

And the "Victims" had the Last Laugh
An Analysis of Jewish Dark and Gallows Humor in Nazi Germany

by

David Wolfe

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Graduate Supervisory Committee:

Robert Alexander
Carla Ghanem
Daniel Gilfillan

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ABSTRACT

In the time of Nazi Germany the systematic targeting of Jews for persecution and extermination was rampant. Although this was a dark time for the Jewish people in Europe, they did not simply stand idly by and let this happen to them. The Jewish people found a way to make a mockery of the situation that they were in, as well as a way to poke fun at the people who persecuted them. The Jews used dark humor to mock the situations that they found themselves in. The interesting point here, though, is that they did not use all the aspects of dark humor that exist. The Jews used situational humor, critical humor, and gallows humor-humor about death-according to the incongruity theory of humor, to make a mockery of the plight that they were in. They did not use all of the different aspects of dark humor, but only the parts that would merge with their need to mock their situation, in order to be able to deal with the reality of what was happening in their lives. For the analysis in this thesis, I researched various collections of Jewish humor in Nazi Germany. I analyzed the jokes in relation to the different humor theories, and gave my conclusion on why these jokes were effective. Based on the evidence, I have come to several conclusions. The Jews that made these jokes only used the aspects of dark humor that would fit in with the atmosphere that they were trying to create. They would not use sexual jokes of any kind because of this. They used jokes that could be used as a shield, to comfort not only themselves but also their compatriots given their situation. The use of humor was a coping measure and a sign of defiance, that helped some of the victims of the Holocaust survive the attempted extermination of the Jews.

Given the opportunity, I would widen my focus on this topic to include collective memory, as well, however the scope of such a project would be more fitting for a doctoral paper.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In the time of Nazi Germany the systematic targeting of Jews for persecution and extermination was rampant. Although this was a dark time for the Jewish people in Europe, the Jewish people did not simply stand idly by and let this happen to them. The Jewish people found a way to make a mockery of the situation that they found themselves in, as well as a way to poke fun at the people who were persecuting them. The Jews used dark humor to mock the situations that they found themselves in. The interesting point here, though, is that they did not use all the aspects of dark humor that exist. The Jews used situational humor, critical humor, and gallows humor—humor about death—to make a mockery of the plight that they found themselves in. They did not use all of the different aspects of dark humor, but only the parts that would merge with their need to mock their situation, in order to be able to deal with the reality of what was happening in their lives.

Why is this important, though? The events of Nazi Germany shaped the modern German culture. The way that the German people have dealt with this event in their history, has made Germany what it is today, just as it has shaped the way the Jewish people are today. Additionally, we have the fact that the Jews are the face of the Holocaust. They are only seen as survivors, though. There has not been as much research into exactly how they survived, as there should be. I am attempting to do just that.

Through the use of primary resources, such as collections of jokes that have been recorded, I hope to show the pattern of Jewish dark humor shown in the time of Nazi Germany. As mentioned, my primary sources are different collections of Jewish jokes that were recorded as having been told in Nazi Germany, and during that time. Other primary sources include sources that help to define the concepts of dark humor, the variation of Jewish dark humor discussed in this thesis, and the definition of gallows humor. This includes the definition of the superiority theory of humor, incongruity theory of humor, self-deprecating humor, satire theory of humor, ethnic humor, and also ironic humor.

My secondary sources consist of supplemental sources. These include supplemental definitions of humor that build on, and solidify, the groundwork laid down by the main humor theories that are discussed in this thesis. In addition to these sources, I also have secondary sources that are used when it comes to the examples. These include sources such as websites and journals. These secondary sources are used to reinforce the theories developed, as well as to help supplement some of the examples that are given.

In this thesis I will be arguing that a state of incongruity did exist in Jewish dark humor, partly because the Jews were mocking the circumstances that they found themselves in with their humor. I will also argue, through the definition of dark humor, that the Jews only used a specific aspect of dark humor, because this was the only part that could be properly used to successfully put this strategy into place.

CHAPTER 2

HUMOR THEORIES

Humor is used in different scenarios. It can be used to relieve tension, have a good time with friends and co-workers, and to relieve fear and distress by acting as a shield in difficult situations:

Human death, which we all fear and dread, remains the bread and butter content of much of our humor. By telling jokes about death and making fun of those in life-and-death industries of medicine, grave-digging and undertaking, we enable ourselves to momentarily, at least, feel superior to that final process which will take away from us all that we own and all that we have known (Gruner 41).

