nonpolitically’ persecuted have remained essentially without rehabilitation or compensation” (“Enemies of the State,” 356). Homosexuals were included in the this nonpolitically persecuted group of individuals.

Many of the men whose stories are accounted for in the following testimonial chapter struggled to have their persecution recognized. Unfortunately, homosexuals are still not viewed as official victims of Nazi persecution both by the Reparations Act and by extension the Germanic government. Therefore, not only did gay male survivors continue to face criminal persecution because of their sexuality after the war they were also erased from the roll call of Holocaust victims and survivors.

Though gay victims still have not received official status or reparations under the Reparation Act, forty-two years after liberation a fund of 11.6 million dollars was established by the Swiss government “with the aim of giving financial assistance to victims of Nazi persecution” (Corydon 5). However, one of the stipulations to receive any of these reparations was that an individual must be a “double victim (i.e. who have suffered oppression even after World War II)” (Corydon 5). Corydon reports that “although the Swiss have used the phrase ‘double victim’ to refer to Eastern European survivors who missed out on compensation received by many of their Western counterparts after the war and who suffered oppression even after World War II, ‘gay’ Holocaust survivors were literally double victims in that they were still considered

criminals in post-war Germany” (5). Unfortunately, considering the very limited number of survivors still alive, these reparations come a little too late.

Yet, even if the Swiss fund’s initial intentions were not to support gay Holocaust victims, the fund nevertheless brings a hopeful and new light to the still shadowed history of those gay victims. Eventually, gay Holocaust victims will be considered as such. Yet, their history of persecution will continue to remind contemporary queers that the persecution of homosexuals by governments is not improbable or impossible.

Furthermore, by remembering the history and the continuing struggle to have these men recognized as valuable people of society who were persecuted for nothing more than their sexuality, today’s queers will be able to see their own struggles reflected and use this history as a positive foundation of their own collective history and consciousness so that such atrocities may never be repeated.

## **CHAPTER TWO:**

### FROM MEMORY TO HISTORY: THE HOMO-HOLOCAUST TESTIMONIALS

Considering the fact that the persecution of homosexuals during the Holocaust was limited, forgotten, or even almost completely erased by history and academia until the late 1970s, the question can be raised where this relatively “new” information on the persecution of gays has come from. How does a historian or an academic rediscover the forgotten past? Though, as mentioned in the preceding chapter, historians such as Rüdiger Lautmann and Richard Plant have meticulously researched and uncovered the treatment of gays through analyzing and finding surviving Nazi memos, letters, and records, the most validating proof that gays were persecuted during the Holocaust comes from the victims themselves. It is through hearing or reading their testimonies that one can see, or that one can get a sense of the history that moves beyond the severely factual and into the effective, which is the place where community identification begins.

Unfortunately, however, testimonials from pink triangle survivors are relatively limited (a fact, itself, that may attest to the erasure of such events from scholarship). Stemming from the fear that they would be rearrested for being gay—since both East and West Germany kept Paragraph 175 in their individual laws after liberation—most surviving gay men did not come out after the war to testify or give witness to the brutalities committed against them. Thus, because of this fear of repeated persecution, the majority of the originating testimonials were presented anonymously. The first testimonial that was given in 1972 and then published in 1979 was by the ghostwriter Heinz Heger, who wrote *The Men with the Pink Triangle: The True Life-and-Death Story of Homosexuals in the Nazi Death Camps*. This text has proven to be the catalyst of the

start of the academic, historic, and literary interest in the gay Holocaust. Therefore, Heger's testimony exemplifies (as shown through its use by Rector, Lautmann, and Plant in Chapter One) the overall effect and importance that these testimonies have on informing and creating a queer history.

However, the fear of persecution even after homosexuality became legal has prevented the complete non-anonymity of some of the testifiers. For example, Friedrich-Paul von Groszheim still remained anonymous by being recorded in the dark while orating his story of Nazi terror in the 1991 documentary film *Wir Hatten Ein Grosses A Am Bein* (We Were Marked with a Big 'A'). Though the film was released in 1991, Groszheim feared the persecution from his community if his physical identity was revealed. In both cases, in the modern documentary which was recorded after homosexuality became legal, as well as, the written testimony given when homosexuality was still illegal, the gay men who gave their stories anonymously cite fear (whether it be the fear of re-arrest or the fear of shame or ridicule by their community if their identity was known) as their main cause for testifying anonymously.

Understandably, anonymity allows the validity of these testimonies to be questioned. However, thankfully, today the remaining survivors do attach—while some hesitantly and others aggressively—their name to their testimony. Several of the men who revealed their stories previously under a pseudonym have since come out to reveal their true identity. For example, Frank Rector in *The Nazi Extermination of Homosexuals* transcribes his interview of the survivor “Herr Wolf” who is noted as being a “prominent actor.” “Herr Wolf” tells Rector about his incarceration in the Lichtenburg concentration camp and how prior to the pink triangle gays had to wear a large ‘A,’ which “stood for

*arschficker*, ass fucker” (158). However, ten years later “Herr Wolf” came out from hiding behind his *nom de guerre* and repeated his story, Kurt von Ruffin’s story, in the documentary film *Wir Hatten Ein Grosses A Am Bein*.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, Heinz Heger was later revealed to be Josef Kohut (though he will remain to be referred to as Heinz Heger hereafter). Thus, at least now, almost all of the testimonials concerning the persecution of homosexuals during the Holocaust have a name attached to them.

Nevertheless, there is still a problem concerning the testimonies of these men: there are not many of them. By the time history and academia finally took notice of this issue and these men no longer had to fear (at least externally, i.e. internal fears can said to be still in place), too much time had passed. It is becoming, as Klaus Müller proclaims in *Paragraph 175*, “almost too late” (Epstein and Friedman). In the 1980s and 1990s, when research into the persecution of homosexuals was finally being explored to a greater extent, most of the survivors were already deceased. Kurt von Ruffin was ninety-years-old when in 1991 he was videorecorded by Jeanrond and Weishaupt. Thus, with the dwindling number of survivors available the few testimonies about this subject given become of increasing importance and increasing value.

But how many voices are needed in order for the persecution of homosexuals in the concentration camps to be recognized as genocide of an entire sector of the European population? Are the written and oral testimonies of Friedrich–Paul von Groszheim, Kurt

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<sup>10</sup> Though Kurt von Ruffin does not state that he had previously given a testimonial about his time in the Lichtenburg KZ, it can be assumed that he and Rector’s “Herr Wolf” are the same person given the following facts: 1. both are considered famous actors (Ruffin reveals in the documentary that he was allowed to keep his hair due to the fact that he was a famous actor and if released people would know of the Nazi abuse of prisoners if he was shaved bald) 2. Both were incarcerated in the Lichtenburg concentration camp 3. Both tell—the only known testimonial to this fact—that gays were first marked with a big ‘A,’ a fact that is not related in the documentary itself but as Dr. Klaus Müller relates in the information about the 1994 United States Holocaust Memorial Museum’s reproduction of the documentary that Ruffin “explained to me off the record, ‘the ‘A’ stood for ‘Arschficker’” (Müller, “Information”).



von Ruffin, Paul Gerhard Vogel, Karl Gorath, Pierre Seel, Heniz Heger, Gad Beck, Albrecht Becker, Heinz F., Heinz Dörmer, Annette Eick, Toefil Kosinski, and (more anonymously given in Jürgen Lemeke's *Gay Voices from East Germany*) Erich and Karl enough? What if we consider only the testimonies of those who actually experienced abuse in a concentration camp or prison for the sole purpose of being gay? We would then have to take out people such as Gad Beck, Annette Eick, Albrecht Becker, and Karl. Considering the introductory remarks made at the beginning of *Paragraph 175* when Klaus Müller asserts the fact that at the time of the film's production (2000) there were "fewer than ten survivors known to be alive," must we then remove those testimonies from those men who never got a chance to videorecord their story (Epstein and Friedman)? Are these few testimonies enough to sustain the validity of the Nazi atrocities committed against homosexual men?

In his essay "Holocaust Testimony, Ethics, and the Problem of Representation," Tony Kushner offers the following answer to such questions: "if a 'reliably' large sample of testimonies was assembled, then it would be possible to 'recover' the experience of those who had previously been silent in this historical record" (281). Kushner then presents Dr. Eva Reichmann's view on this theory: "if I had ten records that is good; but if I have a hundred, then the evidence is conclusive" (281-2). Obviously, there are not a hundred testimonies depicting the persecution of gays in the Holocaust, but there are at least (including the few from other victims who came into contact with the men bearing the pink triangle) enough for the case, in Reichmann's eyes, to be good. Though there is not enough testimony, based on Reichmann's viewpoint, of the persecution of gays to conclusively be the sole evidence that these atrocities occurred, the combination of these

testimonies with the historical research provides enough proof to validate the fact that gay men were indeed victimized.

Thus history and memory, at least in this case, become inextricable partners. Aleida Assmann, in “History, Memory, and the Genre of Testimony,” proclaims that: The survivors as witnesses do not, as a rule, add to our knowledge of factual history; their testimonies, in fact, have often proved inaccurate. This, however, does not invalidate them as a unique contribution to our knowledge of the past. Their point is less to tell us what happened than what it felt like to be in the center of those events; they provide personal views from within. With the acknowledgement of personal voices and their inclusion in historiography [...] the clear-cut borderlines between ‘factual history’ and ‘remembered past’ becomes to some extent permeable. (263)

The permeability of factual history and remembered past becomes crucial, however, in the construction of the memory/history of the persecution of gay men during the Holocaust because of the archival limitations of the historical record as well as the testimonies that are available. However, considering Heinz Heger’s testimony preceded the publication of any lengthy work (the first being Frank Rector’s *The Nazi Extermination of Homosexuals*) concerning the persecution of gay men, the line between memory and history is proven to be in this case more intertwined than permeable. Since Rector includes a portion of Heger’s testimony within his text, it can be relatively assumed that the testimony had in part been the catalyst for a historic and academic examination and research into who wore and what happened to the men in the pink

triangle. Thus, in the case of the persecution of gay men during the Holocaust, knowledge of the atrocities went from memory to history.

Assmann is correct in asserting that, in overly general terms, testimonies are “often proved inaccurate” because personal memory and psyche has the possibility of distorting what actually occurred. However, taking into account that these testimonies come from a wide-range of men and under different circumstances, the similarities concerning the treatment of gays can be said to delimit the possibility of inaccuracies or even to call into complete question the binary of historical accuracy versus historical inaccuracy. If all of the testimonies present brutality, such as the common torture method of the ‘tree,’<sup>11</sup> it is necessarily not naïve to assume that these things did not occur or that these brutalities were misrepresented.

Especially when these men are videorecorded, their testimonies add a certain vivacity which leads to, perhaps, validity through visual catharsis that written testimony does not convey. In her analysis of video and written testimony, Assman asserts that:

The autobiography is a written document that, more often than not, starts from an internal impulse and is composed in a formally coherent and monologic form. The video testimony [...] has a less elaborated form that also leaves room for open-ended passages, such as pauses, periods of silence, uncompleted sentences, innuendo. It is dialogic rather than monologic; it depends on the continuous guidance of another person, who asks questions and supplies some response [...]

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<sup>11</sup> The tree, as represented in the video testimony of Heinz Dörmer and Heinz Heger (amongst others, including non-gays), was a form of torture in which a prisoner’s hands are tied together and then he/she is hung from a wooden pole so that the feet could not touch the ground and “the weight of the body [...] fell on the shoulders in such a way that you could keep yourself up for only a very short time. Very soon, your strength was exhausted and your shoulders were twisted round, which gave rise to terrible pains” (Heger 71).

The video testimony also relies on a pact between the narrator and listener [...] who must be willing to share the testimony and become a co-witness or secondary witness of the memory that he or she helps to extend in space and time. (265)

In the case of Pierre Seel, there is a clear case in the differences between the two mediums of recording testimony. In his book *I, Pierre Seel, Deported Homosexual* (first published in 1982 as *Liberation Was For Others: Memoirs of a Gay Survivor of the Nazi Holocaust*) the reader gets a relatively straightforward representation of Seel's life before and after his six-month imprisonment in the Schirmeck concentration camp in Alsace (Seel 42). The text, for the most part, does not deal with the horrors that were inflicted upon him as an imprisoned gay man (who had to wear a blue bar instead of the pink triangle to represent his homosexuality), but instead textually engages with the internal, psychological struggle that he had to endure throughout the Nazi occupation of France (Seel was from Alsace). He focuses to quite an extent on his time after he was released from the KZ and about his time serving in the military for the Nazis, his feelings of loneliness and "shame" after the war (which included him marrying a woman and having several children), and his final acceptance of his homosexuality and his decision to testify, which occurs after he listens to a presentation of Heinz Heger's testimony (Seel 123).

However, in *Paragraph 175* Seel is shown as annoyed and anxious about revealing his traumatic past: his arrest by the Gestapo and those six months spent in Schirmeck. Though he "initially agreed to be interviewed and even traveled in order to meet the film crew [...] when he was asked to talk about his memories of his

incarceration in German camps during World War II in front of the camera, however, he suddenly refused to speak [...] the film interview with Seel consists of several declarations that he does not want to talk about and remember his past” (Seifert 100). In fact, Seel, who comes off as calm and collected until the end of his written testimony when he becomes angry at being refused recognition or restitution as a victim of the Holocaust, is shown to be rather angry throughout the film. He even lashes out at the interviewer, claiming, “I still bleed from the rape!” alluding to his rape by the Gestapo upon his arrest, which barely warrants two sentences in his book (Epstein and Friedman). In his anger, he even tells the interviewer that Jo, his male lover to whom he dedicates his book to but barely mentions his emotional or homosexual connection to in the text, was eaten by dogs (Epstein and Friedman). Thus, through video we are able to see another more emotional side of Pierre Seel: a side that displays Seel’s post-traumatic stress that is the inevitable result of his encounter with the heteronormative National Socialist machine. Though he may be extremely angry in his outbursts during the documentary, the viewer does in fact gain another, more intimate connection with the “narrator:” the documentary “reconnect[s] the enormous and abstract event of the Holocaust with the concrete voice and face of an individual” (Assmann 272).

