

Glimpsing the Holocaust in Postwar British Detective Fiction

Abstract: (242 words)

Scholars including David Cesarani have noted that there was no concerted effort to represent what we now term the Holocaust in British fiction of the immediate postwar years. What can be found in novels from the late 1940s and early 1950s, however, are suggestive glimpses of how British understandings of the Holocaust were beginning to develop. Detective fiction is a useful point of reference because in the interwar years this form was typically based on simplified or even stereotyped characters, with the war years and the postwar period signalling a turn to greater realism. As Gill Plain has argued, detective fiction expresses a desire to both see and evade seeing the dead body; Plain explores this as an expression of post-First World War cultural anxieties, but in the wake of the widespread circulation in Britain of images of the opening up of the concentration and death camps, such ambivalence takes on a particular significance. Examining two quite different examples, Agatha Christie's *A Murder is Announced* (1950) and Ellis Peters's *Fallen into the Pit* (1951), this article reveals contrasting early engagements with the Holocaust. Both novels feature peripheral characters who are refugees from Europe, and whose stories, although told only in fragments, nevertheless destabilise the process of reinstating order which is the usual narrative trajectory of the detective novel. I will argue that such glimpses of the Holocaust are as telling about contemporary attitudes as more concerted, explicit and direct engagements might be.

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Considering British reactions to the Holocaust, David Cesarani noted that ‘in the arts and literature [...] the extermination of the Jews did not figure largely for decades after the event,’ and that the ‘literary reckoning’ that did emerge was ‘almost entirely confined to Jewish authors.’¹ ‘Largely’ is a key word here: certainly it was only in the 1980s, as Cesarani points out, that a subgenre of British-authored Holocaust fiction, whether by Jewish authors or not, became discernible.² Looking beyond novels that take the Holocaust as a central motivating theme or use the camps as a setting, however, a degree of consciousness of the fate of the Jews and others under Nazi rule can be seen much earlier. Taking two examples of detective fiction from the early 1950s as my focus, I will argue that such glimpses of what would later be termed the Holocaust can themselves be revealing about attitudes to these events, especially given that they occur in a genre that was usually seen in the interwar years to deal in stereotypes, but which, in the post-Second World War period, began to shift towards greater realism. Authors’ inclusion of refugees from Europe as minor characters in their novels might be interpreted as relegating these experiences of displacement to the periphery, but I will suggest that even indirect or passing references have the ability to destabilise a narrative, especially one which has the restoration of social order as its usual trajectory.

The two novels to be discussed here are both set in English villages. In Agatha Christie’s *A Murder is Announced* (1950), Jane Marple investigates a murder that takes place after a number of village residents are summoned to Miss Blacklock’s house on a particular day at a particular time by a newspaper small ad. The plot that then unfolds involves disguised identities and the claiming of an inheritance. Miss Blacklock herself eventually proves to be the guilty party and is caught with the help of her housekeeper Mitzi, a pre-war refugee from Europe who is evidently

¹David Cesarani, ‘Great Britain’, in David S. Wyman (ed.), *The World Reacts to the Holocaust* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press 1996), 599-641 (626).

² Cesarani, ‘Great Britain’, 627.

Jewish though not explicitly described as such. My second example, Ellis Peters's *Fallen into the Pit* (1951), is the first in a series of crime novels with contemporary settings which feature policeman George Felse as their investigating protagonist. The action centres initially on the murder of Helmut Schauffler, a German former prisoner-of-war and the plot opens out to encompass issues of pre-war marital discord and postwar land ownership. Peters's novel, like Christie's, situates the refugee character in a domestic setting. Gerd, the wife of a farmer, has a number of highly fraught encounters with Schauffler and is a suspect in his murder before Felse's attention shifts elsewhere.