As can be seen here in this quote, there is a track record of people using humor about dark events, and people related to dark events, in order to alleviate the tension that occurs in circumstances. People will use this humor as a shield, so that they can distract themselves from the bad situations that they can be in. If you can laugh about a situation, it will at least temporarily seem less realistic. It is a way to deal with the situation.

The Jews used certain aspects of dark humor to shield themselves from the plight that they were in, but what is dark humor really? What does it entail?:

The humor of death, destruction and disaster ought also to include an explanation of that humor which is generally regarded as "sick." Dundes and Hauschild (1938: 249) have pointed out that "Nothing is so sacred, so taboo, or so disgusting that it cannot be the subject of humor." They

might well have had in mind that form of humor that we today call "sick" humor. And "sick" humor embodies the aggression, the "contest element" that fits so neatly the theory that constitutes the major thesis of this book. For the content of sick humor includes the taking lightly of such horrors as infanticide, matricide, mutilation, infirmity, disability, debilitating illness, dismemberment, amputation, monsterism, vampirism and, I would include, incest (Gruner 44-45).

As we can see here, dark humor covers a wide range of circumstances ranging from general disasters to an extreme and highly disturbing aspects of death humor. What is important to note, though, is that the Jews only used certain aspects of this dark humor. They chose to use the portions that were directly relevant to their situation.

The main aspects of humor used were self-deprecating humor, the incongruity theory of humor, the superiority theory of humor and satire humor-making fun of their persecutors, and finally gallows humor. These different aspects of humor fit perfectly into the shielding idea that was the focus of their survival and continued coping with their fate.

What, then, are all of these theories? What do they really mean? How are they important to this argument that is being made? The incongruity theory is:

Incongruity, in Allen Funt's words "to place something that makes sense in a completely inappropriate or bizarre setting" (p.46). He adds that an essential element quite often is that "people don't acknowledge the bizarre but it must be apparent that they've seen it" (MacHovec 19).

The superiority theory, following this pattern, is when the person making the joke talks down to the focus of the joke. The focus of the joke is not at the level of the jokester, or is somehow inferior to the person making the joke.

The satire theory, known also as the derision theory, targets specific people, ideas, or entities. It is also an aspect of the superiority theory:

This is the oldest known theory of humor. Plato is described with founding it with his observation that "at the sight of tragedies the spectators smile through their tears...even at a comedy the soul experiences a mixed feeling of pain and pleasure...pleasure at seeing other people humiliated" (Eastman, 1922, p.123)...the source of humor was "enjoyment of the misfortune of others due to a momentary feeling of superiority or gratified vanity that we ourselves are not in the predicament observed" (Allen, 1987, p. 10). (qtd. in Gruner 30).

Lastly, we have the term gallows humor. This is perhaps the most easy to define: "...gallows humor" (in which condemned men make light of their impending fate)..." (MacHovec 47). Even so, this is the final and most extreme humor that is found in Jewish humor during the time of Nazi Germany. This is the last aspect of dark humor and, naturally, has to do with jokes about the idea of death and ideas directly related to death. While not necessarily the most popular of the dark humor aspects, this was the final piece of the shield that the Jews had in their humor shield.

From the listing of humor given here, and when comparing this to the full definition of this dark or "sick" humor, we can see that the Jews did not use every

single aspect of this humor. Throughout the time that I have researched this topic, I never read a joke that had anything to do with rape, incest, or other sexually violent theme in their humor. The Jews seemed to purposefully shy away from these specific aspects of dark humor. This goes back to the idea of the shield and protection theory that I am making in my thesis. The Jews who made these jokes were attempting to stave off the reality of their situation using humor, as well as possibly attempting to make those around them feel somewhat better. Because of this, humor related to sexual violence would have absolutely no place in this mindset and state of existence. If you are going to try and make some people feel better about their current circumstances, then you are not going to make a joke about how your sister's sister is also your wife (or something along those ends), simply because this joke would in no way or form fit in with the mood that you are attempting to create. The Jews used whatever form of humor would make their lives feel less miserable. If it was to be their last day on this world they wanted to leave it on a high note, and wanted to leave knowing that they had made the attempt to soften the blow for those that they cared about. What better way to go out, than to go out with a joke on your lips, and a laugh in your memory?

