

Comparing kinder transport and rabbit



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The play *Kinder Transport* follows the story of a nine year old German Jewish girl, Eva Schlesinger as her mother puts her aboard a train for her flight from Nazi Germany to her life as Evelyn, a quintessential English woman, who hides her origins from everyone, including her daughter Faith. Eva has been through a lot as a child, and was never really able to accept the hurt of the past.

Past and present are inextricably wound together in this play as one family's secrets and tragedies emerge to reveal a shattering truth. *Kinder Transport* is set partly in 1939, but also in the 1980s. As the play shifts subtly between past and present, we see the young Jewish Eva grow up and assimilate into British culture, and we see Faith discover family secrets, and then confront her mother and grandmother, Lil. The plot explores such themes as mother-daughter relationships, survivor guilt, and loss of identity. *Rabbit* is a play set in the future, which year or century remains a mystery to the audience. It is a distressing story about orphans who are survivors of a devastation of some form.

All these children live together, and work as a team to survive. The play touches on many issues; how the children feel threatened when a new member is introduced into their close-knit group, levels of authority and status amongst all beings, rules and rituals. Although this is a short play, we can almost immediately see the relationships formed between various characters, and we learn a lot about their lifestyles; how they have adapted in their surroundings. Many of the motifs in *Kinder Transport* are comparable to those in *Rabbit*. Especially resentment towards parents, as most of the characters in *Rabbit* begrudge their parents and think that they had planned

to leave them alone. They refuse to accept the harsh reality that they did in fact die in an accidental explosion, as Eva refuses to accept the fact that her mother had sent her away from Germany because she loved her so much, and could not bear to see her suffer and possibly die under the Nazi regime that was inflicted upon Jews in the 1930s.

Both Eva and some of the children in Rabbit are haunted by memories of their past. While the children in Rabbit live alone, without even having a parent figure to guide them, Eva at least has Lil, and the luxuries of real food, and mothers love; things that the children in Rabbit are deprived of. Rabbit concentrates on the relationship between children and Kinder Transport is all about the attachment between an adult and a child. Kinder Transport is told through flashbacks, a difficult but powerful technique.

It is a two act play which requires only one set – the attic, or the box room. However, as this play involves three generations of mothers and daughters, it has to continually move back and forth in time; requiring the stage to be divided into two sections. One section is in the present, where we see Evelyn rummaging through old boxes and papers recalling her past, with various characters coming in and out. The other part of the stage is in the past, where we see Evelyn's memories take shape. When we perform this play the left hand side of the stage is an attic with old furniture and Eva's forgotten possessions, where as the right hand side will create different places through the use of props. Rabbit is a short, straight forward story and is only one scene long.

However, the set is more complex than that of Kinder Transport, as it is located in a broken down building. Again we will see old bits of furniture and cardboard boxes, but instead of being there for storage purposes they will serve as furniture, protection from rain and all sorts of different things. Everything the children own is makeshift and doesn't always serve its purpose efficiently. I imagine the set of Rabbit to be a broken brick wall encircling the stage, with a large patched up quilt draped over one part of the stage creating an enclosure, which will be the children's' sleeping area. There should be dirty sheets, newspapers, cans, boxes and old bits of furniture strewn across the stage to give the impression that the children are living in ruins.

In Kinder Transport Eva is able to live in 'luxury'; she eats nutritious food to which she has easy access. The children in Rabbit, however, need to hunt for their food and don't live on a healthy, balanced diet. They are frequently in competition for the best food, as there is sometimes a shortage of this essential. Eva always has some one to care for her, and has always had people worrying about her, whereas the children in Rabbit have only themselves to worry about. Both plays are set in a period different to the one we are living in now; thus the cultures, styles and society are understandably different. Both plays consist of characters that speak in broken English, though over time we see Eva become fluent.

Both Eva and the children in Rabbit have to form new identities, and spend time trying to figure out who they are. Eva does this by destroying all proof of her German origins and forgetting her Jewish rituals, such as Passover. The children on the other hand invent their own rituals, like the killing of the

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rabbit. This provides them with a sense of belonging and allows them to feel like they are living in the real world. We see at least one characters display authority over others; like Lil's authority over Eva and Mig's over the other children.

In Kinder Transport we see two different yet typical societies, one German and the other British. In Rabbit, where the children have been left to their own devices, we see them create their own society and culture. I think this is the most significant difference between the two plays, one is self made and the other is reflective of the country at that time. In Kinder Transport I am playing the character of Evelyn, the grown up Eva.

Evelyn is a woman who bottles up her emotions, and finds it very difficult to talk about her experiences. Evelyn tries to block out her hurt by always keeping her self busy, and never talks to anyone about her past. My group are performing the last few scenes of the play, where Evelyn finally confronts her fears and tells Faith, Lil, Helga and the audience about how she has suffered over the past years with the memories of her past gnawing away at her. Evelyn is bitter about what happened to her; as is Vid - the character I played in Rabbit. Vid is adamant that her parents left her in this harsh world they created on purpose.

Both these characters are continually hurting throughout the play, and it's quite a challenge to have to express their pain through my facial expressions and tone of voice. Kinder Transport is an act of remembrance which stages what Evelyn would prefer to forget. In Evelyn's refusal to embrace her past or to let her daughter have access to it, and in the parallel scenes of the

teenage Eva confronting the personal legacy of the Holocaust, Kinder Transport shows us that there are two types of survival; and that is it possible to lose you self in the act of preserving yourself. I have enjoyed studying these plays and feel as though I have a better understanding of them after writing this essay. I personally prefer the story of Kinder Transport as it is based on one of the most well known historical tragedies ever, and I feel as though I can relate to it better. Even still, they are both first-class plays with gripping plots.

Both Kinder Transport and Rabbit have many similarities and differences, which makes them even more exciting to study.