Video may be able to provide another, more personal connection between the testifier and the viewer; however, this does not diminish the impact or the importance of written testimony or oral testimony that is transcribed and not videotaped. In fact, the video testimonies, most of which are given by men who have testified previously either through writing it themselves or orally, appear more emotional (such as Seel) and a complete “story” or narrative structure of their lives is more difficult to formulate. For

example, Dorthe Seifert in “Between Silence and License” states that the testimony of Heinz Dörmer, which was presented in *Paragraph 175*, was “rather truncated, perhaps influenced by his frailty which seemed to allow him to say very little and to tell his story in a fragmented manner” (100-1). Yet, Dörmer still is able to speak a little about his persecution, whereas Karl Gorath is shown only once in the film. In the brief clip of Gorath the viewer sees another frail, old man. However, similar to Seel, Gorath is reluctant to be videorecorded. He tells the interviewer that he does not want to talk about it anymore and that it “is in the past for me” (Epstein and Friedman). The viewer never sees Gorath again. From this brief video recording, Gorath might be dismissed from the classification as a gay man who survived the camps because he does not speak his story to the camera and, thus, the viewer receives no information. Fortunately (and this is perhaps how/why the filmmakers included Gorath in the film), Gorath had previously given his testimony orally, which is presented in Müller’s introduction to the 1994 edition of Heinz Heger’s testimony. The reader learns that Gorath was sentenced in 1939 to a concentration camp after being denounced by “a jealous lover” and that on his transfer (in 1942) to Auschwitz “he managed to switch his pink triangle for a red one en route, an act that probably saved his life” (Müller, “Intro.,” 14). Müller also reveals how Gorath continuously fought with the German government for recognition and reparations as a Holocaust victim and survivor. Since, his requests for reparations (and, thus, his status as a victim of the Nazi party) were repeatedly denied, it is perhaps more understandable why, by the time of his videotaped testimony, Gorath no longer wanted to repeat his story (Müller, “Intro.,” 14).

Though it is obvious that all three media (videorecording, written, and orally transcribed testimony) have their own benefits as well as faults, it is nonetheless important not to prioritize one media over another—especially considering that many of the men videorecorded have also testified in a written form. Thus, this chapter will seek to explore in the few testimonies that do survive the question on how these testimonies represent the treatment of men imprisoned in the Nazi concentration camps for their homosexuality. Unfortunately this narrow focus goes against the proclamation by Kushner that “forcing survivors to give testimony, or ignoring their lives before and after, is to add another form to the abuse that began with their persecution, continued after the war in neglect and marginalization” (290). Though the exploration of these testimonies will focus specifically on the persecution, it is not this chapter’s intention to marginalize the survivors’ lives even further by not including a history of their lives prior and after persecution. However, considering the impact that the persecution has had on the lives of these men as well as the queer community as a whole, it is nevertheless important to study or provide a summary of the degree of cruelty and violence presented in these testimonies. Furthermore, since the focus of this chapter seeks to explore the brutalities committed against gay men in the camps, the specificity of subject matter under discussion will no doubt “erase” to a certain extent some of the voices that have (and some that have not) been mentioned thus far.

In an attempt to reduce the possibility of erasing these voices, I will explain reasons for the non-inclusion of some of these voices. For example, I do not include Gad Beck as being part of the homo-Holocaust testimonies. Beck did write a rather compelling and very detailed memoir concerning his life spent under the reign of

National Socialism, a reason why he was included as one of the main testifiers in *Paragraph 175*. Though he is considered by the literary critic Eric Sterling as being amongst heroic homosexuals who “risked their lives to save their lovers,” the fact remains that as a Jewish *mischlinge* (a half-Jew) who spent his years during the war in Berlin aiding the Zionist movement to save Jews, Beck’s personal recollection of the war and imprisonment has more to do with his radical anti-National Socialist politics than with his homosexuality (Sterling 376). Though, at almost the conclusion of the war the Gestapo does question Beck’s homosexual inclinations and Beck asserts “they couldn’t pin us down so easily as gay,” Beck himself states that his homosexuality had almost nothing to do with his actions during the war. In an article written prior to the publication of the English translation of Beck’s book, Wayne Hoffman states that “Beck’s version of homosexual persecution counters the recent narratives put forward by gay historians about men with the pink triangle [...] [H]is point is not that gay men didn’t suffer, but that as a gay Jew, there wasn’t any comparison as to where his true risks lay” (Beck 154; Hoffman 42). Beck does offer, however, one account of brutality against a homosexual (the one that denounced Beck to the Gestapo):

Paul Dreyer [...] he tried to improve his situation during the questioning by claiming he didn’t know we were Jews. Then why did he help us at all? ‘Because they were such nice, pretty boys.’ The poor idiot exposed himself as gay, in hopes that that might help him. Instead it brought additional battering [...] They had set two specially trained dogs on him—specialists in testicles and ears. He lost those body parts entirely; there wasn’t the slightest trace of outer ear to be seen, and he



was virtually deaf. As concerns the other body part, he said all that was left was a hole for peeing. (148)

Dreyer's story is retold by Beck without giving the reader the necessary information to tell whether or not Dreyer gave the account to Beck personally. Thus, it is possible that what had happened is hearsay. Furthermore, the brutality committed against Dreyer, though Beck alludes that it was due to his homosexuality (not to say it did not have some part in the harsh treatment given), could have been part of the torture common to those men captured that helped with the political movement Beck was involved in, especially considering how late within the war both men were arrested.

Beck certainly is a figurehead for human and homosexual (because he identifies himself as one) dignity because his underground political movement for the Jews is undeniable a success in the case for human rights. Yet, Beck was never arrested or tortured as a gay man. Therefore, he will not be included with the gay male survivors in this essay.

Likewise, Albrecht Becker, who is videorecorded in *Paragraph 175*, will also not be included because he (like many gay men during the time) joined the army in order to escape perhaps impended/inevitable arrest for homosexuality. Becker was never arrested and was never imprisoned in a concentration camp (Epstein and Friedman). Since Teofil Kosinski's testimonial was "told under the pseudonym of Stefan K." and dramatized in the short novel *Damned Strong Love* by Lutz van Dijk, his account will also be left out (Miller 35). It will be almost impossible to discern which facts, events, and actions in the novel are true and which ones van Dijk expanded upon or exaggerated for dramatic effect. The novel, however, will be explored in the following chapter. Karl, who was

interviewed in 1984 by Jürgen Lemke will also not be included. Karl, who was imprisoned in a concentration camp, was done so as a prisoner of war from France and was marked with the red triangle rather than the pink. Though Karl admits to an “acquaintanceship” with a man named “R.,” Karl was never persecuted for his homosexuality. In fact, Karl cannot even call himself or use the term “gay” during his testimony (Lemke 27-36).

Furthermore, and not surprisingly, lesbians are not within the parameter of this study. Though Claudia Schoppman in her text *Days of Masquerade: Life Stories of Lesbians During the Third Reich* is able to present a plethora of interviews with lesbians (including Annette Eick, who was featured in *Paragraph 175*) who survived in the camps as well as outside the camps during Nazi control over Germany, none of these women were imprisoned for their homosexuality. Most of the women presented in the text who were imprisoned were marked with a black triangle or red triangle; and, thus, not persecuted for their homosexuality. Furthermore, even though she is able to present a case of two women (Elli Smula and Margarete Rosenberg: a coup for Schoppmann considering that, according to Epstein and Friedman, “researchers have uncovered only five cases of lesbians being sent to the concentration camps”) who were specifically arrested for being lesbians, she is unable to present any testimony regarding their treatment (Schoppmann 1; Epstein and Friedman).

Such is the same for the lesbian survivor whom Terrie Couch interviewed over a period of time in the 1980s. The woman, anonymously named “Liebe P.” acknowledges that she was imprisoned (though it is not mentioned under what category, but presumably a red triangle), when asked whether she could “estimate how many lesbians were there”

in the camps, her response was “no” because it was “*verboten* (forbidden)” (Couch 19). Liebe P. never furthered any discussion about her time in the camps.

Given the necessary but unfortunate reason for the exclusion of the abovementioned testimonies in an effort not to have their voices erased, I focus on the remainder of the Holocaust testimonies given by men who experienced firsthand the brutalities of the Nazi regime because of their sexuality. Rather than attempting to piece together some sort of cohesive narrative structured account from all of these accounts, each man’s testimony will be presented individually. Commonalities will start to emerge even within exploring separately the persecution of these gay men.

### Erich

Interviewed in 1984 by Jürgen Lemke, Erich was arrested for being a homosexual on July 5, 1935 at the age of 34 (Lemke 18). Imprisoned until liberation, Erich spent time in five different concentration camps (all located within Germany): Columbia-Haus, Lichtenburg, Esterwegen, Sachsenhausen, and Flossenbürg (Lemke 18-20). Erich repeatedly asserts that he and his fellow pink triangle inmates “were the lowest of the low” and that “always and everywhere, in every camp, the hardest and shittiest work was reserved for us” (Lemke 18-19). The most common work that the 175ers were put to task was in the clay pits (nicknamed the “death pits”), where men had to continuously fill wagons full of mud and rock and then push the wagons up a steep incline out of the pit...an assignment that was difficult, dangerous, and led to the death of innumerable men (Lemke 19). Erich, who self-secluded himself from other gay men in attempt to

survive (though he latter regrets that decision) notes that “they picked on the tall, strong, handsome guys just as much as on the real queens. Those types did not live long” (Lemke 20). Furthermore, Erich states that “it was hunger that finished us off. The fact that we were met everywhere with ‘Ha, you queer swine’ did not make us suffer long, but we suffered constantly from undernourishment” (Lemke 21). Erich even went on to proclaim that “you won’t hear heroic tales about our kind,” which is perhaps the most revealing statement given about his own treatment (Lemke 21). Erich was so psychologically destroyed by the SS as well as the kapos that he removed himself from any contact with the homosexual community and began to believe that neither he nor any gay man could possibly be a contribution to anything heroic or, through expansion, anything at all.

#### Friedrich-Paul von Groszheim

Groszheim was arrested along with 230 other gay men in Lübeck on January 23, 1937. After spending two years in prison for his homosexuality (a time that he does not detail in his testimony), he volunteered to be castrated rather than to remain (where he was imprisoned quite briefly) in the Sachsenhausen concentration camp (Müller, “Information.”). During his orally given testimony in Jeanrond’s and Weishaupt’s documentary, Groszheim remained anonymous by not allowing his physical identity to be revealed, citing “fear of humiliation” from his community. Groszheim exemplifies Geoffrey J. Giles point that castration was used as a mere instrument of punishment than an actual solution to homosexuality (see Chapter One, page 24-5).

## Heinz F.

Heinz F. is shown as a frail yet rather astute elderly man in his videorecorded testimony given in *Paragraph 175*. Though he does admit that he feels “shame” from his past (most likely caused from the years spent under governments that condemned his sexuality), he relays to the interviewer that he spent a year and a half in Dachau (located in Germany) after being arrested for his homosexuality (Epstein and Friedman). After his release from Dachau, Heinz F. was continuously followed by members of the Gestapo and was later rearrested for homosexuality after he was caught with a male prostitute, who Heinz F. implies was either a police informant or undercover member of the Gestapo (Epstein and Friedman). Heinz F. spent over another seven years in a concentration camp for being a repeat Paragraph 175 offender (Epstein and Friedman).

## Kurt von Ruffin

Ruffin, who has already been mentioned, was and is perhaps the only gay men incarcerated by the Nazis who has revealed that gay men were labeled with a large ‘A’ for “ass-fucker” (prior to the establishment of the triangle demarcating system). Ruffin was incarcerated without trial for nine months in the Lichtenburg concentration camp (Jeanrond and Weishaupt). In an interview with Frank Rector, Ruffin relates many of the abuses gay men had to suffer with in the camp. He recalls that in the case of a “young male prostitute from Steglitz [...] the SS forced [the boy] into giving them blow jobs one after another” and that “there were holes in the walls and [the SS guards] would reach

through the holes and play with the genitals of the men sleeping close to the holes. Then they would say they had caught them jacking off, and they would beat them” (Rector 156). In a more brutal example, Ruffin remembers that “one day all the gays who were transvestites were ordered to strip and then were beaten and tortured. This greatly amused the SS. The SS thought it uproariously funny when one of them pushed the head of a transvestite into a toilet bowl and held him down until he drowned” (Rector 157). Commonly, the SS would also “flog” gay men’s genitals (Rector 159). Though Ruffin was released prior to liberation, he still lived in fear of re-arrest. This fear was not ill-founded; the Nazis did attempt to put him back into a work camp, but a friend was able to save him from that fate (Rector 159). He proclaimed that “We gays who were still free were forced to be extremely cautious. We had to be extremely careful because we were frightened of spies and informers” (Rector 159).

#### Paul Gerhard Vogel

Though Vogel, who was videorecorded in the Jeanrond and Weishaupt documentary, was first sentenced to serve time in the Emsland camps, located in the lower region of Germany, for his communist politics, he was later rearrested and sent to the same camps (for a combined incarceration time of seven years) for his homosexuality. After being arrested for being a homosexual, Vogel spent most of his time in solitary confinement, as did most homosexuals in that camp. For six months, Vogel had his hands tied to his feet so that he was “bent over” (perhaps the Nazi guards idea of a practical homosexual joke) and could only eat what he could get into his mouth without the use of

his hands. After liberation, Vogel was given a letter by the British army that stated he had served time in prison. However, the letter did not help in Vogel's attempt to be recognized as a victim of the Holocaust or to receive any sort of restitutions from the German government. (Jeanrond and Weishaupt)

### Karl Gorath

Karl Gorath, who spent four years between Neuengamme (in Northern Germany), Auschwitz (in Southern Poland), and the Mauthausen (in Austria) concentration camps, has repeatedly been denied restitutions and acknowledgment as a victim of the National Socialist Party's plan to cleanse the German people (Müller, "Intro.," 8, 14). Though, as aforementioned, Gorath was reluctant to speak on camera—claiming “that is in the past for me”—he still shows his internal strength to tell his story and have his story heard by agreeing, at first, to be a part of the documentary film *Paragraph 175* (Epstein and Friedman).

### Heinz Dörmer

Dörmer recalls in *Paragraph 175* the torture of gays on the “trees” (refer to footnote 11 on page 38) and how the screams of pain from the victims could be heard throughout the camp. Dörmer was rearrested even after liberation under Paragraph 175 and has never received reparations or acknowledgement of his status as a victim during the Holocaust by the German government. (Epstein and Friedman)

## Pierre Seel

Seel was arrested after the take over of France by the Nazi party. Since his name was recorded in the Alsace's police records as being a homosexual (an illegal act since homosexuality was not illegal in France from 1792 until the Nazis took over), the Gestapo was able to arrest Seel under Paragraph 175 (Seel 21; 24). Seel gives a very descriptive account of the brutality and torture methods used against him and his fellow gay prisoners. He recalls being called a "*schweinehund* [slang for a gay man equivalent to 'swine-dog']" and "filthy faggot" (Seel 24). Upon being interrogated for violation of Paragraph 175, "one after another the interrogators yelled, threatened, brutalized. They tried to corner us, exhaust us, quell any resistance [...] Kneeling on a ruler, we had to confirm that all these names [on the police record] made up the roster of homosexuals in Mullhouse. The walls echoed with our screams [...] The SS began pulling out the fingernails of some of the prisoners" (Seel 25). The SS guards then "broke the rulers we were kneeling on and used them to rape us" (Seel 26). Seel asserts in the documentary film that this rape has left him "ninety percent disabled after the war" (Epstein and Friedman).