It is difficult, of course, to know how contemporary readers might have reacted to such representations, or indeed to reconstruct with precision the knowledge base that might have informed individual responses. Certainly, as Tony Kushner has argued with reference to the place of Bergen-Belsen in British cultural memory and discourse, references to 'Belsen' often had a metonymic or metaphorical quality, even in the immediate wake of the opening up of the camp and the subsequent British-organised trial of its personnel, with 'Belsen' rapidly becoming shorthand 'to describe *anything* in an abused state'.³ Kushner here characterises figurative language as distancing the reader from the comparator; to borrow his example, describing the interwar treatment of Britain's architectural heritage as 'Belsen-like' diminishes Belsen, reducing it to one 'horror' with which another can easily be compared. Another way of considering such apparently insensitive comparisons is to see them as a means of attempting to control or encompass within discourse events that initially appear uncontrollable and highly dissonant. They may seem reductive to us now, but to authors or readers of the time, reduction may have been precisely the point: this was an attempt to bring into focus images and descriptions that were unprecedented in their horror. Minor characters and passing references in fiction could also have a metonymic function, acting as a means of alluding to, without fully exploring or explaining, particular aspects of historical context. Incorporating these horrors within a popular genre like

³ Tony Kushner, 'From "This Belsen Business" to "Shoah Business": History, Memory and Heritage, 1945-2005', in Susan Bardgett and David Cesarani (eds), *Belsen 1945: New Historical Perspectives* (London: Vallentine Mitchell 2006), 189-216 (196).

detective fiction may seem problematic or even disrespectful to a present-day reader, especially where the representation of a refugee draws on negative stereotypes, as is the case in Agatha Christie's novel. Drawing on culturally familiar stereotypes can be a way of attempting to understand the Other, but it can also result in the reinforcement of their 'othered' status

Gill Plain has seen interwar detective fiction as an indirect means of responding to the devastating losses of the First World War. In detective fiction, she argues the 'fragmented, inexplicable and even unattributable corpses of war are replaced by the whole, over-explained, completely known bodies of detection.'⁴ Noting the differing depictions of dead bodies in the work of Christie, Plain observes that while some bodies are presented as whole, undamaged and 'made safe', others bear the 'uncomfortable trace of authentically shocking violence', and thus a dynamic is established between 'corporeal repulsion and fascination.'⁵ Although the plots of detective novels often feature more than one murder, it is notable that the bodies are treated sequentially and individually; following Plain's argument, a singular body becomes a means of working through the mass death of the First World War. The images of camps, particularly Belsen, that were circulated in the British media in 1945-6, confronted the British public with mass death on an unprecedented scale and in an unprecedented manner. I will argue that one of the depictions of a body in Peters's novel can be read as prompting the reader to recall those images, and that this body becomes, like the verbal references that Kushner identifies, a metonym for something much larger. Even when the Holocaust is glimpsed at the fringes of a narrative or referred to indirectly, it can still be thematically important.

The Refugee in the Kitchen

Tackling the question of antisemitism in Agatha Christie's novels, Christie's most recent biographer Laura Thompson separates attitudes conveyed by the narrator or by characters within the novels from attitudes that Christie herself might have held, while also suggesting that

⁴ Gill Plain, *Twentieth-Century Crime Fiction: Gender, Sexuality and the Body* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 2001), 33.

⁵ Plain, *Twentieth-Century Crime Fiction*, 33, 38, 41.

Christie's shock when she encountered extreme expressions of antisemitism in real life underscores how 'meaningless' references to antisemitic stereotypes in her books really are: Thompson gives the example of a character in *The Hollow* (1946) who is described as 'a Whitechapel Jewess with dyed hair and a voice like a cornrake.'⁶ By Thompson's logic, this description should be read as a throwaway aside that reflects contemporary prejudices fostered over the years in literary representations, rather than as an evocation of an attitude that might affect real-world relationships, though this is difficult to square with Thompson's contention that Christie, far from being an ahistorical puzzle-setter, was in fact deeply 'engaged' with 'contemporary thinking'.⁷ What makes *A Murder is Announced* a notable example for this discussion is its inclusion of Mitzi, who is not explicitly described as Jewish but who reflects many antisemitic stereotypes.⁸ Not naming Mitzi as Jewish is a way for Christie, in Thompson's terms, to 'engage' with a contemporary issue without having to actually 'engage' with historical detail, but it also shows how deeply embedded antisemitic stereotypes were for Christie and her contemporaries. They are legible even when not explicitly named, and as Jane Arnold notes, Mitzi is not the only example in Christie's work of a character who is constructed with reference to antisemitic characteristics without ever being explicitly described as Jewish.⁹

Mitzi – her surname is never given, but we are told it is 'unpronounceable' – works as a housekeeper for Miss Blacklock, despite being, as she asserts early on in the novel, over-qualified for this role:

'Has something upset you?'