Humor is an important aspect of many different languages. The German language is no exception to this, as is the German culture. Since many different forms of humor usually involve some kind of story, what is a humorous story? How do you tell this kind of story in a way that conveys the idea that you want to come across, correctly?:

The humorous story is told gravely; the teller does his best to conceal the fact that he even dimly suspects that there is anything funny about it; but the teller of the comic story tells you beforehand that it is one of the funniest things he has ever heard, then tells it with an eager delight, and is the first person to laugh when he gets through. (Bercovitch 90)

This seems to be a decent enough definition of the humorous story that many Jewish people would have used during the Holocaust, seeing as many of their jokes were woven in with longer thoughts and ideas, as well as opinions.

Although this is a definition of a humorous story, it does give a background on the idea of what humor is, and as such it would seem important.

What, then is a Jewish joke? Is it different from say a German joke?

Does it have characteristics that make it specifically Jewish? According to this logic, Jewish jokes must be at least somewhat different from other jokes:

There seem to be three fundamental requirements, any of which would permit us to regard a joke as really Jewish. First, *it may stem from the conditions of Jewish life or from the experience of the Jewish people* [sic].

Even this requirement has some flexibility. For example, probably the most pervasive element in the Jewish experience, a major cement holding the Jews together and dominating their life, has been religion. Further,

the holiest day in Judaism is Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement...A

second requirement of a Jewish joke is that *the joke or the punch line may depend on the use of a Jewish language, especially Yiddish*...Finally,

Jewish jokes may show real or supposed Jewish characteristics or stereotypes. (Eilbirt 59, 61)

This idea of what a Jewish joke is gives us a good starting point to look at the different forms of humor that will be talked about in this paper. Based on the idea that a major characteristic of Jewish humor itself revolves around the idea of using religion, it can be assumed that Jewish dark humor will have examples of humor about religion in it, as well. We can also see that the Jews were quite willing to incorporate ideas of anti-Semitic stereotypes, as well as jokes about their language and the way they lived, into their own jokes. This being the case, we now have a starting point for looking at the different forms of humor that existed during the Holocaust.

The Holocaust is important to the past of Germany, and as such the humor that became popular during this time period is also important to the language and the culture of Germany. What, though, is important about this type of humor, and what is dark humor and humor really? Are they different aspects of the same picture? If so, then what are the differences between the two:

In them [the] [sic] targets and the tragedy are only too real. Psychologists I have talked to tell me that is the point. They say we joke about the truly horrible as a way of distancing ourselves from it, as a way of isolating ourselves from tragedy. By joking about it, we make it unreal. Well maybe. But maybe we joke about such things for a different reason. Maybe we did it to satisfy some, deep, dark urge within us to speak the unspeakable, to push against the limits of decency... (Oring 34)

As can be seen from this quote, humor is used in a way that makes light of truly terrible events and occurrences. Another definition, close to what is described here, is the following one:

Gallows humor is an unmistakable index of the morale and spirit of resistance of the oppressed, the absence of which reveals either resigned indifference or a serious breakdown in the will to resist tyrannization...Gallows humor has built-in limitations. Frankl further added, though, that humor was one of the "soul's weapons" in the struggle for self-preservation. "It is well known that humor, more than anything else in the human makeup, can afford an aloofness and ability to rise above any situation, even if only for a few seconds" (Cohen 57).

Through the use of humor, people are able to get a handle on the situation, instead of becoming overwhelmed with what is happening around them. It shows that this form of humor, i.e. gallows humor, is not only humor about death, but it is also a way for victims to resist those who are persecuting them. This form of humor was a way to show that the fire of resistance still flickered in the hearts of those who were being systematically eliminated by the Nazis. These people were determined to survive, and to deny their captors the satisfaction of having cowed them, and because of this they continued to find humor in even these worst of situations: "More typical was the Warsaw Ghetto resident who called humor "the only weapon in the ghetto...there is no other remedy for our ills. People laugh at death and at the Nazi decrees. Humor is the only thing the Nazis cannot understand" (Lipman 145). In some cases, jokes and humor are quite simply the

only way for people to get past the emotions that would otherwise overwhelm them. They need a way to vent those negative feelings:

Jokes are forms, par excellence, that deal with situations of unspeakability because they may conjoin an unspeakable, and hence incongruous, universe of discourse to a speakable one. This is not necessarily the joke's rason d'etre, but it certainly is one of the joke's unique talents. (Oring 35)

What then is black humor, or dark humor? Is it the same, or can this have a different definition altogether? If so, then what would this different definition be?:

I want to suggest an alternative line of thought. I am going to propose that black humor, coming to the American canon of letters after World War II, may have some of its deepest roots not in our literary traditions but rather in a tradition we think of as Eastern European. I have in mind the tradition of the fool-as-protagonist; and more precisely the *shtetl* tradition of the *schlemiel* and the *schlimazl*. (Boyer)

As can be seen from this quote, the idea of dark humor in American literature may have been rooted in East European tradition that dates back to World War II.