Though once Seel was sent to the concentration camp he wore a blue bar to denote his homosexuality rather than a pink triangle, he relates that "with my blue ribbon, which was quickly interpreted by my fellow unfortunates, I realized I could expect nothing from them" (Seel 36). Seel was also subjected to medical experimentations: "sometimes the authorities wanted to inflict monstrous experiments on me. Mostly these consisted of very painful injections in my nipples [...] During one injection session, my



unfortunate neighbor blacked out and collapsed: the needle had struck his heart. We never saw him again” (Seel 40). The most horrific treatment of a homosexual that Seel recalls in his text was of his lover Jo (though as aforementioned the reader does not get the same emotional connection that Seel exudes for Jo in his text as he does in *Paragraph 175*). The SS stripped Jo, who was only eighteen, “naked and shoved a tin pail over his head. Next they sicced [*sic*] their ferocious German shepherds on him; the guard dogs first bit into his groin and thighs, then devoured him right in front of us. His shrieks of pain were distorted and amplified by the pail in which his head was trapped” (Seel 43). Seel, who was released six months after his incarceration, has never received recognition as a deportee or as a victim of the National Socialist Party (Seel 140).

### Heinz Heger

Imprisoned for six years in a Vienna prison as well as the Sachsenhausen and Flossenbürg concentration camps, Heinz Heger, due to the fact that he was able to keep a diary during his imprisonment, gives the most detailed testimony of the persecution of homosexuals by the Nazis. Like many gays, Heger was summoned to appear to the Gestapo’s Department II (the Department for the Investigation of Homosexuality and Abortion) (Heger 21). Once sentenced and imprisoned, Heger recalls countless brutalities committed against homosexuals, which he stated were “the lowest of the low in this ‘scum’ were we, the men with the pink triangle” (Heger 32). He was forced upon first arrival in the camp to fellate his fellow prisoners: “with thumps and blows they forced me to suck their cocks, which I never would have done voluntarily, and this went on several

times a day from then on” (Heger 28). The brutal treatment of homosexuals by other inmates did not end there. As Heger notes, each concentration camp had to send out a certain number of its prisoners to be eliminated at one of the extermination camps. The list of prisoners to be sent was compiled by the camp senior (a duty assigned to an inmate). Heger asserts, “if the camp senior was a political [inmate, marked with the red triangle], you could be sure that, by far, the greater number of those prisoners marked down for extermination would be men with the pink triangle” (103).

Heger also relates how most gay men became sexual servants to specific kapos. Heger himself became the sexual slave to several different kapos during his stay in the concentration camp.

Yet, the harshest treatment came from the SS guards of the camp. In 1941, when the camp gained a new commander “his first order was that our pink triangles should be replaced by new ones that were almost double in size. And over the triangle a yellow stripe should be sewn, 2 centimeters wide and 12 centimeters long” (Heger 67). The reason for this new demarcation was so that the commander, to quote, “can recognize you filthy queer scum before you get close” (Heger 67).

Many homosexuals were sentenced to lashings on the ‘horse,’ to which bodies would be tied and then a guard would horse whip the prisoner (Heger 54). Heger also recalls the “cap trick,” which gains notoriety in the fictional play *Bent* by Martin Sherman. Homosexuals were told by guards to throw their caps close to the concentration camp fence. The prisoner was then asked to retrieve the cap and was shot because he was within five meters of the fence and, thus, the prisoner was considered to be attempting

escape. Heger states that while working in the granite quarry alone he witnessed ten occasions when this occurred (50).

Heger was also put to work in the clay pits which he dubbed “the ‘Auschwitz’ for homosexuals” because, as he claims, “thousands upon thousands of homosexuals must have lost their tormented lives there” (37). Heger was later employed in the construction of a new firing range for the SS guards. Since the SS guards did not wait for the completion of the range, they “came to the firing range to start their shooting practice while we prisoners had to carry on emptying our barrows on the mound” (Heger 43). Inevitably, prisoners were shot. Like the clay pits, Heger states that “once again, it was only homosexuals who were employed, plus a few Jews who never returned to the camp in the evening alive” (Heger 43). Surviving both the clay pit and the firing range, Heger was later assigned to work in the granite quarry, another job where “only Jews and homosexuals were assigned” (Heger 49).

Heger also notes how “it was rare for any gay person taken into the sick bay to come out alive. We who wore the pink triangle were prioritized for medical experiments, and these generally ended in death” (34).

In general, these testimonies show how the orally recorded or written testimonies present more information regarding the persecution of homosexuals than those testimonies that were videorecorded. Though this is perhaps due to the editing choices of the directors or the questions asked by the interviewers, the video testimonies still

contribute a human face—a “concrete voice”—that allows its viewers to know that these people do exist and their stories present memories of actual events.

Taken as a collective whole, these few testimonies do share some rather blinding commonalities. The clay pits and other such “death traps” are repeatedly mentioned, as are the physical and sexual abuse forced upon gay male victims. Furthermore, it is clear that although the pink triangle may differ (from the originating marker ‘A,’ to the blue bar, to the enlarged and embellished pink triangle) these markers of homosexuality that were forced on these men stigmatized them into a “lower” subset of victims within the camps.

But what is rather intriguing about most of these testimonies, if not all of the them, is that they present a less severe representation of the brutalities committed against gay men by the Nazis than in the gay Holocaust fiction that will be analyzed in the next chapter. Only Heinz Heger’s account presents a representation of severe brutality against homosexuals. However, though he may have claimed like others that the pink triangles were the “lowest of the low,” Heger never neglects to mention that Jews were always a part of the work details that homosexuals were assigned to. Even Heinz Dörmer stated that when Jews were placed on the “trees” their bodies were twisted to induce more pain and suffering (Epstein and Friedman). Thus, even within their own gay male centric testimony and their claims that they were the worst off, Jews are still located on the same playing field of Nazi brutality. These testimonies do not circumvent the fact that Jews were being killed *en masse*, but simply assert the fact that homosexuals were tortured and killed as well.

Nevertheless, the most notable commonality that emerges from these testimonies is the fact that homosexual men who were imprisoned because of their sexuality were never successful in their attempts to gain recognition or reparations as victims of the Holocaust. This, as mentioned above, can even be seen as the reason behind the choices of men like Karl Gorath who now refuse to speak of their persecution.

Though these testimonies mainly attest to the fact the Nazi treatment towards gay men was completely horrendous, there are positivisms that also emerge within their testimonials. First off, the mere fact that most of these men who first gave their stories anonymously have come out of hiding to reveal who they actually are and fight to have their stories heard attests to their own personal dignity for their sexuality. To come over such resilience against homosexuality during and after the war and to actually present themselves shows an overall refusal to allow their homosexuality to be forced into hiding or into shame any longer. Furthermore, there are portions of a few of the testimonies that truly exemplify a notion of homosexual dignity and love. Heinz Heger was the “first and only prisoner with the pink triangle to become a Kapo and foreman” (Heger 90). This position allowed him to look over and relatively take care of around twenty-five pink triangle inmates who would have had a much worse fate if left to the hands of another kapo in charge of some sort of work detail (Heger 93). Furthermore, even while still being imprisoned, Heger managed to find love and express homosexual love within the camps. He states that “I got into a relationship with another German pink-triangle prisoner—no relationship of convenience [i.e. being sexually abused by a kapo in exchange for protection] this time, but a genuine one, based on mutual understanding and trust” (Heger 95).

Even Pierre Seel, after years of trying to belong to the heteronormative world by being married to a woman and having children, eventually came out to express his true sexual identity and the tortures he had to endure because of that factor of his identity. Seel concludes (just as he begins with the dedication) in his written testimony a proclamation of his love for his childhood lover, Jo. He ends his text stating that “when I have finished wandering, I go home. Then I light a candle that permanently burns in my kitchen when I am alone. That frail flame is my memory of Jo” (Seel 140). That flame, like so many other contemporary commemorative candlelight vigils, represents Seel’s refusal to let go of his homosexual love as well as his homosexuality in totality.

Even though these men have suffered and continued to suffer by never being legally viewed as victims of the Holocaust, their testimonies do show resilience. These gay men refuse to have their homosexuality diminished or erased. Thus, these testimonies have a huge impact on the queer community. It is their testimony—their memories—as well as their resistance to and perseverance through such continued attempts of erasure that have affected a communal queer history. Historian Alon Confino confirms this point when he asserts that “memory has taken its place now as a leading term, recently perhaps *the* leading term, in cultural history” (Assmann 262-3). Thus, their memory lives on within cultural history, especially queer cultural history. What these men encountered and suffered has established a queer collective memory that exists to this day. They may have never received reparations or recognition as victims, but certainly they do contradict Erich’s ominous utterance that there are no gay heroes. You *will* find heroes of their kind, and whether he knew it or not, by merely telling his story Erich took a heroic leap and he,

along with the other survivors, have changed the way academia and history look at the Holocaust and the way queers look at themselves.

### **CHAPTER THREE:**

#### THE FICTIONAL QUESTION: POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE ATTRIBUTES OF GAY HOLOCAUST LITERATURE

*A work of art opens a void, a moment of silence, a question without answer, provokes a breach without reconciliation where the world is forced to question itself. What is necessarily a profanation in the work of art returns to that point, and, in the time of that work swamped in madness, the world is made aware of its guilt.*

Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*

Gregory Woods begins his book on the history of gay literature with a quote from the “Bylaws for the Urning [i.e. homosexual] Union” by Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, who proclaims that one of the “principal goals of this as yet non-existent Union [is] to found an Urning literature” (1). This “union”—or what can be now called a queer collective identity and consciousness—through a foundation of literature is now a relatively accepted and expected fact. The importance of this foundational literature is supported by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, who within her axiomatic discourse in *Epistemology of the Closet*, supports the idea of a “re-creation of minority gay canons from currently noncanonical material” (58). The genre, or what Sedgwick might label as a mini-canon, of gay Holocaust literature (a phrase coined by Kai Hammermeister in his 1997 essay “Inventing History: Towards a Gay Holocaust Literature”) would certainly fall into the realm of a recreated (or in this case a completely created) gay mini-canon based on noncanonical material. In the case of gay Holocaust literature such noncanonical material is the history and testimony that has been described in the previous two chapters as well as other types of materials.



The foundation of such a literature through the use of this material is not Holocaust-specific. As Wood asserts, “‘gay literature’ [...] often seems to exist in the spaces between texts, shaped by a debate between pro- and anti-homosexual historians and critics” (16). Yet, when considering gay Holocaust literature, it becomes quite obvious that these texts exist within that liminal space between both history and reality. Considering the rather large chronologic gap between the actual historical event of the persecution of homosexuals during the Holocaust and the reporting of that event, Jean Baudrillard’s proclamation that “history is our lost referential, that is to say our myth” becomes even more haunting as one realizes how very true it is that the history of the persecution of gays was and still is relatively our lost referential (43).

This lost referential or erasure, Baudrillard claims, “must be effaced by an artificial memory” (49). Thus, in order to regain that lost history—Baudrillard’s myth/history’s erasure—and to remember what happened (giving validity to the utterance “never again”), gay Holocaust literature must be imagined and then created. Yet the authors that have participated thus far in the establishment of this mini-canon of queer collective memory have not based their texts solely on poetic license alone. All of them—all seven texts that exist—reflect certain features of other Holocaust literature, testimony, and history, i.e. Sedgwick’s noncanonical material. As Gregory Woods explains, “the literature of the gay holocaust has to be assembled piecemeal, not from accounts by the gay survivors themselves, but from accounts by prisoners from the other categories and even from the words of the Nazis and their supports of heterosexism, whatever their nationality” (248).

Dorthe Seifert confirms the need for gay Holocaust writers to look other sources for inspiration in her essay “Between Silence and License: The Representation of National Socialist Persecution of Homosexuality in Anglo-American Fiction and Film.” She asserts that:

Writers about the persecution of homosexuals under National Socialism have been relegated to collecting information from a range of rather unreliable sources such as other concentration camp prisoners [...] or members of the SS, such as Rudolf Höß [Hoess or Höss], commandant of Aushwitz. The limited amount of sources in the specific case further underscores how dependent any account of this persecution is on imaginative reconstruction. (106-7)

Thus, gay Holocaust literary authors have to garner most of their information about the persecution of homosexuals during the Holocaust from the few testimonies and histories that do exist. But, considering the lack of that information, these authors have to look at other examples of writing during the Holocaust and about the Holocaust (basically, the plethora of testimonies given by Jewish victims and the numerous historic accounts of Jewish persecution) in order to formulate and imagine a relatively realistic representation of stories about the persecution of gays. Therefore, it makes sense that most of the gay Holocaust fictions stylistically represent testimonials, considering their primary sources for examples of Holocaust stories were testimonies.

Martin Sherman’s play *Bent* (one of two texts of gay Holocaust literature that does not follow the testimonial format) exemplifies how an author of such a literature had to formulate his (or her) narrative from other non-gay sources. Sherman’s play, first published as well as performed (in London) in 1979, preceded the first book solely

dedicated to the history of the gay Holocaust: Frank Rector's *The Nazi Extermination of Homosexuals* (1981). Therefore, *Bent*, like Heinz Heger's testimony, confirms Seifert's statement that "fictional and autobiographical works have in part engendered historical research and vice versa" (104).

Complying with the literary theorist Scott Bravmann's assertion that "*queer fictions of the present* must be seen as contradictory *and* supplemental," Seifert also renders a connection between historical knowledge, fiction, and the formation of a collective memory (15, emphasis his own). Seifert claims that:

The reception of literature about the persecution of homosexuals is influenced by the general lack of factual knowledge about this persecution even among initiated readers such as gay audiences. Knowledge of this history among gay communities is mostly preserved within the framework of a collective memory. This has largely consisted of a vague awareness of the fact that persecution took place, without, however, specific or differentiated knowledge of dates, events, and figures. (105)

Thus, it can be inferred from her assertion that "specific or differentiated knowledge," i.e. specific historical details concerning the persecution of homosexuals, is not necessary in order to create such fiction and that it is not problematic that gay Holocaust literature does not completely represent the facts exactly as they are. Jean E. Howard agrees with this thought when she asserts that "literature is one of many elements participating in a culture's representation of reality to itself, helping to form its discourse on the family, the state, the individual, helping to make the world intelligible, though not necessarily helping to represent it 'accurately'" (27).

Most, if not all, of the gay Holocaust fictional texts inaccurately stretch the historic facts and truths. These inaccuracies present a negative attribute—perhaps the only one—of gay Holocaust fiction. However, the majority of the inaccuracies presented within these texts can be seen as an effect of the historical and academic erasure of sources. Yet, gay Holocaust literature must be understood as being a part and not separate of the newly articulated research on the persecution of gays during the Holocaust that they did not have access to. As the New Historicist H. Aram Vesser asserts, “literary and non-literary ‘texts’ circulate inseparably” (2). Thus, when read along with research, such as Richard Plant’s *The Pink Triangle*, that were unavailable at the time to the majority of these writers, one must understand how such inaccuracies can occur. Nevertheless, it is important to illustrate what precisely are the main inaccuracies of gay Holocaust literature in order for these inaccuracies to be closed to further criticism.