'Yes, I am upset,' said Mitzi dramatically. 'I do not wish to die! Already in Europe I escape.

My family they all die – they are all killed – my mother, my little brother, my so sweet little

⁶ Laura Thompson, *Agatha Christie: An English Mystery* (London: Headline, 2007), 387.

⁷ Thompson, *Agatha Christie*, 388.

⁸ As Jane Arnold suggests: 'It seems fair to assume that [Mitzi] is intended to be Jewish.' 'Jews in the Works of Agatha Christie', *Social History*, vol. 49, no. 3-4, 1987, 275-82 (279).

⁹ Arnold provides a list of Jewish characters in Christie's works in an appendix to her article (280-1) and notes other examples of strongly implied Jewishness. For example, in *The Secret of Chimneys* (1925), Herman Isaacstein works as a financier but is not described as Jewish.

niece – all, all they are killed. But me I run away – I hide. I get to England. I work. I do work that never – never would I do in my own country – I -’

‘I know all that,’ said Miss Blacklock crisply. It was, indeed, a constant refrain on Mitzi’s lips.¹⁰

Christie avoids having to specify where exactly Mitzi escaped from, or indeed exactly how her family were killed or by whom. She doesn’t need to: Mitzi’s story is only important in this novel inasmuch as it allows Christie to draw her, swiftly and economically, as a character motivated by (self)-righteous indignation. Further, when the police begin investigating the murder that has taken place at Miss Blacklock’s house, Miss Blacklock tells the officers:

‘Please don’t be too prejudiced against the poor thing because she’s a liar. I do really believe that, like so many liars, there is a real substratum of truth behind her lies. I mean that though [...] her atrocity stories have grown and grown until every kind of unpleasant story that has ever appeared in print has happened to her or her relations personally, she did have a bad shock initially and she did see one at least of her relations killed. I think a lot of these displaced persons feel, perhaps justly, that their claim to our notice and sympathy lies in their atrocity value and so they exaggerate and invent.’¹¹

Miss Blacklock’s comments could be read as an indictment of the British public’s attitude to ‘atrocity stories’; it is the public’s lack of understanding or acceptance that causes Mitzi and other ‘displaced persons’ to exaggerate. But what is underscored more strongly is Mitzi’s status as a fabulist, and her apparent appeal to the ill-defined ‘atrocity stories’ mentioned by Miss Blacklock overshadows the more-or-less passing references to her having seen ‘one [...] of her relations’ (it evidently matters little which) killed. ‘Atrocity’, as used here, is a word that gestures towards all manner of recent historical events and experiences, but the reader is not invited to confront what it might actually mean, least of all for Mitzi.

¹⁰ Agatha Christie, *A Murder is Announced* (London: HarperCollins 2005), 25.

¹¹ Christie, *A Murder*, 58.

Mitzi eventually plays a key role in entrapping the murderer but the fact that the culprit turns out to be her employer does little to undermine the reliability of Miss Blacklock's earlier account of Mitzi's exaggerations. Miss Marple persuades Mitzi to put herself in the position of being Miss Blacklock's next victim, with the assurance that a rescue will be effected before Mitzi comes to any harm. Miss Marple explains: 'I flattered [Mitzi] up, of course, and said I was sure if she'd been in her own country she'd have been in the Resistance movement [...] I told her stories of deeds done by girls in the Resistance movements, some of them true, and some of them, I'm afraid, invented.'¹² Mark Rawlinson has observed that the concentration camps and death camps were displaced in the postwar British cultural imagination by prisoner-of-war camps,¹³ and similarly here suffering under the Nazis, the keynote according to Mitzi, of her European family's war experience, is displaced by the derring-do of Resistance heroines, eliding the fact that a number of these, including British female agents of the Special Operations Executive, ended their days in Ravensbrück or Dachau. Miss Marple's admitted fabrication here is placed in a different category to the ingrained tendency to exaggerate by which Mitzi is characterised, even though both are attempts by socially marginalised figures – Mitzi the refugee, Marple the older female – to woo the listener into sympathy with a particular world-view.