With words such as "schlimazl" and "shtetl" we can assume that this tradition of humor is based on Jewish humor. We also see that this kind of humor had a special type of protagonist in it, who was perfect for this variety of Jewish humor, given the fact that it would be self-deprecating to the extreme. Many of the Jews thought that they would be fine even if the Nazis gained power in the case of German Jews and that they would be safe even if the Nazis took over the country

that they were in, in the other cases. This form of dark, or black humor would give them the perfect opportunity to poke fun at the fact that they were fools to have thought this. They had a false belief, and this caused them to become "inmates" in the Nazi concentration camps.

Gallows humor took on many different forms during the Holocaust and the time of Nazi Germany. Some of the jokes were made by the Jewish victims of the Holocaust, while others were also thought up by other victims of the Nazi regime. An example of these people could be German citizens who opposed the policies of Adolf Hitler, and because of this were thrown into the concentration camps, themselves:

Two men meet. "Nice to see you're free again. How was the concentration camp?" "Great! Breakfast in bed, a choice of coffee or chocolate, and for lunch we got soup, meat and dessert. And we played games in the afternoon before getting coffee and cakes. Then a little snooze and we watched movies after dinner." The man was astonished: "That's great! I recently spoke to Meyer, who was also locked up there. He told me a different story." The other man nods gravely and says: "Yes, well that's why they've picked him up again. (Crossland)

This is further proof, as some might argue, that the Jews were not the only people to suffer at the hands of the Nazis. This is without a doubt true.

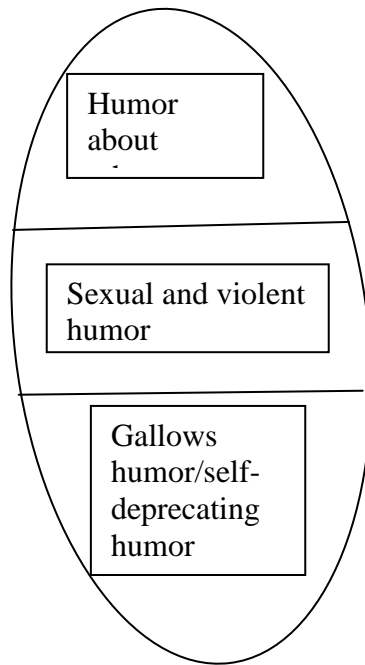
The fact is though, that the Jews were victims of the Holocaust too. Despite the efforts of the SS, the prison guards and even some of their own fellow inmates, these people still managed to put a good face on a bad situation. They managed

to not only survive through this adversity, but also to thrive. The Jews used humor as their defense against the atrocities that were committed against them by the Nazis and their allies: "In freedom, humor is a mere luxury," Sharansky says. "In prison, it's the only weapon. The moment you can laugh at them you are free" (Lipman 134).

Because of this, the argument can be made that dark humor and gallows humor are related. Both of these aspects of humor talk about the violence of people. In the case of Jewish dark humor and gallows humor, both of these aspects of humor discuss the misfortunes of the Jewish people in the time of the Third Reich. That being said, though, we have to keep in mind that dark humor and gallows humor are not completely the same. They were both forms of defiance humor, this is true, however they were also quite different in the way that they were executed (no pun intended).

While gallows humor is certainly an aspect of dark humor, I would argue that it is a much more extreme version of said humor. Whereas dark humor can be anything from a people making fun of themselves and their origins to making fun of a situation that they are in, gallows humor always takes this an extreme step further. Gallows humor is specifically and irrevocably about death. When you think of the idea of gallows humor, you think of a death object the gallows and as such an idea of imminent death. This makes it the end of the line in terms of dark humor, and although it goes along with the idea of defiance humor just as the regular Jewish dark humor did, it is quite different in the delivery and placement of the joke. Simply put, dark humor is humor that encompasses

different aspects of negative humor, while gallows humor-although a part of dark humor-is a very distinctive portion of said dark humor.