One of the most criticized texts within gay Holocaust literature for misrepresenting historical fact is Martin Sherman’s *Bent*. In the play, once Max, the main protagonist, is arrested and put on a train to a concentration camp, the character Horst explains to Max the taxonomy of the colored triangles: “Queer. If you’re queer, that is what you wear [a pink triangle]. If you’re a Jew, a yellow star. Political—a red triangle. Criminal—green. Pink’s the lowest” (33). Afterwards, Max is able to get a Jewish star from the guards on the train after he is able to have sex with a dead girl—thus implying that Jews suffered less than homosexuals. Dorthe Seifert criticizes this scene: “During the period in which the fictional events take place, the existence of a hierarchy among concentration camp prisoners in which homosexual prisoners would have ranked lower than Jewish inmates cannot be substantiated by historiographical evidence” (111).

However, this criticism is not meant to devalue the fact that pink triangle inmates were heavily persecuted. It is true that pink triangles did suffer greatly; to reiterate Klaus Müller statement, “a pink triangle meant harsher treatment in the camps. Gay men suffered a higher mortality rate than did other relatively small victim groups” (13).

Another highly criticized aspect of gay Holocaust literature is that the majority of the other fictional texts exaggerate the numbers of how many pink triangles were in the camps and how many met their deaths within those camps. In Robert C. Reinhart’s novel *Walk the Night* it is claimed that the number of homosexual deaths were “in the many tens of thousands” (27). In Lannon D. Reed’s *Behold a Pale Horse*, Dr. Mengele (who is also shown as an evil, menacing figure in Linda Kay Silva’s *Tory’s Tuesday*) tells Van that “we have received 83,279 [homosexuals] since Auschwitz opened” and that most of these gays Dr. Mengele rather enthusiastically uses in his deathly “experiments” (Reed 165). These numbers are incorrect. As illustrated in Chapter One, the current accepted estimate of homosexual deaths is between five and fifteen thousand. However, whether the numbers are exaggerated or not, the point gets across: gays were killed for being gay.

Unfortunately because some of the facts are inaccurate or exaggerated, other traumatic events represented in these texts that did occur will more than likely be taken as mere exaggerations or, at least, their validity questioned. This should not happen. For example, in *Behold a Pale Horse* Van’s lover Franz is castrated. Such castrations were common and did happen. Günter Grau, whose text *Hidden Holocaust?: Gay and Lesbian Persecution in Germany 1933-45* derives its historic, factual information from primary Nazi sources, reveals that in “Clause 2 of §14 permitted and regulated ‘castration indicated by reason of crime’ in the case of homosexual men” (246). Furthermore,

Geoffrey Giles's research, as mentioned in Chapter One, reports that at least 2,156 men (though not all, but most of them were homosexual) were castrated between 1934 and 1941 ("The Most Unkindest Cut," 46-7). Thus, though some may not want to believe and reject much of the suffering represented in these texts because of slight historic fallacies, many of the representations are accurate. Yet, as aforementioned, considering most of these gay Holocaust narratives derived their inspiration from a plethora of sources (mostly non-gay focused), it is understandable how some factual information that has been recently uncovered, such as Plant's *The Pink Triangle*, is left out. However, most of the representations presented within the texts are still grounded in historic fact and should not be shunted aside. Yet, even those texts not grounded in precise historical truths should not be dismissed. Most novels or representation are not exact representations; thus, these texts can still reflect a culture of persecution which has been historically erased.

As for the texts that consist of the genre of gay Holocaust fiction, there are seven narratives in total<sup>12</sup>. The first, and most important work, *Bent*, by Martin Sherman, was published and performed starting in 1979, and the latest text, *Clifford's Blues* by John A. Williams, was published in 1998. However, seven is a generous number when considering gay Holocaust literature. This fact will be illustrated once each text is broken down into a general category. Only two of those seven texts deal specifically with the persecution of men imprisoned for their homosexuality during the Nazi reign over Germany from 1933 to 1945. Those texts are Martin Sherman's *Bent* and Lannon D. Reed's *Behold a Pale Horse: A Novel of Homosexuals in the Nazi Holocaust*. Robert C.

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<sup>12</sup> This chapter does not include a discussion of those texts such as Christopher Isherwood's *The Berlin Stories: The Last of Mr. Norris and Goodbye to Berlin* which lie on the periphery of gay Holocaust literature.

Reinhart's novel *Walk the Night: A Novel of Gays in the Holocaust* does allow a gay survivor, Dieter Holtman, to retell his story of persecution as a pink triangle inmate in a concentration camp (which makes the plural of "gays" in the title of the text rather misleading—there was only one gay man whose story is told). However, the novel is what Thane Rosenbaum would consider a post-Holocaust novel, because it mainly focuses on the "present day" character Paul Kohl and the personal trials and tribulations he encounters while trying to find Dieter.

Fictionalized because of their narrative adaptation, there are two novels that are based on true stories: Lutz van Dijk's *Damned Strong Love: The True Story of Willi G. and Stephan K.* and Erica Fischer's *Aimée & Jaguar: A Love Story, Berlin 1943*. Though these texts might be considered testimony at first (*Aimée & Jaguar* even provides photos of the two women and is based on the collected interviews of Lilly Wust, also known as, Aimée) they are not when considering how they might have been dramatized for the genre of the novel. However, they are still useful within the category of gay Holocaust literature. *Damned Strong Love* illustrates the persecution of men imprisoned under paragraph 175 by the Gestapo. Although the main character Stephan K. (revealed in Chapter Two as Teofil Kosinski), a Polish, young boy, was never sent to a camp (he was sent to a prison), his story exemplifies the negative treatment of homosexuals by the National Socialists even if they were not sent to the labor and death camps. *Aimée & Jaguar* does not really deal with the persecution of homosexuals at all. Its main characters Lilly Wust and Felice Schragenheim, also known as Jaguar, are two women who are able to fall in love with each other in Berlin amidst the constant vigilance and constraints of the Nazi party. Felice is eventually arrested by the Nazis—for being

Jewish, not a lesbian—and is assumed to have died in the camps (Fischer 170). Though *Aimée & Jaguar* exemplify the ability for homosexual love to survive under harsh constraints, it is a stretch to place this particular novel in the category of gay Holocaust literature and should be disregarded when this essay analyzes gay Holocaust literature *en general*.

Linda Kay Silva's novel *Tory's Tuesday* also deals with the love between two women: Elsa and Marissa. Though both women are sent to Auschwitz after the *Kristallnacht* (Crystal Night or Night of the Broken Glass; November 9-10, 1938), they are not imprisoned for being lesbians. Elsa is sent to the camp for being a Jew and Marissa is sent there under the red triangle (political prisoner) for being Polish. Though not specifically speaking to the treatment of pink triangle prisoners, the women are able to remain together and their love is able to outlast their imprisonment. Thus, the novel shows that homosexual love can exist and be expressed within the camps. Furthermore, Silva's text is of particular importance since it is the only text of gay Holocaust fiction that addresses lesbians within the camps.

The cover of John A. William's *Clifford's Blues*<sup>13</sup> is rather misleading. The novel's main protagonist, Clifford Pepperidge, an African-American gay man, is illustrated sitting at a piano wearing a tuxedo. Though a tuxedo is obviously not part of the traditional garb worn by prisoners at Dachau, where Clifford is "imprisoned," the tuxedo is his uniform as he plays in a band for the entertainment of the Nazi *Shutz-Staffer* (SS) and *Sturm-Abteilungen* (SA) members at their forested retreat between Dachau and Munich. Yet Clifford's tuxedo is still shown to be embellished with a pink triangle that all gay inmates are given to represent their "crime." Perhaps Kelly Kofron, the illustrator

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<sup>13</sup> The first edition of the text: Minneapolis, Coffee House Press, 1998.



of the cover, did not read the novel, but Clifford never had the burden of wearing the pink triangle throughout his “stay” at Dachau. For one, Clifford never really experienced living in the concentration camp. He lived as a *calfactor* (houseboy) with the homosexual SS commander, Dieter Lange, who was a *raffke* or male hustler/pimp prior to the Nazi takeover of Germany. Dieter, who lusted for but never received any attention or affection from Clifford in Berlin, changed Clifford’s arrest documents so that Clifford, on paper (though he, Clifford, did not care that anyone knew) was not shown to be arrested for being a homosexual. Dieter also arranged through changing Clifford’s reason for arrest from homosexuality to dealing cocaine for Clifford to wear a green triangle (representing a criminal). In fact, the novel hardly deals with the persecution of gays in the camp at all. There are only around seven to eight references by Clifford to the pink triangles throughout the entire novel. Surprisingly, the novel makes it out to seem that the Jehovah’s Witnesses (the purple triangles) faced worse treatment in the camp (an error in fact as researched by Lautmann which is articulated in Chapter One) (Williams 229). The novel also focuses more on Clifford as a black inmate in the camp than on his homosexuality. The novel in totality does not show any real focus or interest on how the status of Clifford’s sexual orientation affected his treatment within Dachau (Williams 308-9). However, the sexual abuse that Clifford endures throughout his stay with Dieter (starting in 1933 and lasting throughout the rest of the war) exemplifies the most common and typical, negative treatment of gay, imprisoned men during the Holocaust.

There are many commonalities that can be found within all of the gay Holocaust literature. Not only are the same concentration camps (Auschwitz and Dachau) or names of officials (Hitler, Himmler, Dr. Mengele) represented within many of the texts, but

most have the same stylistic approach—that of a testimonial. Although Thane Rosenbaum in his essay “The Audacity of Aesthetics: The Post-Holocaust Novel and the Respect for the Dead,” claims (though he is mainly speaking about Jewish Holocaust literature) that “Holocaust literature was perceived as testimony framed in literary terms” and that newer Holocaust literature is leaving behind its testimonial framework, the opposite is the case when considering gay Holocaust literature (493). In fact, the only two fictional pieces within the gay Holocaust literature category that do not take a testimonial approach are the first two texts that were published: *Bent* and *Behold a Pale Horse*. *Damned Strong Love* is presented in a narrative way similar to that of Sherman’s and Reed’s texts because it is based on a true story and, therefore, essentially comes from a testimonial perspective. Although *Walk the Night* is a narrative text reminiscent of a mystery novel, when Paul Kohl finally finds Dieter Holtman he confesses/testifies his experience in the camps and the abuse he received as a pink triangle prisoner. *Tory’s Tuesday* has Elsa and Marissa standing in front of an audience giving their testimonies; the novel begins with this opening line: “My name is Elsa Liebowitz, and I am a survivor of the Auschwitz death camp in Poland” (Silva 1). *Clifford’s Blues* is in totality Clifford Pepperidge’s journal (very reminiscent of Anne Frank) that he kept during his twelve years of imprisonment. This journal becomes an artifact of testimony.

Yet, the most important commonality that runs throughout gay Holocaust literature is also these texts’ most positive attribute. This commonality is the ability for homosexuals to find and show love even in the face of the most horrifying of traumatic experience. Hammermeister affirms this positivism when he asserts that homosexual “dignity [and] love” are the prevailing messages that come out of gay Holocaust literature

(26). This ability to still have love and dignity within the heterosexist concentration camps that seek to destroy homosexuality illustrate “the defeat of the torturers” because the tortures are unable to prevent such affections from triumphing (26). Thus pride—as a combination of homosexual love, dignity, and survival—becomes in these texts the prevailing positive message.

Though the gay character in Reinhart’s *Walk the Night* is only given a small smattering of pages within the novel, Dieter Holtman (known as Helmut Kiel after the war) is still able to present Hammermeister’s ideals of homosexual love and dignity. Holtman relates to his long-lost son Paul Kohl that during the few remaining days before liberation dysentery began to break out within the camp. Holtman’s lover was one of the unfortunate prisoners to become infected with the disease. Yet, even though “there was medicine in the camp [and] officers were hoarding it [because] they knew that when the war ended, medicine would be priceless on the black market,” Holtman decides to place his own individual dignity aside in order to save his friend (201). Holtman tells Paul that

For years an officer had been after me and I thought, I will help my friend live. I will give myself to that ugly awful man to get the medicine [...] The ugly officer didn’t even stop shuffling through files while I told him he could have me [...] I said, ‘Didn’t you hear me, sir?’ and he turned [...] and said ‘You’re too old and scrawny.’ [...] So, four days before you Americans arrived, my friend died. (201-2)

Though Holtman’s offer is rejected and his friend perishes, his story illustrates homosexual love and dignity. For one, Holtman is able to find someone within the camp that he falls in love with, proving the rather arbitrary and ineffectiveness of the Nazis’

attempt to exterminate actual homosexual love. Furthermore, Holtman, by giving up his own personal dignity by making perhaps one of the most horrifying sacrifices—selling one’s body—in actuality exemplifies homosexual dignity. Holtman, by offering to willingly commit a demoralizing act for someone other than himself, shows how homosexual dignity prevailed within the concentration camps<sup>14</sup>.

The two women, Marissa and Elsa, presented in Silva’s novel *Tory’s Tuesday*<sup>15</sup> demonstrate how homosexual love can exist and last throughout the horrors of the Aushwitz concentration camp. Inside the camp, Marissa and Elsa make a pact together that if they happened to be separated after their release they will wait for each other at Tory’s, a small café in their hometown in Poland, every Tuesday until they finally are reunited. As it were, the two lovers are indeed split apart during the chaos of liberation and it is Elsa who returns to Bialystok to wait for Marissa’s arrival. Elsa, waiting patiently for her lover that quite possibly may never return, goes to Tory’s every Tuesday for over two months (160). When questioned by the café owner’s wife as to why Elsa continually waits for what is perhaps a lost cause, Elsa continually replies, “She’s alive, Mrs. Walesa. I don’t know how I know that, but I do. And until someone proves differently, I will wait for her return” (162).

As fate would have it, Marissa does return to meet her lover at Tory’s and upon first seeing of her long lost love, Elsa, paying no attention to her surrounding or the fear of any backlash, takes “Marissa’s hands [and] brought them to her lips and kissed each

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<sup>14</sup> Reinhart’s account (similar to what occurs in *Bent*) shows the rather paradoxical nature of homosexuality in the camps. The SS guards want to use gay men for sexual pleasure, yet, do not consider themselves as homosexuals. Perhaps, in the camps (similar to today’s prisons) the lack of females allow heterosexuals to utilize homosexual behavior without having to identify themselves as homosexuals (whereas the gay inmate identifies himself with his homosexual behavior prior to being imprisoned).

<sup>15</sup> Since Silva’s novel is quite similar to other gay Holocaust literary texts, it is important to relate what occurs in her novel since it is perhaps one of the only lesbian love stories that is published concerning how lesbian (though not imprisoned for being so) love could survive as well.

one” (178). Uttering her sentiments, Elsa says to Marissa, “everyone kept telling me to go on with my life, but I couldn’t [...] you are all I have. I could not possibly give up [...] I couldn’t anymore that I could just stop breathing” (179). Marissa, too, proclaims her love for Elsa: “‘Only you, my love, You are all I need now.’ Pulling Elsa to her, Marissa kissed her on the mouth” (179).