Christie was an established novelist by the time of the publication of *A Murder is Announced*, and although she was certainly willing, during and in the wake of the Second World War, to incorporate details of social commentary into her novels, by the 1950s, she was competing with a new wave of detective authors who took a different approach. Ellis Peters, author from the 1960s onwards of the popular medieval-set Brother Cadfael mysteries, published her first detective novel in 1951, and the contrast between *Fallen into the Pit* and *A Murder is Announced* is striking. Like many of her contemporaries, Peters centres on an investigation run by the police, rather than on the efforts of a private investigator. The structure of the novel is largely recognisable from earlier examples of the form: a closed world of suspects, in Peters's case in an

¹² Christie, *A Murder*, 249.

¹³ Mark Rawlinson, 'This other war: British culture and the Holocaust', *Cambridge Quarterly*, vol. 25, no. 2, 1996, 1-25.

invented village in the English-Welsh borders; a second murder that complicates the investigation of the first; a resolution that removes the guilty party without recourse to legal remedy, following the convention whereby the identification of the culprit by the investigator provides a guarantee of the culprit's guilt, regardless of standards of legal proof. Peters, however, is much more concerted than Christie in her attempt to locate the action at a particular historical moment, and, for part of the action at least, to focus on concerns that extend beyond the boundaries of Comerford, its fictional setting.

Unlike Christie, Peters is specific about her refugee character's national origins: Gerd Hollins is a pre-war refugee from Germany. While Peters to some extent shares Christie's tendency to gloss over the detail of what may or may not have happened to the refugee's family left behind, her depiction of Gerd is different from Christie's portrayal of Mitzi in at least two key respects. Especially near the start of the novel, Peters's third person narration is sometimes focalised via Gerd, and, partly as a consequence of this, Gerd is a much more immediately sympathetic character than Mitzi. This is not to say that Peters avoids stereotyping: by including a German former prisoner-of-war, Helmut Schaffler, among the other inhabitants of the village, Peters provides herself with the opportunity to go out of the way to stress Gerd's attempts at forgiveness, attempts that are sorely tested by Schaffler's unrepentant antisemitism.

The depiction of Schaffler itself draws on particular wartime and postwar stereotypes: he is not only 'blond' but 'blond as a chorus-girl', a comparison not just indicating that he is of Aryan stock but pointing towards degenerate effeminacy. He is a figure who provokes ambivalence on the part of George Felse, the sergeant on the case: '[Schaffler] should, thought George, be a pretty impressive specimen when on his feet, broad-shouldered and narrow-flanked [...] His English was interestingly broken.'¹⁴ Felse's opportunity to scrutinize Schaffler comes about when the young man gets into a fight with one of the locals, after being seen giving a Nazi salute, a gesture he claims has no meaning for him other than to signify the effects of his early life and upbringing: 'Never have I been a Nazi, only one must conform [...] I am young, I do as I am

¹⁴ Ellis Peters, *Fallen into the Pit* (London: Futura 1991), 28.

taught.’¹⁵ Peters’s introduction into the novel of debates about whether Nazis can be re-educated, and if so, how, is undercut by the fact that Schauffler is evidently being disingenuous when he makes this comment. After his involvement in the fight, he has to be moved to work on a different farm, and Gerd persuades her husband to offer him employment, framing this as a way for her to ‘get used to the idea that Germans are much the same as other flesh and blood.’¹⁶ But this experiment ends disastrously when Schauffler unleashes antisemitic invective at Gerd, and after Schauffler is murdered, there are initially suspicions that this might be an act of revenge on the part of either Gerd or her husband.