Yet Marissa and Elsa are not the only representations of homosexual love surviving the camps presented in Silva’s text. Yvonne, a kapo who, as many of the men did with their underlings, took the young woman Katya as her lover. Though as the story progresses, Yvonne and Katya fall in love with each other and join Marissa and Elsa in their Polish town. Yvonne, showing homosexuality love and dignity, sells her jewelry collection (that was hidden during her imprisonment in Aushwitz) in order for all four women to move to America (182). The novel ends, with both Marissa and Elsa on stage concluding their testimonial, with Elsa’s utterance that “Yvonne and Katya are both retired now, and they live in the upstairs portion of our home. We have been a family since our arrival in the United States, and I’m sure we will continue to be until our final days” (182).

Yvonne, though placed in the double-edged sword role of kapo, is able to show her dignity throughout the camp by treating the women in her charge with care and compassion as well as giving up all of her monetarily valuable goods to allow all four women to live together in love and harmony in the United States. Elsa and Marissa, through keeping their word to wait for each other, show how homosexual love was never defeated within the camps. Their love for each other lasted longer than their forced

oppression and the months of separation after liberation. They never allow themselves to live believing that their loved one was lost forever.

At the end of the fictionalization of Toefil Kosinski's testimonial presented in *Damned Strong Love: The True Story of Willi G. and Stephan K.*, Lutz van Dijk presents a letter from Kosinski (or Stephan K. in the novel) written from Warsaw in November of 1994. In the letter, Kosinski writes that "to this day I have Willi to thank for my being able to experience feelings of love as something beautiful from the beginning" (134). Though Kosinski, a young Polish musician, and Willi, an Austrian drafted in to the German *Wehrmacht* (the general German army), spend very few days together, the impact of their love has on Kosinski is obvious in his letter to Lutz van Dijk (53). More than just expressing his unabashed thanks to Willi for opening his eyes up to the possibility of homosexual love, Kosinski's letter presents a nice parallel to the beginning of his persecution because of his sexuality. After Willi is shipped off to fight on the front lines of battle, Kosinski, completely unashamed of his feelings for Willi, writes a love letter to him. In his letter, which of course is intercepted by the Gestapo and becomes the reason for Kosinski's arrest, states that "I can't sleep, I think only of you. With love and kisses, your Stephan" (83; 89-90). Though Kosinski's first letter led to his persecution, the fact that he refuses to stop writing about his love for Willi—as expressed in the letter to van Dijk—represents his homosexual dignity. No matter what—persecution by the Gestapo, imprisonment, etcetera—Kosinski is never ashamed throughout his entire life that he has homosexual love and his continual proclamations of that love prove his refusal to erase that love.

Van in Lannon D. Reed's novel *Behold a Pale Horse* is arrested the day after the "Night of the Broken Glass." Though he is sent to Auschwitz for being a Jew, Van is also a homosexual. Throughout the novel, Van is given rather laborious tasks and later assists Dr. Mengele with his medical experiments. Yet, he proves himself to be a caring person who tries to limit the tortures he must inflict upon his fellow prisoners (just as Max relieves the tortures that could be inflicted on Horst in Sherman's *Bent*). Though such actions exemplify that Van, even as a "deviant" homosexual, is a good person, it is when Van's yellow-star of David is taken away from him and he is relabeled under the pink triangle that he exemplifies Hammermeister's notions of homosexual love and dignity.

Upon realizing that Van is a homosexual, the men (Jewish men) in his barracks attack Van and yell out "You are not a Jew anymore! Don't ever wear the Star of David again! Jews aren't queers! It is against God's laws! You are a queer! Here is where you belong!" (170). The men then file "past him, hitting, kicking, tearing at his skin and spitting in their utter disgust for him" (170). Van is then thrown out of his Jewish barracks. Unlike Max in Martin Sherman's play *Bent* (which is to be explored in Chapter Four), Van readily accepts his new identifying symbol: "In the center of the shadow of the Star was his new badge, the pink triangle, its inverted top pointing downward. As he gazed at the new emblem, his final truth, he knew that he could at last keep his vow to himself never again to live a lie" (171). Though it took a brutal attack from his own (ethnic) people, Van's willing acceptance of the pink triangle is a sigh of relief for him. He no longer has to hide his homosexual identity and feelings; he no longer has to hide the love that lies within himself.

Similar to *Tory's Tuesday*, Van illustrates homosexual dignity during the liberation of the camp at the end of the novel. This case is exemplified in Van's treatment of Franz, his lover prior to his arrest and who is imprisoned in Auschwitz for being a homosexual. Franz, a victim of castration by Mengele, who claimed "his penis was cancerous [...] We removed it [...] We have attached a tube he will learn to use for urinary purposes," is never abandoned or left to die or to suffer by Van (202). Van takes care of Franz throughout the rest of the novel, an act that shows Van's homosexual love and his refusal to abandon such love even in the most extreme of cases. Yet, Franz also proves his love for Van. During their escape from the camp during liberation, an SS guard follows the two men into the woods. Fearing for Van's life,

Franz brought [a] knife up and plunged it into the chest of the SS man. As the Nazi's pistol discharged, they both fell to the snow-covered ground. Van rushed to them, turned Franz over and pulled him off the dead guard. [Franz] was covered with blood, gushing from a hole in his stomach. (220)

Franz, knowing he is close to death, tells Van "I'll never really leave you, Van. You are the only one I've ever loved;" and, as he lies dying he utters his last words: "I love you, Van" (220-1). To which Van replies to the now dead Franz, "I love you, Franz" (220).

Franz makes the ultimate sacrifice in order to show his love for Van. This sacrifice proves Franz's respect for his homosexuality in that he is willing to give up his own life in order to save his love. Van, too, shows his own dignity for himself by not taking his own life in the face of the loss of Franz. He follows Franz sentiment that "Life is too precious. Too many of us have died. Life, Van, life, that is the most prized of all" (220). Thus, Reed, not following the stereotypical trope of gay literature in general,



allows Van to live and, therefore, to allow homosexual love and dignity to survive as well.

These examples from gay Holocaust literature exemplify how fictional accounts of the Holocaust are important and effective in establishing a queer collective memory. Douglas Crimp attests to this fact when he asserts that “it [is] the function of art [such as literature] not only to express the experiences of love and caring, loss and mourning, fear and despair, anger and outrage, but also to inform, to educate, and to engage in the activist struggle against [...] negligence of our governing institutions [such as historical and academic scholarship]” (257). Furthermore, these texts contribute and demonstrate Sedgwick’s theory that gay and lesbian literature is a “literature of oppression and resistance and survival and heroic making” (51). Hammermeister’s theory of homosexual love and dignity, expressed in each of these gay Holocaust literary texts, demonstrate all four of Sedgwick’s adjectival assertions of gay literature. Though each text does present the oppression of homosexuals, it is their ability to show that love and dignity can resist and survive that enables such heroes to be created that truly represents the positive effect this mini-canon can have on a contemporary queer audience.

Scott Bravmann furthers this point when he asserts that “the importance of history to gay men and lesbians goes beyond the lessons to be learned from the events of the past to include the meanings generated through the retellings of those events and the agency those meanings carry in the present” (4). Thus, gay Holocaust literature allows queers to remember what happened while learning the lessons that history has provided. As Bravmann concludes, “we [must] continue to imagine new futures from [...] gay and lesbian historical imaginations [...] [Q]ueer fictions of the past are equally visions for the

future, making provisional statements about conditional, undecided, perhaps alternative worlds which we might someday inhabit” (127). Such an alternative world can be imagined through a collective queer consciousness and memory that these fictional accounts, along with the history and testimony of the persecution of homosexuals, will help to further establish. This possible future world will be one that will allow such atrocities to “never again” happen.

## **CHAPTER FOUR:**

### **THE BENT STRUGGLE FOR LOVE AND DIGNITY: PAIN AND ABJECT HOMOSEXUALITY IN MARTIN SHERMAN'S PLAY**

The most highly acclaimed and criticized work within gay Holocaust literature is undoubtedly Martin Sherman's play *Bent*. The play was the first fictional work to be published (and in this case performed) that dealt explicitly with the matter of the persecution of gays during the Holocaust. Sherman's text, as the foundational piece of this mini-canon, can be considered the most "literary" work of this genre. *Bent* has had a verifiable range of success especially considering that when it was first performed in London in 1979 Sir Ian McKellan performed the starring role of Max (Sterling 372). Later, when it came to Broadway in 1980, Richard Gere played Max (Román iv). Seventeen years after its Broadway debut, a 1997 film adaptation of the play was directed by Sean Mathias and starred such well known celebrities as Clive Owen, Ian McKellan, Mick Jagger, and Jude Law. With such acclaimed, well-respected, and popular actors, the play is perhaps the only piece of gay Holocaust literature that has entered into the discourse of the dominant, i.e. heterosexual, society and culture. Thus, it is easy to understand how and why *Bent* has received so much attention.

Unfortunately, because of the political and social circumstances of the time, the play came under quite a bit of criticism. *Bent* was first produced during the rise of the gay liberation movement and when the AIDS epidemic was beginning to take its first victims. Because of these surrounding political, cultural and social factors, the play was criticized for pushing a political agenda and aligning its message with that of current politics rather than focusing on truthfully representing the persecution of gays during the Holocaust.

Erik Jensen points out this criticism in his essay, “The Pink Triangle and Political Consciousness: Gays, Lesbian, and the Memory of Nazi Persecution,” when he quotes the journal *Spectator* which claimed that the play came “dangerously close to enlisting the unspeakable horrors of Dachau in the propaganda services of Gay Liberation” (330). Though Sherman never denies the connection between the politics of the time and the politics of pre-Holocaust Germany, the fact that the play has been connected with a gay political movement shows how the piece has effectively been incorporated into a queer collective memory and consciousness. The rather harsh critique by *Spectator* in reality actually exemplifies how gay Holocaust literature, as well as the remembrance of the persecution of gay men by the Third Reich, can be successfully used in current and contemporary political movements.

The majority of the rest of the criticism, as mentioned in the previous chapter, questioned the play’s depiction of the persecution of gays as being worse than that of the Jews. However, Eric Sterling presents an intriguing counterargument to this criticism when he asserts that

Although it is probable that during World War II Nazi guards treated Jews with more cruelty than they exhibited toward homosexuals, Sherman sets his drama in 1934—before the Nuremberg Laws, *Kristallnacht*, gas chambers, Auschwitz and the active attempt by the Nazis to carry out the ‘final solution,’ so it is conceivable that in *Bent* homosexuals would receive worse treatment than Jews. (282)

Though these criticisms show how the Holocaust has become a contested site of memory (who can use it and how), the play’s real strength *is* in its ability to have political

and social importance. Hammermeister upholds *Bent* as keystone in gay Holocaust literature that “celebrates dignity, love, and, paradoxically enough, the defeat of the torturers” (26). *Bent* illustrates how homosexual love and dignity has the ability to survive even the most in extreme of circumstances. Thus, the play allows contemporary readers to understand and read *Bent* as a text that contributes to that collective queer memory of struggle and shows how, above the struggles and the victimization, homosexual love and dignity shine bright and, indeed, proud. Sir Ian McKellen confirms this point when he proclaims that the “story is still relevant not just as a bit of our communal history—I speak as a gay man—but it’s relevant to events and facts today of life throughout the world where gay people are often put at a disadvantage” (Review).

The play begins in “the living room of an apartment [in Berlin]. Small. Sparse furniture. A table with plants” (Sherman 7). The apartment belongs to Maximilian Berber (Max), who is a thirty-four-year-old cocaine dealer, and his lover/boyfriend (though clearly defined intimacy and love do not exist between the two), Rudolf Hennings (Rudy), who is a thirty-year-old dancer at one of Berlin’s gay clubs. Wolf, a member of the SA, whom Max had sex with the previous night, is in the apartment as well. Suddenly, members of the Gestapo barge into the apartment and, as they shoot Wolf to death, Max and Rudy flee. Max tries to find help/advice from the drag queen/club owner Greta. Greta confesses to Max that it was he who reported where Max and Rudy lived (“Told them, hell—I showed them your building”) because the SS were looking for Wolf, the boyfriend of Karl Ernst’s, deputy assistant to the second in command of the SA (Sherman 21). Greta gives Max a “roll of money” and tells the two to leave Berlin (Sherman 19-21).

Max then visits his non-outwardly gay uncle Freddie, from whom Max receives a set of falsified documents that will help Max leave the country. However, there are no papers for Rudy. Though Max pleads to his uncle for help from his family to get extra papers, Freddie states that the family wants nothing to do with Max: “Throwing it [his homosexuality] in everyone’s face. No wonder they don’t want anything to do with you” (Sherman 24). The following conversation then ensues:

Freddie: Do you love him?

Max: Who?

Freddie: The dancer?

Max: Jesus!

Freddie: Do you?

Max: Don’t be stupid. What’s love? Bullshit. I’m a grown-up now. I just feel responsible.

(Sherman 24)

Unsuccessful in their attempt to flee the country, Max and Rudy go on the run. They move around from city to city and eventually find themselves living in the forest. One night in the forest, they are found and arrested. In the next scene, the two men are on a train bound to Dachau. Rudy is tortured and is killed by an SS officer. Max is also forced to participate in Rudy’s torture. In order to save himself and on the advice of Horst, another gay man on the train, Max denies knowing Rudy. It is also on the train that Horst tells Max that queers get a pink triangle to wear to designate them from other members of the camp and that “pink’s the lowest” (Sherman 33). Max is also tortured on the train and is forced, as aforementioned, to have sex with a dead, thirteen-year-old girl in order to prove to the SS guards on the train that he is not “bent,” i.e. a homosexual.

Because Max is able to have sex with the girl, he is able to convince the guards to give him the Star of David to wear rather than a pink triangle.

After they debark from the train and are walking towards Dachau, Max continually tries to speak to Horst, but Horst is upset at the fact that Max traded out of wearing a pink triangle. In the concentration camp, Max is able to get a special work detail by himself of moving stones or snow (depending on the season) from one pile to another and back and forth again. Max is able through bribery to get Horst assigned to the same detail. Horst falls in love with Max and both are able to have sex—though not physically—while on one of their three-minute calls to stand at attention or “break.”

Throughout their time together, Horst continuously reminds Max that he should be wearing a pink triangle, though Max continually rebuffs his criticism. During the winter, Horst becomes sick and Max, who has also fallen in love with Horst by this time, is able to get him medicine by performing fellatio on one of the SS captains. The SS captain comes to oversee Max and Horst’s work detail and hears Horst cough. Upon realizing that Max gave the medicine to Horst, the SS captain demands that Horst throw his hat against the electrified fence and then to retrieve it (a common way SS members made inmates kill themselves: “the hat trick”). Instead, Horst rushes towards the captain, but is shot dead by an SS guard. Max is then ordered to dispose of Horst’s body (by throwing it in a pit). Max goes into the pit and comes out wearing Horst uniform—he is now wearing the pink triangle. Max then runs into the electric fence and dies.

Although Sterling situates the play in 1934, the text itself does not open with a definitive time period. The reader does learn that the play began the morning after the Night of the Long Knives, which would place the play’s beginning on July 1, 1934. The

time throughout the rest of Act I is relatively ambiguous; however, after Max and Rudy are arrested and Act II begins, the time Max spends in Dachau until his death roughly comes down to five months and six days. Assumedly, Max and Horst die sometime within late January or February 1935.

Yet, Sherman's play distinguishes itself from the tropes employed by the majority of the other gay Holocaust literary texts. Its central focus is about the struggle of a gay man to find love and pride for his homosexuality within himself. John M. Clum agrees with this outlook of the play in his text *Acting Gay*: "the Holocaust provides a background of brutal oppression, but the real issue of the play," he states, "is self-oppression [...] we are warned to see homophobia, or heterosexism, as a constant possibility, but we are also encouraged to see Max's education in love as a gay *Pilgrim's Progress*" (227, emphasis his own). It is Max's complex struggle to find and accept love, dignity, and pride for his homosexuality that becomes the main purpose of the play.

Max's journey to self-acceptance is one that involves a rather intricate composite of both pain and the self-abjection of his homosexuality. Pain is an integral and inextricable part of Max's life both within Dachau and within his own personal psyche. In the concentration camp, Max both commits painful acts and has pain inflicted upon him. For example, in his second love scene with Horst (to be examined more closely later in this chapter), Max performs an act of pain towards his lover through "biting" his nipple. This act allows Horst to make the claim that Max is "like the Gestapo [and] the guards" (66). On the other hand, Max is abused by the Gestapo and the guards. This abuse is most clearly illustrated when Max must copulate with a dead girl on the train to Dachau for the amusement of the SS guards (40). Though it is obvious that Max is forced



into the role of an abused victim based on his surroundings (the torture he endures by the Nazis), his painful actions are ones he chooses to commit—and he chooses this prior to being sent to Dachau—and he does so in order to deny or self-abject his homosexuality while still participating in homosexual activities. Max's struggle with ending his self-abjection of his homosexuality towards accepting his sexuality is a thematic element of the play that exemplifies how even during external oppression one can still struggle to accept himself. This notion of the struggle of self-acceptance is one that many members of the queer community continues to struggle with today. Thus, Max's transformation is one that clearly affects a queer memory and consciousness because his struggle is one that relates to many contemporary queers.

Max's denial of homosexuality is closely related to Julia Kristeva's idea of abjection (though the term is not her own neologism). In her text *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, Kristeva is the first theorist to really define what abjection entails. Abjection is something that is cast off as waste, as useless, and as meaningless. Everyone involves themselves with some sort of abjection. Anne McClintock summarizes Kristeva's idea of abjection: "in order to become social the self has to expunge certain elements that society deems impure: excrement, menstrual blood, urine, semen, tears, vomit, food, masturbation, incest and so on" (71). McClintock expands upon the idea of the abject to include people. She asserts, "abject people are those whom industrial imperialism rejects but cannot do without: slaves, prostitutes, the colonized, domestic workers, the insane, the unemployed, and so on" (McClintock 72). Furthermore, John Lechte points out that "phobia and loathing [...] are two fundamental forms of abjection" (161). Quite clearly, we can see how the Third Reich in fact created (through their

fear/phobia and loathing) groups of abject people. However, for Kristeva, the abject—whatever it or they may be—always ends up as ghostly remnants that haunt one’s identity: “Abject. It is something rejected from which one does not part” (Kristeva 4). Idealistic as the Nazis were in their dream for a utopian society, the abject people would still haunt them. The Nazis, in fact, needed the abject to still exist. For without the binary opposition of what an Aryan should not be, how is one to define what an Aryan should be?

Yet, Kristeva mentions another interesting dimension to the abject in regards to the Holocaust. She states that “in the dark halls of the museum that is now what remains of Auschwitz, I see a heap of children’s shoes [...] the abjection of Nazi crime” (4). Objects of the victims entering into the camp were cast aside if they had no value: such as shoes. These shoes now, which are displayed in museums across the globe, represent the harsh reality of abjection of people and prove how the abject haunts us. Those shoes—black and dirty; numerous and anonymous—illuminate in the spectator’s mind the ghosts of the souls of the abject people who were thrown away just like shoes.

For the purpose of this chapter, however, the focus will be on one of the more basic meanings of abject. Like excrement, vomit, and semen, Max attempts to reject a part of his own identity that society has deemed “impure”: his homosexuality. Though prior to being imprisoned, Max does not try to hide his homosexuality—“Throwing it in everyone’s face. No wonder they don’t want anything to do with you”—he does not fully accept it. Eric Sterling notes in his essay “Bent Straight: the Destruction of Self in Marin Sherman’s Bent” that “Max had previously confused love with sadomasochistic sex. Max has always avoided emotional ties with his lovers” (384). Though Max vehemently

denies ever loving Rudy—“Don’t be stupid. What’s love? Bullshit. I’m a grown-up now. I just feel responsible”—he does have homosexual inclinations that he does not hide. However, they are all linked to pain. Rudy remarks on this the morning right before the Gestapo raids their apartment: “You pick guys up. You think you’re doing it for me, too. You’re not. I don’t like it [...] you and your own little storm trooper [Wolf] began to get rough with each other, and I know pain is very chic just now, but I don’t like it because pain hurts so I went to sleep” (Sherman 12).

Through committing painful acts—emotionally with Rudy and physically on Wolf—on his partner in his sexual activity, Max is able to negate the homosexual action, which unconsciously he desires in his Freudian id. His superego, or the symbolic internalization of masculinity (the father) and cultural regulations (heterosexuality), is able to be expressed while he represses the id and, therefore, Max’s homosexual desires. Through inflicting pain in sex, Max, at least in his psyche, is able to reject his true emotional feelings connected with his actions and turn his homosexuality into an object. This is closely aligned with Elaine Scarry’s notion that pain “is a vehicle of self-betrayal” (46-7). Though Max commits painful acts towards Rudy by so blatantly disrespecting him, this pain demonstrates Max’s own self-betrayal or the self-rejection/self-abjection of his homosexuality. However, it is not until he is on the train to Dachau that Max openly rejects his homosexual actions, but also his homosexuality in its totality.

Since the train scene is crucial to the abjection of his entire homosexual identity through pain, it is relevant to reproduce part of the scene here:

Max: It isn’t happening...it isn’t happening...

[The light expands. The guard drags Rudy in. Rudy is semiconscious. His body is bloody and mutilated. The guard holds him up. The officer enters the circle. Max looks away. The officer looks at Max. Max is still mumbling to himself.]

Officer: [To Max] Who is this man?

Max: I don't know. [Stops mumbling, looks straight ahead.]

Officer: Your friend?

[Silence.]

Max: No.

[Rudy moans.]

Officer: Look at him [Max stares straight ahead.] Look! [Max looks at Rudy. The officer hits Rudy on the chest. Rudy screams.] Your friend?

Max: No.

[The officer hits Rudy on the chest. Rudy Screams.]

Officer: Your friend?

Max: No.

[Silence.]

Officer: Hit him [Max stares at the officer.] Like this. [Hits Rudy on the chest. Rudy screams.]

Officer: Hit him. [Max doesn't move.] Your friend?

Max: No. [Closes his eyes. Hits Rudy on the chest. Rudy screams.]

Officer: Open your eyes. [Max opens his eyes.] Again. [Max hits Rudy on the chest.] Again! [Max hits Rudy again and again and again....] Enough. [Pushes Rudy down to the ground at Max's feet.] Your friend?

Max: No

Officer: [Smiles.] No.

(Sherman 34-5)

Though at this point Max has to play into the sadism of the SS officer, he still must inflict pain in order to dispel his own homosexuality. Sterling asserts that in this scene, "Max is

denying part of himself; because Rudy is part of Max and they are sexual partners, the act is one of self-denial and self-destruction” (375). In fact, Rudy, in being rejected by Max, becomes another abject object in Max’s life. And, to repeat Kristeva, “Abject. It is something rejected from which one does not part” (4). Thus, even though at this point Max has rejected both Rudy and, therefore, has also turned his homosexuality in an abject, the abject remains—though denied—within Max and it haunts Max until his dying day—when the abject no longer is rejected.

However, this process of accepting his homosexuality does not happen quickly. It takes the slowly developing relationship between Horst to assist Max in his true acceptance of his homosexuality. Horst is obviously proud of his homosexuality. In fact, Horst was arrested because he signed (a performative act showing pride in and dignity for his homosexuality) one of the petitions circulated by Magnus Hirschfeld to “make queers legal” (Sherman 37). His character truly represents someone who has homosexual dignity. This is reflected in his constant reminder to Max—after Max bribes the guards to allow Horst to join his work detail—that he should be wearing a pink triangle and accept his homosexuality. He jabs his point into Max quite frankly and slightly sarcastic: “Maybe if you knew him [a Jewish Rabbi] you could be proud of your star. You should be proud of *something*” (Sherman 48, emphasis his own).

Horst is also a symbol of homosexual love. Though most critics applaud *Bent* in the first “sex” scene between Horst and Max as showing how homosexual love can conquer and survive through even the harshest constraints, Max still only sees the action as something pleasurable. Though both men are able to climax without touching each other (they come to arousal and ejaculate through talking to each other and imagining

each other when standing side-by-side in formation during their break), Horst is the only one who realizes the significance of what they just accomplished. He proclaims, “We did it [...] We made love. We were real. We were human” (Sherman 57-8). Yet, Max ends the session in jest: “I never [...] thought we’d [...] do it in three minutes” (Sherman 58). However, what is important in this scene is that it solidifies Horst’s developing, genuine love for Max.

Two months later, Horst lets Max know how he feels. He tells Max “I love you [...] I do. I love you [...] It makes me happy.” (Sherman 60). Max, however, tells Horst not to love him and that “Queers aren’t meant to love [...] They don’t want us to. You know who loved me? That boy. That dancer. I don’t remember his name. But I killed him. See—queers aren’t meant to love. I’ll kill you too. Hate me. That’s better. Hate me. Don’t love me” (Sherman 61). Max’s utterance shows that his homosexuality is still an abject object of his identity. What is most revealing is when he says that he does not remember Rudy’s name. Though he had only been imprisoned for a little over three months, Max was with Rudy for over two years (Sherman 24). Thus in his not being able to even recall Rudy’s name, Max is reflecting his internal, psychological denial and “forgetting” of his homosexuality.

The second “sex” scene between Max and Horst is more revealing in regards to the abjection of Max’s homosexuality and its association with pain. At this point, it is obvious that Horst is in love with Max, it has been expressed to Max, who has yet to reciprocate the feeling back to Horst. During this scene, which takes place outside in the bitter coldness of winter, Horst shows the first signs of becoming sick. Max attempts to cheer and warm Horst up by trying to recreate their first, imagined sexual encounter:

Max: I'll make you warm [...]

Max: My mouth is on your chest...

Horst: Yes.

Max: Kissing your chest.

Horst: Yes.

Max: Biting your nipple.

Horst: Yes.

Max: Biting...into it...

Horst: Yes.

Max: Harder...harder...harder...

Horst: Hold it! That hurts!

Max: Harder...

Horst: No, hold it. I'm serious. You're hurting me.

Max: You pulled away.

Horst: Damn right. [...] you're rough.

Max: I'm not being rough.

Horst: Yes you are. Sometimes you are.

Max: O.K. So what? [...]

Horst: Why'd you have to spoil it? You were making me warm. Why can't you be gentle?

Max: I am.

Horst: You're not. You try to hurt me. You make me warm, and then you hurt me.

I hurt enough [...] You're like them. You're like the Gestapo. You're like the guards. We stopped being gentle [...] You don't make love to hurt [...]

Max: I want you to be happy.

Horst: Is that true?

Max: I think so. I don't know. Yes.

Horst: Then be gentle with me.

Max: I don't know how.

Horst: Just hold me.

Max: I'm afraid to hold you.

Horst: Don't be.

Max: I'm afraid.

Horst: Don't be.

Max: I'm going to drown.

Horst: Hold me. Please hold me.

Max: O.K. I'm holding you [...] you're here in my arms. I promise. I'm holding you. You're here...

Horst: Touch me [...]

Max: Yes. Touching. Softly...I'm touching you softly...gently...You're safe...I'll keep you safe...and warm...You're with me now...You'll never be cold again...I'm holding you not...safe...and warm...As long as you're here, as long as you're with me, as long as I'm holding you, you're safe

(Sherman 64-7)

This scene is thematically the climax of the play. It demonstrates Max's abjection of homosexuality through the use of pain, Horst's homosexual dignity and love, and Max's eventual refusal to abject homosexuality (both the sexual action and love). Max is at first sexually aroused and wants to have "sex"—through speech and imagination—but, now (knowing that Horst is in love with him, like Rudy was in love with him), Max's emotional, homosexual connection has to be broken with the act of inducing pain on his partner. He bites Horst's nipple "harder...harder...harder" and continues to do so when Horst tells him to stop. It is that moment of disruption that shocks Max into actual reality. No one stopped him from performing his painful acts before; no one stopped him at the moment in which he was enacting a form of abjection while committing the act that was to become the abject. It is at that moment that Max must now truly confront his homosexuality.

By stopping Max in his action, Horst is demonstrating homosexual dignity. Though one could say Rudy had homosexual dignity, he never prevented Max from



humiliating “Rudy by flaunting his sexual escapades in front of his lover without considering the dancer’s feelings” (Sterling 374). Yet, Horst also shows homosexual love. Though it is obvious prior to this scene that Horst is in fact in love with Max, by allowing and giving Max the chance and opportunity to rectify his wrongs, he allows Max the opportunity and challenges him to accept his homosexuality.

At the end of this scene, Max illustrates his internal conflict about accepting Horst’s love; thus, allowing the ghost of his abjected homosexuality to come back into existence within him. He is “afraid.” He is afraid because he is now confronting the abject in himself. His utterance of “I’m going to drown” becomes quite significant in these considerations. Max is drowning in his psychological recognition that he is allowing homosexuality to become a part of him. And, rather than vomiting or very violently trying to rid himself of the abject, Max does not allow anything to leave. Finally, he comes up from drowning—an almost spiritual rebirth/a baptism—and allows homosexuality to be a part of himself, his psyche, and his identity. At last, Max reciprocates the homosexual love that is shown to him. His utterance “You’re with me now” also means its reverse, “I’m with you now.”

Yet, even with this internal acceptance of his homosexual love, Max does not give up his yellow star and take on the outward display of showing his homosexuality by wearing a pink triangle. Nevertheless, it is obvious that Max does love and care for Horst. Once Horst becomes deathly ill, Max (saying it is for himself) is able to get medicine for Horst by performing fellatio on an SS Captain. This is something Max would not have done before. Earlier in the play, prior to their arrest, Rudy tells Max, “If I get sick, you’ll leave me behind. You’re just waiting for me to get sick [...] You’d love it if I died”

(Sherman 27). Max avoids Rudy's assertion and by doing so the reader knows that Rudy's statement has truth behind it. Unfortunately, by the time Max does love someone enough to take care of him when he is sick, Max still has to reject his homosexuality to an extent. Upon asking Max where he got the medicine, Horst is met with the brash retort that "do you think that SS bastard would let a queer go down on him? Of course not. He'd kill me if he knew I was queer. My yellow star got your medicine [...] I'm tired of being told I should have a pink triangle" (Sherman 70). However, by the end of the scene, Max willingly and acceptingly puts on the pink triangle.