We are told that Gerd fled Germany in 1937 and hoped that her family would follow: ‘but nobody ever came. [...] Long after she had married Christopher Hollins she had gone on hoping and believing that the others would turn up, after the war; and after the war she had traced at least her youngest brother, but to a cardboard box of ashes on a shelf in a room of the crematorium of Osviecim. And that was all.’¹⁷ Not even a body, then, but only a box of ashes, albeit an apparently individuated one, attributable to the particular body of her brother: it is striking that Peters conjures this curious, sparse, almost antiseptic image rather than, for instance, alluding to the images of corpses that Gerd (and Peters’s original readers) might have been expected to see in magazines and newsreels at the war’s end. One explanation, to which I will return later, is that in this kind of novel, there is only room for particular kinds of body.

Schauffler’s threats to Gerd, when he approaches her in the farm kitchen, are based on the notion that England is not the safe haven it might seem to be:

‘Do you think even the English do not tire at last? There are some who are tired already of harbouring you [...] You hear already, but a Jew crawls away only when he must. Even when you kick him out at the door he creeps in by the window again. [...] Even in this nice

¹⁵ Peters, *Fallen*, 28.

¹⁶ Peters, *Fallen*, 33.

¹⁷ Peters, *Fallen*, 31.

country,' he whispered, with a stupid little giggling breath of excitement and pleasure in her ear, 'you will wear here, some day, a yellow star.'¹⁸

Peters's insertion of explicit antisemitic sentiments into the narrative contrasts with Christie's 'playful' use of stereotypes in the depiction of Mitzi. It is notable, however, that it is another outsider, indeed a Nazi, who voices these sentiments. The portrayal of Comerford as a welcoming community, violently disrupted and disturbed even by the death of a Nazi, would not withstand the enunciation of these views by one of its own. Gerd's passivity in the face of these words - she does not speak, and does not further withdraw herself from Schauffler's presence when he approaches close to her - is underscored by her reflections once he has left her: 'She seemed to be contemplating some domestic complication such as the next week's grocery order. What she was actually seeing was a long, dark earth corridor, and six people walking down it, father, mother, Walter, Hans, Frieda, Josef; and at the end of it as crematorium trolley into which, one by one, they quietly climbed and vanished.'¹⁹ The conjunction of Gerd's domestic concerns with her imagining of her family's fate invites a parallel between her passivity in the face of Schauffler's bullying and the (presumed) passivity of her family, and by extension other Jews, in the hands of the Nazis: 'they quietly climbed and vanished.' Gerd has chosen not to rise to Schauffler's taunts, but pictures the most extreme outcome of this attitude. The precise nature of what became of her family, the fate that Schauffler implies could also await her, is only hinted at, perhaps to signal Gerd's own inability or unwillingness to confront directly what her family might have gone through, perhaps because any more precise evocation would rupture the narrative irreparably. If detective fiction is about containing and controlling death, how can it control and contain those particular deaths?²⁰ In fact, the most explicit depiction of a dead body in this novel and the one most evocative of the Holocaust is the one that is ostensibly furthest removed from those events.

¹⁸ Peters, *Fallen*, 37.

¹⁹ Peters, *Fallen*, 38.

²⁰ Notably, in the final volume of her trilogy about a serving soldier, published in 1947 under her real name, Edith Pargeter, the author gives a detailed account of her protagonist's involvement in the relief effort at an unnamed camp in Germany, though the prisoners are not specified as Jewish. See *Warfare Accomplished* (1947; London: Headline 1990), pp. 287-311. Pargeter visited Czechoslovakia with the WEA during 1947, travelling across Europe by train, and maintained a strong interest in Czech affairs. Her translation from

Uncovering the Remains

The murder of Schaffler and the subsequent killing of Charles Blunden turn out to be the responsibility of Selwyn Blunden, Charles's father and a local landowner and magistrate, and are part of a plan on his part to keep concealed his earlier murder of his wife, committed in 1941; she was believed locally to have left her husband for another man. This murder, the first in the chronological sequence, is not revealed until the very final pages of the novel, after Blunden has died while in prison awaiting trial. The wife's corpse, dug up in a field that Blunden had protected from excavation, is described in terms which are graphic, especially when compared with those used to depict Schaffler's and Charles's remains. Schaffler's body is discovered semi-submerged in an underground pool, by Felse's son Dominic, who has been undertaking some amateur sleuthing, and, like his father, Dominic seems to find Schaffler, even in death, strangely attractive:

Pale things at this hour had a lambent light of their own, and the back of the blond head, breaking the surface with a wave of thick fair hair, was the first alien thing he had seen, and fascinated him still [...] He lay there half-obscured by the cloudy, ochreous quality of the water, which reddened him all over, all but the patch of fair hair.²¹

Schaffler's body matches Plain's definition of the 'sacrificial' corpse, 'the body made safe';²² not only is the narration sparing in the description of Schaffler's head wound, focusing instead on his iconic fair hair, but he is framed as easily dispensed with. There is a surfeit of potential culprits and the possibility that he, too, might have a grieving family is not entered into. Charles's death is more disruptive from the perspective of the coherence of the village community, not least because he is initially thought to have committed suicide. As Felse reports laconically to Dominic, Charles is found 'in the woods there, with his own shot-gun lying by him, and both barrels in

Czech of Josef Bor's account of a performance of Verdi's requiem at Theresienstadt was published as *The Terezin Requiem* (London: Heinemann 1963).

²¹ Peters, *Fallen*, 75.

²² Plain, *Twentieth-Century Crime Fiction*, 33.

him.’²³ This indirect account serves its purpose: Charles’s death, like many second deaths in detective novels, is a means of ruling out certain narrative possibilities and eventually sets the course for the identification of Selwyn Blunden as the person responsible for both his son’s and Schauffler’s deaths. Blunden’s position as both a land-owner and a Justice of the Peace makes his act of filicide in particular all the more troubling, and his removal from the village community can be read as symbolic of the cementing of a new, more egalitarian, postwar social order. The discovery of the final body, however, goes some way towards complicating this conclusion.

The description of this final body, the body of Blunden’s late wife, which has been buried for about ten years, is graphic even by the standards of what Plain calls the semiotic body, the body that bears the ‘uncomfortable trace of authentically shocking violence.’²⁴ The fact that the reader is presented with this corpse so late on in the narrative is also unusual, limiting as it does the space available for explaining or making safe this shocking discovery:

There she lay, a short, tumbled skeleton, falling apart here and there in the dirty folds of cloth which had now only slight variations from the universal dirt-colour of buried things, among the soil and gravel and brick [...] A few fragments of skin still adhering to the skull, and masses of matted hair. Front teeth touched with distinctive goldwork standing forward in the jaw; and two things round her neck, a necklet of carved imitation stones and a twisted wire.

Loose enough now, but once it must have been tight round a plump, soft throat.²⁵

The disrupted syntax gives the impression of the viewer, Felse, glancing from one detail to another, and also evokes a bureaucratic listing of ‘distinguishing features’. As such it invites the reader to both ‘see’ and not see what is described. The effect here is quite different from the earlier focus on Schauffler’s blond hair, a detail which links the discovered body with the individual as he was in life, and which underlines his reduction in the narrative to a particular stereotype. Blunden’s nameless wife only appears in the narrative in either mediated form –

²³ Peters, *Fallen*, 207.

²⁴ Plain, *Twentieth-Century Crime Fiction*, 38.

²⁵ Peters, *Fallen*, 277.

earlier, Felse has seen a photograph of her wearing the necklace that he recognises here – or in fragments.