The SS captain that Max fellated comes out to Horst's and Max's work detail. When Horst is unable to stop his cough, the captain realizes that the medicine Max received from him was for Horst. Perhaps out of jealousy from realizing what had happened, the SS captain forces Horst to perform the "hat trick." Yet, Horst does not allow the SS captain to control his fate. Instead he rushes towards the SS captain. However, prior to this act "he takes his hand and rubs his left eyebrow" at Max, which alludes to the scene in which Horst first tells Max he loves him and that when he runs his finger across his left eyebrow it means "I love you." Thus, Horst's dying performative action inextricably shows his homosexual dignity and love. Though he does not say it, his dying expression was one of love—performing the act of showing his love to Max—and dignity—rather than following the deathly order by the SS captain, Horst commits an act, though futile, of retaliation.

Eric Sterling believes "because Horst teaches Max about identity and self-respect, his death creates an immediate impact upon Max" (386). Upon holding up Horst's dead body, Max whispers to the corpse of Horst "I love you [...]What's wrong with that? [...]"

What's wrong with that?" (Sherman 75-6). Max follows the SS captain's orders and "throws" Horst's body into a pit and then, after a few moments of returning to work, he jumps into the pit and comes out and "holds Horst's jacket with the pink triangle on it. Puts the jacket on [and] walks into the fence," thus, killing himself (Sherman 76). Max's death is tied to pain, however, this time it is self-inflicted. The death of Horst pains him emotionally and in order to rectify the wrongs committed against Horst and Max, as well as the wrongs Max committed against himself, Max accepts the pink triangle and then throws himself into the electrified fence. Yet, Max's suicide is not a way of removing himself (or turning himself into an object) from the world because of his homosexuality. It is instead a way of making sure that his homosexuality—and the love and dignity for it—will never be able to leave his body, his psyche, his identity again. Sterling affirms this point: "When Max takes his life, he dies with dignity" (386).

One can view Horst's murder and Max's suicide as following the rather formulaic trope in gay literature—utilized by such acclaimed authors as Baldwin, Vidal, and Rechy (among others)—that the gay man must die. However, considering the environment and the situation that these final acts occur, both gay men's deaths exemplify resistance to persecution and show that homosexuals will not bow down to subordinate subjectification by an extremist heterosexual society. As mentioned earlier, Horst, by attacking the SS captain and refusing his order to commit suicide, shows strength in his character and, to reiterate once again, dignity. Max's suicide is also a form of resistance. Horst relates to Max earlier in the play that suicide is considered as a "kind of defiance" and that the guards "hate that—it's an act of free will" (Sherman 58-9). Thus, Max refuses to accept the torture and persecution by the guards any further. Max commits an

act of free will and defies the Nazis by taking his own life and refusing to be persecuted further. Through his suicide, Max disallows the Nazis to have a chance to erase his newly accepted homosexual identity. Though both men fall into the trope of the good dead gay man, it is truly the only way they could resist and show dignity for themselves and for each other within the concentration camp.

*Bent* ends with the lights of the electric fence growing “brighter and brighter, until the light consumes the stage. And blinds the audience” (Sherman 76). For Robert Skloot “the sudden bright light validates the ‘brilliance’ of Max’s love for Horst and underscores the shock of the recognition Max achieves concerning his true nature” (120). Though the light does represent the blinding love for Horst, it in no way underscores the “shock of the recognition Max achieves concerning his true nature.” In fact, the light in its brilliant and blinding way binds Max’s homosexual love for Horst, the dignified way in which they both die, and Max’s final acceptance of his homosexuality together in totality. This ending is what leads the performance critic David Román to proclaim that the play has an “insistence on homosexuality as a mark of pride [...] *Bent* and that audience of gay men offered me a means to conceive and imagine a future” (v). Román’s statement clearly reflects the purpose of gay Holocaust literature. It has vitality and validity even in the contemporary world. It helps establish that queer collective memory that allows queers to “imagine a future” while reflecting on and remembering the past.

*Bent* does not merely depict a gruesome, cathartic-evoking representation of gay victimization. It is about a gay man coming to terms with his own homosexuality and finding pride in that part of his identity—something contemporary queers can certainly relate to. Thus, Sherman’s play combines both queer history and an example of a still

continuing queer struggle, proving the validity of gay Holocaust literature as part of a queer collective consciousness. *Bent* along with the history, testimony, and the other works of gay Holocaust fiction of the persecution of gays during the Holocaust have created the notion of homosexual love and dignity that can survive anything. Queers may struggle with the external forces as well as the forces within themselves, but overall homosexual pride will continue onward and into the future. And, “what’s wrong with that?” Nothing.

**CONCLUSION:**

THE PINK TRIANGLE AND A QUEER COLLECTIVE CONSCIOUSNESS

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick poses the following question in *Epistemology of the Closet*:

As the gay community and the solidarity and visibility of gays as a minority population are being consolidated and tempered in the forge of this specularized terror [gay genocide] and suffering, how can it fail to be all the more necessary that the avenues of recognition, desire, and thought between minority potentials and universalizing ones be opened and opened and opened? (130)

Sedgwick's question speaks to the establishment of a queer collective memory and consciousness through a communal understanding of the possibility of future as well as past attempts at gay genocide. By understanding and utilizing the origins of the pink triangle, whether it be through knowing the history, testimonials of gay victims, or gay Holocaust literature, the queer community can come together under such a queer collective consciousness in order to solidify as a group (minority potentials) as well as establish themselves as a viable group of people within society at large (universalizing potentials).

However, concurrent with the historical, academic, and sociological studies into the persecution of gays during the Holocaust, the symbol of the pink triangle started to be used differently from the commemoration of those victims who had to wear the symbol for its originating purpose. As Klaus Müller asserts, "the pink triangle was able to become a modern symbol of gay and lesbian pride because we are not haunted by concrete memories of those who were forced to wear it in the camps" (Introduction, 13).

Such statements and beliefs have led some critics, such as R. Amy Elman, to claim that by “embracing the symbols of such persecution is likely to offer affirmation only among those ignorant or careless with the past. Indeed the adoption of such symbols may have the unintended consequence of concealing rather than promoting consciousness of the Holocaust” (7).

Though certainly many queers do not know the historic reference behind their proud symbol of the pink triangle, it is questionable whether or not it is problematic for the community to embrace the symbol. It is acutely undeniable that the symbol has gone through major transformations in the last sixty plus years since the Holocaust. As Arlene Stein asserts in her essay “Whose Memory? Whose Victimhood? Contests for the Holocaust Frame in Recent Social Movement Discourse,” the symbol is “constantly being made and remade, appropriated and reappropriated” (519). Stein points out that the pink triangle was revitalized in three main periods of queer history. She illustrates how the pink triangle was first used in the “early 1970s, in relation to the rise of the gay liberation movement; the early 1980s, in response to the twin threats of the New Right and the AIDS epidemic, and the 1990s, in reponse [*sic*] to anti-gay ballot measures sponsored by Christian conservative organizations in several states” (523). Through accepting such reclamations of the symbol for these movements may appear at first to concur with Müller and Elman’s proclamations about the dilution of the symbol, Stein insists that all of these reclamations/re-usages of the symbol were always within a Holocaust frame (524). She furthers this point by stating that “gay liberationists enacted a ‘reverse affirmation,’ claiming the stigmatized category, and the sense of victimhood associated with it, as a means of destigmatizing the category” (524).

Though Elman would disagree with this “reverse affirmation” by claiming that “one cannot effectively eliminate oppression by mimicking the language, actions, and symbols of the oppressor,” Stein’s argument proves that the knowledge of the history of the persecution of gay men during the Holocaust has a powerful political effect when used via a queer collective consciousness. She insists that these movements used the pink triangle not in naiveté of its history, but rather

[T]he spectra of a Holocaust has been utilized by lesbians and gay men to dramatize their plight as an oppressed group in American society [...] reflect[ing] the historical oppression of homosexuals during the Nazi reign of terror [queers] use the frame as metaphor, drawing parallels between contemporary homosexuals and the victims of Nazism fifty years earlier. (527)

By utilizing such a history, queers are not “promoting a denial of [the] horrific dimension” of the pink triangle, but through remembering and utilizing the history of the horrific past, queers are affirming the viability of their current and future presence in society. Pam Mitchell’s epigram to her book *Pink Triangles: Radical Perspectives on Gay Liberation* also confirms this point: “Today the pink triangle has been revived so we don’t forget our history, or that the gay movement is part of a larger movement for social liberation.”

Yet, even though there are those academics and historians who assert that past and current re-usage of the pink triangle affirms, remembers, and commemorates the persecution of homosexuals by the Third Reich, the pink triangle still retains its originating purpose of demarcating queer people as Others. Currently the pink triangle is used in several different, yet, inextricably connected ways. Firstly, it symbolizes the



remembrance of its historical past. For example, the memorial—the Homomonument—of the persecution of gays by the Nazis in Amsterdam utilizes the inverted pink triangle as its main design element. However, as stated on the international website that correlates with the monument:

The Homomonument makes a strong statement that history must not be repeated: ‘Never again.’ The monument calls for vigilance. The Homomonument does not, however, only commemorate the victims of the Second World War. It commemorates all homosexual men and women who have been, or are still being, persecuted and murdered by government regimes who denounce their very existence. (Homomonument, <<http://www.homomonument.nl>>)

Therefore, the pink triangle is not only used as a remembrance of the persecution of gays by the Nazis, but also all queers who have been persecuted because of their sexuality. The pink triangle now represents all of those who have fallen victim to heterosexist bigotry and violence. It is also commonly used by the queer community to represent themselves to each other and to the outside, heteronormative community. It has become, like the symbol of the rainbow<sup>16</sup>, a sign of pride and strength within the community.

Most, if not all, gay places and spaces have been marked by gays themselves with either the pink triangle or the rainbow. Tens, if not hundreds, of gay flags can be found hanging from the buildings of queer spaces such as the Castro District in San Francisco, or Old Compton Street in London. Pink triangles and rainbows alike adorn queer bars, clubs, cafés, restaurants, and most “queer friendly” places. Though these symbols are

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<sup>16</sup> Though the rainbow can be seen as a replacement of the pink triangle because it is not so gay male centric, the rainbow does not have a history of persecution behind it. Thus, the pink triangle, which is used by the majority of all queer people and has undergone such re-affirmation, can still be viewed as a symbol that can represent everyone and a queer collective memory as a whole.

utilized to let gays know where it is “safe” for them to go, these symbols also let non-queers know that this is a place gays frequent. Through this increased visibility comes the increase in potential for some homophobic people and groups (Fred Phelps and others) to parade their messages of hate or even violence against gays. As Jon Binnie notes in *Trading Places: Consumption, Sexuality, and the Production of Queer Space*, with “increased public visibility comes the ever-present threat of queerbashing (which no amount of legislation will ever be able to prevent). In one recent incident a gay man was knifed after leaving Compton’s bar on Old Compton Street at one of the busiest times of day in what was described as a clear homophobic attack” (197).

Thus, as positive as it may appear to be, the pink triangle—even if self-imposed—still marks queers as subversive Others to dominant society and culture. Even through this appropriation, the pink triangle remains a symbol that follows its original, historic purpose of marking gay people. By demarcating themselves and their spaces with these symbols, whether it be for an ahistorical symbol of pride and group solidarity or as a symbol for the remembrance of the gay lives lost during the Holocaust, the AIDS epidemic, or other persecutions, the symbol of the pink triangle has not in fact been altered in its historical, Nazi-created denotations. It remains an unambivalent symbol that marks gays as Others.

However, this is not to assert that queers should stop utilizing the pink triangle—to do so would be a historical and community travesty that would do nothing but return the persecution of gays back into invisibility as it has historically been in academia, politics, and queer life for so long: it did take 40 years for the first Homomonument to be erected (Homomonument). Furthermore, the pink triangle should not be considered a

symbol that continues the image of the queer as a damaged, persecuted Other; it should not have “the negative effect of burdening its wearer with a sense of perpetual victimhood” (Jensen 347). Instead, the pink triangle must be used as a continued remembrance of its historic creation. Erik Jensen asserts that remembering/commemorating the persecution of gays by the Third Reich in Germany—especially focusing on the few testimonials given by survivors—creates an “individual memory [that] provide[s] the framework for a larger collective memory” (325). This collective memory is a burden that continues to mark queer people as subjugated Others; however, it is also what keeps queers together and solidifies their group identity. It is only through having a collective memory and consciousness—even if it is such a negative memory of persecution—that makes queers a viable unit that can achieve political goals that will better themselves and their visibility within dominant society and culture.

Wendy Brown agrees with this idea of commemoration. She proclaims that “erased histories and historical invisibility are themselves such integral elements of pain inscribed in most subjugated identities that the counsel of forgetting [...] seems inappropriate if not cruel” (74). This becomes especially true when considering the ignoring of Nazi persecution of gays for decades by both historians and academics alike. It would indeed be extremely inappropriate and cruel to forget once again what was already once completely disregarded. Furthermore, Brown attests, “history becomes that which has weight but no trajectory, mass but no coherence, force but no direction: it is war without ends or end” (71). Thus, people must grab the reigns of their history and utilize it, because without incorporating your history into group identity (via a collective memory or consciousness) it would basically be impossible for this history to be used as

anything constructive on its own. Politics cannot change based on history itself; it takes people's action based on history in order to effect and enact change.

If gays do not claim or utilize their own history of persecution, they risk losing that history all together. Like the people who claim the Holocaust never happened to the Jews, there are those who are publishing and arguing that gays, in actuality, committed more crimes against people during the reign of the Third Reich than any other group. The best example of this is the historically inaccurate and completely degrading text *The Pink Swastika* by Scott Lively and Kevin Abrams. They assert that the purpose behind their text is to prove that “although some homosexuals [...] suffered and died at the hands of the Nazis [...] there was far more brutality, rape, torture, and murder committed against innocent people *by* Nazi deviants and homosexuals than there ever was *against* homosexuals” (Lively and Abrams, emphasis their own, IV). Though Lively and Abrams completely distort historical facts by seeking to destroy the “myth” of the persecution of gays—which they attest is symbolized by the pink triangle—and completely homosexualize the enemy—exemplifying the anti-homosexual motives underlying the entire text—it is questionable whether their arguments could be discounted or discredited if gays themselves did not know their own history of the atrocities committed against them by the Nazi Party.

Taking into account that whether “gay and lesbian history even exists is a contested [fact] [...] and the struggle to record and preserve it is exacerbated by the invisibility that often surrounds intimate life, especially sexuality,” Ann Cvetkovich's proclamation that “understanding gay and lesbian archives [such as history, testimony, and literature] as archives of emotion and trauma helps to explain [...] the determination

to ‘never forget’” (242). Thus, in order to combat in the “war” of history and politics, gays must be responsible for the continued remembering and use of their history via a communal, collective consciousness.