Interpreting this description as an occluded reference to the bodies of Holocaust victims could of course be seen as a case of confirmation bias: it is exceedingly difficult to know whether a reader in 1951 would have made a link between the ‘goldwork’ on the victim’s teeth and the removal of dental gold by the Nazis as present-day reader might. I argue that this is a plausible reading precisely because of the veering away from the description of Nazi crimes that occurs elsewhere in the novel. This description supplements both Gerd’s partial descriptions of the possible fate of her family and Schauffler’s racist rants. The Holocaust did not happen here, Peters acknowledges, but we must nevertheless make some reckoning with it. By placing this discovery so close to the end of the novel and indeed identifying the victim only in the final line of the text, Peters forecloses the possibility of reparation that Plain sees as characteristic even of the most graphic depictions of the body in detective fiction. Although the discovery of this final body provides a pretext for the earlier murders, it is itself simply presented for the reader to contemplate, implying that it, and what it represents, exceed the explanatory powers of this narrative.

It is pertinent to compare this discovery, ostensibly unconnected with the Holocaust, with how Christie presents the attempt on Mitzi’s life in *A Murder is Announced*. As I have noted, Marple persuades Mitzi to place herself in danger in the knowledge that she will be rescued: ‘Mitzi turned off the taps and as she did so two hands came up behind her head and with one swift movement forced it down into the water-filled sink. [...] Mitzi thrashed and struggled but Miss Blacklock was strong.’ Marple, hidden in the kitchen broom-cupboard, distracts Blacklock who releases Mitzi and once Blacklock has been arrested, Mitzi congratulates herself on her own performance: ‘I do that good, do I not? I am clever! And I am brave! Oh, I am brave! Very very nearly was I murdered too. But I am so brave I risk *everything*.’²⁶ Whilst Marple frames Mitzi’s ordeal as evocative of the treatment meted out to captured resistance fighters, this incident is also

²⁶ Christie, *A Murder*, 229, 230.

a domesticated re-enactment of the escape from mainland Europe to which Mitzi has alluded earlier in the novel, and, notably, it is framed as a performance: Mitzi asserts that she has risked everything but she was never in any real danger and her claim to have been brave is therefore undermined, marked instead as further evidence of her propensity to exaggerate. Christie, I argue, therefore further diverts her reader away from considering the actual danger that Mitzi or her family might have confronted in a way that contrasts strongly with Peters's more nuanced treatment of the legacy of the Holocaust in postwar Britain. Peters's depiction of Gerd is not without its problems, as I have suggested, but *Fallen into the Pit* is a bold attempt to incorporate the most troubling legacies of the war in Europe into a popular narrative form.

As Plain argues, a single body has the potential to stand metonymically for many more, but classic detective fiction works by limiting the reader's space for contemplating mass deaths, such as those that occurred in the First and Second World Wars. What happens in these two novels is similar to the 'swerve' away from the depiction of evil that Robert Eaglestone identifies in contemporary fictional treatments of Holocaust perpetrators; a number of the texts that he discusses substitute other kinds of evil for the evil of genocide even while seeming to thematise the Holocaust itself.²⁷ In this context, the inclusion of individuals who have fled persecution, rather than Holocaust survivors per se, is itself a form of engagement that is also an avoidance of engagement. The question of genre is a factor here. To suggest that detective fiction as a form is simply inadequate as a means of representing the Holocaust would be to impose unhelpful limitations on what constitutes 'proper' representation. What might now seem like unhelpful or ill-informed attempts at engaging with the Holocaust nevertheless warrant consideration as part of the early effort, uneven and inadequate as it sometimes now appears, to reckon with the legacy of Nazism. Further, the disturbance of the usual forms of detective fiction that is effected by attempts to incorporate this legacy indicates that the 'usual forms' were themselves in flux at this period.

²⁷ Robert Eaglestone, 'Avoiding Evil in Perpetrator Fiction', in Jenni Adams and Sue Vice (ed.), *Representing Perpetrators in Holocaust Literature and Film* (London: Vallentine Mitchell 2013), 13-24.

While the representation of the dead and the reconstruction of their stories are at the heart of detective fiction, such texts, as these novels show, are also about community, and how communities may be regulated and made safe. Christie and Peters not only engage in very different ways with the dead; they also present very different images of what survival might mean in postwar Britain, and indeed, postwar Europe.