This is not to say that gays themselves have not distorted the facts of the persecution of gays. Considering the relative flux in the number of deaths of gay victims—ranging from 10,000 to over a million—and the idea that the Holocaust was just as much about eliminating gays as it was Jews, there has been some over estimations of the reality of what occurred during the Nazi rule over Germany from 1933-1945. Though the few remaining testimonies do establish that cruelties (sexual exploitation, abuse, and death) were inflicted upon the men marked with the pink triangle in the camps, it is important to note that the fictional accounts of the persecution, such as Mark Sherman’s play *Bent*, tend to dramatize the stigma of the pink triangle. Setting the record straight (no heterosexual connotation intended), was part of the reason behind Jeffrey Friedman and Rob Epstein’s film *Paragraph 175* (Epstein and Freidman). Friedman asserts that the purpose behind the film was to show that “there was no gay Holocaust. There was persecution of gay people. But there was no systematic annihilation” (Jensen 349). Friedman’s assertion is absolutely true.

Yet, gays must remember that they have always been historically (especially by the Nazis) and still continue to be persecuted by laws and politics. Though the pink triangle also includes now the remembrance of the gay victims of the AIDS epidemic—notably and, perhaps, appropriately called the “gay Holocaust”—the fact remains that its originating history must be preserved, remembered, and expressed accurately. As Chauncey, Duberman, and Vicinus conclude in their introduction to *Hidden from History*,

“the lives of lesbians and gay men [and queers as a whole] are enhanced by a knowledge of their history [and] a reclamation of [their] homosexual past” (13).

This history is inextricably connected to that of queer suffering. Yet continued representation of queer suffering through the use of the pink triangle is not a negative action that will perpetuate gays as victims or damaged Others. Instead, one must follow Paul Gilroy’s advice that a “detour through modern histories of suffering [such as the suffering of queers] must be made mandatory. It provides an invaluable means to locate ethical and political principles that can guide the work of building more just and equitable social relations” (151). Furthermore, he avows that this action ultimately “seeks to turn the tables on all purity seekers, whoever they may be, to force them to account for their phobia about otherness and their violent hostility in the face of the clanging, self-evident sameness of suffering humankind” (Gilroy, 151). Though Gilroy’s theories on multiculturalism are ground in a racial discourse, it is quite obvious that they can be applied to that of queers. What Gilroy is really asserting is that the exploration of the history of the suffering of Others will ultimately lead to political and social action and the recognition that gays, lesbians, transsexuals, etcetera are either not that different from the people that have excluded them from their mainstream, dominant social and cultural realm or that queer difference is not grounds for oppression.

The recognition by dominant society of queer grief is necessary and vital to the overall acknowledgment of the historic and contemporary suffering and persecution of queers and could lead to acceptance or greater tolerance of queers. For queers, this grief is represented within the symbol of the pink triangle and the remembrance of the loss of queer life during the Holocaust, AIDS, and hate crimes. However, as noted by Judith

Butler, heterosexual recognition of queer grief has been difficult because of the construction of sexual identity that is repeated and naturalized constantly throughout dominant society. She asserts that heterosexuality “demand[s] *the loss* of certain sexual attachment [homosexual attachments], and demand[s] as well that those losses *not* be avowed, and *not* be grieved” (Butler, emphasis her own, 135). Sara Ahmed continues Butler’s assertion to state that “homosexuality becomes an ‘ungrievable loss,’” and, therefore, “the failure to recognize queer loss as loss is also a failure to recognize queer relationships as significant bonds, or that queer lives are lives worth living, or that queers are more than failed heterosexuals, heterosexuals who have failed ‘to be’” (155, 156). Ahmed grounds this argument by discussing how “queer losses were among the losses excluded from the public cultures of grief” specifically in referring to the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 (Ahmed 157). However, the same can be referred to the Nazi persecution of gay men and lesbians. Considering that the law (the original Paragraph 175 without its amendment §175a) were still in effect after the war and that it took almost forty years for historians or academics to recognize the loss of gay lives during the Third Reich’s domination over Germany, it is quite applicable to assert that queer grief has historically and continues to be historically ignored. Thus, as Ahmed proclaims, “the challenge for queer politics becomes finding a different way of grieving” (159). For Ahmed, this different way of grieving is melancholia.

Accordingly, queers must utilize melancholia within their collective consciousness as a method of expressing their grief. Though in Freudian terms, “melancholia is pathological: the ego refuses to let go of the object, and preserves the object ‘inside itself,’” Ahmed agrees with the Silverman and Klass’ argument that

“melancholia should not be seen as pathological; the desire to maintain attachment with the lost other is enabling, rather than blocking forms of attachment” (Ahmed 159). Thus, melancholia is a form of grief that is completely ethical in that it has the ability of “keeping the past alive [...] the object is not severed from history, or encrypted” (Ahmed 159). Judith Butler furthers this by declaring that “gay melancholia [...] also contains anger that can be translated in political expression” (147). Thus, the pink triangle becomes a symbol that represents gay melancholia and it is in this melancholia that political action, change, or Wendy Brown’s “war” can be enacted because melancholia keeps queers (the memory and history of the dead and the alive in the remembering of the dead) solidified as a viable unit of people that can achieve and change their status in this heteronormative and hetero-dominated society and culture.

However, as this conclusion has undertaken to illustrate, even as the pink triangle is utilized by the queer community to represent the remembrance of queer pride as well as loss, grief, and melancholia, it is still used within its historical context as a marker of Otherness. Thus, the paradoxical question arises: do we still wear and mark ourselves with the pink triangle? The answer should be a resounding yes; however, as senior editor of the gay magazine *10 percent* Sara Hart proclaims in her discussion of the pink triangle, “before we can wear the button or carry the banner that reads ‘Never Again,’ we must first remember” (Jensen 320).

It is this remembering that becomes critical. It is the remembering of the correct history of the persecution of gays, the knowing of the testimonies and both the positive and negative attributes of the literature, and the knowledge that this “proud” marker keeps queers together through creating a collective memory and consciousness. Perhaps



we need to consider the pink triangle as a scar that is etched into the skin and psyche of all queer people because “a good scar is one that sticks out, a lumpy sign on the skin. It’s not that the wound is exposed or that the skin is bleeding. But the scar is a sign of the injury: a good scar allows healing, it even covers over, *but the covering always exposes the injury reminding us of how it shaped the body*” (Ahmed, emphasis her own, 201-2). This scar, whether it is a pin on a shirt, a sticker on a building, or an idea in the mind, allows us to collectively move beyond all the different forms of historic and present persecution or injury and demands that we establish and use our a collective queer consciousness of our history and our literature and our grief and our melancholia as represented in the symbol of the pink triangle to create political change that will enable us to become equals amidst this unrelenting, heteronormative world.

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## ***Appendix I:***

### *Paragraph 175<sup>17</sup>:*

The original version taken from the Penal Code of 1871:

#### §175

An unnatural sex act committed between persons of male sex or by humans with animals is punishable by imprisonment; the loss of civil rights may also be imposed.

The new version of §175 after the amendment of June 28, 1935 to the Penal Code:

#### Sex Offences between Males

(1) §175 of the Penal Code is given the following wording:

#### §175

A male who commits a sex offence with another male or allows himself to be used by another male for a sex offence shall be punished with imprisonment. Where a party was not yet twenty-one years of age at the time of the act, the court may in especially minor cases refrain from the punishment.

(2) The following rule shall be inserted after §175 of the Penal Code as §175a:

#### §175a

Penal servitude up to ten years or, where there are mitigating circumstances, imprisonment of not less than three months shall apply to:

1. a male who, with violence or the threat of present violence to body and soul or life, compels another male to commit a sex offence with him or to allow himself to be abused for a sex offence;
2. a male who, by abusing a relation of dependence based upon service, employment or subordination, induces another male to commit a sex offence with him or to allow himself to be abused for a sex offence;
3. a male over 21 years of age who seduces a male person under twenty-one years to commit a sex offence with him or to allow himself to be abused for a sex offence;
4. a male who publicly commits a sex offence with males or allows himself to be abused by males for a sex offence or offers himself for the same

(3) The former §175 of the Penal Code shall be inserted as §175b after deletion of the words 'between persons of male sex or.'

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<sup>17</sup> Taken from Hidden Holocaust?: Gay and Lesbian Persecution in Germany 1933-45. Günter Grau, ed.. Patrick Camiller, tr.. New York, Cassell, 1995.



## ***Appendix II:***

### *Selected Chronology*<sup>18</sup>:

- 1871: §175 is adopted from the Prussian Penal code by the entire (newly founded) Second Reich.
- 1897: Hirschfeld establishes the Scientific Humanitarian Committee at his Institute for Sexual Research.
- 1899: The S.H. Committee presents a petition at the Reichstag to eliminate §175. It is signed by such luminaries as Albert Einstein, Hermann Hesse, Thomas Mann, and Rainer Maria Rilke.
- 1921: The National Socialist German Workers Party is founded.
- Jan. 30, 1933: Hitler is appointed chancellor.
- Feb. 27, 1933: Reichstag is burned down (a homosexual is suspected then convicted for the act).
- May 6, 1933: Hirschfeld's Institute for Sexual Research is vandalized and its collection of books and research becomes the material for the first book burning.
- June 28, 1933: "Night of the Long Knives"/"Blood Purge;" Ernst Röhm, his SA counterparts, and 300 other men are murdered by the order of Hitler.
- July 2, 1933: SS is established under the control of Heinrich Himmler
- Oct. 24, 1933: A secret letter is sent by the Gestapo to police departments throughout the country ordering them to submit lists of all men known to be or to have been homosexually active.
- Oct.-Nov. 1933: First wave of homosexual arrests begins.
- June 28, 1935: §175 is expanded.
- Aug. 1, 1936: Olympic Games open in Berlin; Anti-Semitic signs are taken down and gay-bars are reopened.
- Oct. 10, 1936: Himmler asserts that homosexuals must be eliminated as a danger to the German race.

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<sup>18</sup> Information from 1871-1945 is taken from Richard Plant's The Pink Triangle: The Nazi War against Homosexuals. New York, Henry Holt and Co., 1988.

Oct. 26, 1936: Gestapo Department II (Federal Security Office against Abortion and Homosexuality) is opened.

Dec. 10, 1936: Illicit sexual acts do not have to be acts; intent is what counts.

Nov. 12, 1938: “Crystal Night”/“Night of the Broken Glass”: attacks on Jews (thousands arrested).

Dec. 8, 1941: Attack by the Japanese on Pearl Harbor.

March 21, 1942: Heydrich decrees that only German homosexuals are to be arrested. Homosexuals from other nationalities are to be deported from Germany (most likely to the concentration camps located outside in occupied German territory).

Jan. 26, 1945: Auschwitz is liberated by the Soviets: 15,000 survivors.

April 12, 1945: Bergen-Belsen is liberated by the British: 40,000 survivors.

April 28, 1945: Dachau liberated by Americans.

April 30, 1948: Hitler commits suicide.

May 7, 1945: General Alfred Jodl signs Germany’s unconditional surrender at Reims, France.

May 23, 1945: Himmler commits suicide.

1950: Kogon’s text on the holocaust is published. First mentioning of homosexuals in the camps.

June 28, 1969: The Stonewall Riots begin in New York City.

1971: Heinz Heger gives his testimony.

1972: Heger’s testimony first published.

1978: Martin Sherman’s play *Bent* is published and opens in London.

1981: Frank Rector publishes the first book based solely on the persecution of homosexuals by the Nazis.

1985: *Behold a Pale Horse* is published.

1986: Richard Plant’s *The Pink Triangle: The Nazi War against Homosexuals* is published.

Sept. 5, 1987: The “Homomonument” is unveiled in Amsterdam.

1992: *Tory's Tuesday* is published.

1994: *Aimée & Jaguar* (the English translation) and *Walk the Night* are published. The USHMM subtitled version of *Wir Hatten Ein Grosses A Am Bein* is released.

1995: The English translation of *Damned Strong Love* is published.

1998: *Clifford's Blues* is published.

2000: The documentary *Paragraph 175* is released.

***Suggested Further Reading:***

Friedman, Ina R.. The Other Victims: First-person Stories of Non-Jews Persecuted by the Nazis. Boston, Houghton Mifflin Co., 1990.

Chapter two of Friedman's children/youth book focuses on how the Nazis persecuted homosexuals during the Second World War. However, unlike the other victims she presents (gypsies, etcetera), Friedman does not present any first-person stories of persecuted homosexuals and takes her entire account from Richard Plant's text. However, the book has quite an interesting concept.

Giles, G. J.. "The Denial of Homosexuality: Same-Sex Incidents in Himmler's SS and Police." *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 11.1/2 (January/ April 2002): 256-90.

This essay explores homosexuality within the Nazi party, especially in the Nazi armies. Giles explores how it was Heinrich Himmler and not Hitler who was the most adamant on the destruction of homosexuals. Furthermore, the essay examines the history of homosexual tolerance in the army; going from a pseudo-"don't ask, don't tell" policy (when Ernst Röhm controlled the Gestapo) to a capital offense (after Röhm was murdered by the Nazi party and Himmler created the SS).

Johnson, Hans. "The 'Pink Nazis.'" *Harvard Gay & Lesbian Review* 2.3 (Summer 1995): 1; 49-50.

A critical query into the radically incorrect text The Pink Swastika.

Machtan, Lothar. The Hidden Hitler. New York, Basic Books, 2001.

Machtan presents a rather lengthy report of Hitler's life. He focuses specifically on Hitler's sexual experiences and close friendships with other men. Machtan basically tries to illustrate that Hitler was in all probability a homosexual. This book and theory has come under quite a bit of controversy for homosexualizing Hitler—which most people deem as a negativism towards the homosexual community. It is still a rather intriguing argument and it is very well articulated and full of detailed examples.

Micheler, S.. "Homophobic Propaganda and the Denunciation of Same-Sex-Desiring Men under National Socialism." *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 11.1/2 (January/April 2002): 95-130.

Micheler explores the history of homosexual intolerance and persecution under National Socialism. Micheler explores the expanding law (Paragraph 175) against homosexuality, which ended with the illegality of unuttered thought about same-

sex sexual encounters. Micheler also illuminates how these laws remained in effect even after the Nazi party fell.

Schoppmann, Claudia. Days of Masquerade: Life Stories of Lesbians During the Third Reich. Allison Brown, tr.. New York, Columbia University Press, 1996.

A collection of testimonials by lesbians who survived under the reign of the Third Reich from 1933-1945.

Oosterhuis, Harry, ed.. Homosexuality and Male Bonding in Pre-Nazi Germany: The Youth Movement, the Gay Movement, and Male Bonding Before Hitler's Rise: Original Transcripts from Der Eigene, the First Gay Journal in the World. Hubert Kennedy, tr.. New York., Haworth Press, 1991.

This text contains a selection of articles from *Der Eigene*, the first periodical for male homosexuals, which began publishing in 1896.