To focus the reader's attention towards to following examples of dark humor, I would like to leave you with these thoughts on Jewish humor.

As we can see, defensive humor under certain conditions may lose its main function and bare "fangs and talons". Raskin, despite all this, considers Jewish humor self-deprecating. "*Jewish humor includes all ethnic jokes which have the Jews for the targeted ethnic group*" [sic]. According to Raskin, "*the especially mentioned ethnic characteristics ridiculed in Jewish jokes are: sarcasm, wiliness, intelligence, cowardice, untidiness, Jewish logic, attraction to money, paradoxical relations to things, family relations (Jewish mothers and wives, and also JAP—Jewish American Princess—that is, Jewish daughters). Also mentioned are anti-*

Semitism, relations with non-Jews (the goyim) and even the pogrom [sic].
(qtd. in Krichtafovitch 60)

As Krichtafovitch says in this news quote: " **Avner Ziv** [sic] (1988) determined the purpose of Jewish humor as an aggressive-defensive mechanism. This view may be disseminated to all forms of defensive humor" (Krichtafovitch 60). Raskin and Ziv are both very well known for their work with the understanding of Jewish humor and jokes, and are themselves Jewish. They agree that Jewish humor is defensive. It is used as a shield to protect themselves. If these two eminent and knowledgeable people believe this to be a fact, then who are we to argue with them?

CHAPTER 3

GENERAL DARK HUMOR

While the sources that I use sometimes give basic descriptions, such as dates and locations, of the jokes used, they do not always give enough information or even analysis of the jokes given. In the following two chapters, I am taking the analysis one step further. I will write out the jokes, identify the humor theory that it is linked to, and analyze the joke for what makes it funny. This is the new aspect that I will bring to these sources, and what will distinguish my work from the authors who collected these jokes. I will dissect and analyze the humor used.

Jewish dark humor can be found in various forms of jokes. Some of them are contained in humor about death, which is the main point of gallows humor. Some of the jokes are related to their own beliefs, in the form of self-deprecating humor. Finally, there was also the anti-Nazi humor that the Jews came up with, in order to fight back against their oppressors in at least some way no matter how inconsequential it was. All of these forms of humor are essential to seeing that the Jews were not merely the hapless victims that they are portrayed as being. Instead, they fought back in whatever way they could, by making light of their situation.

Some of the most common forms of Jewish dark humor, are the examples of self-deprecating humor related to the Jewish beliefs, violence towards them as a result of this, as well as simply being a Jew: "Dear God, for five thousand years we have been Your chosen people. Enough! Choose another one now" (Lipman 140)! This was not the only type of joke that was related to religion by the Jews.

They also continuously made joking references to their religious holidays when it came to describing their lives during the Nazi time period:

Jews are now very pious. They observe all the ritual laws: they are stabbed and punched with holes like *matzanas*, and have as much bread as on Passover; they are beaten like *hoshanas*, rattled like Haman; they are as green as *esrogim* and as thin as *lulavim*; they fast as if it were Yom Kippur; they are burnt as if it were Hanukah, and their moods are as if it were the Ninth of Av. (Lipman 141)

When using humor such as this dark humor the Jews were not only able to still honor their traditions, such as by celebrating the different holidays that were on the Jewish calendar, but they were also really able to defy the Nazis while doing this at the exact same time. The prisoners in the internment camps were likely not supposed to be doing anything but work and die. The brutality the guards turned on the inmates resulted partly from their performing acts that were considered traditional and related to the prisoner's religions. Unless the guards were knowledgeable in the different rites and traditions of the Jewish people, though, they would have no possible way of knowing that these bits and pieces of humor were actually the way that the prisoners were honoring their past.

As it was, the Nazis considered anything Jewish beneath them. Why, then would they "tarnish" themselves with attempting to learn about the Jewish people and their holidays or traditions? The Jews were "sub-humans" and as such the Nazis, and especially the SS, would go to great lengths to avoid sullyng themselves by interacting with the Jewish populations of their camps if it were not

vitally essential. Because of this the Jews really had an invaluable, and in a sense a guaranteed form of defiance that they could always fall back on, when things became too hard on them. They could find a safe haven in the traditions of their people, craftily concealed in various forms of humor, so that the guards would not catch wind of what was occurring right under their noses.

The Jewish people routinely made jokes not only about the situation that they found themselves in, but also about their gullibility in believing that they would be safe even after the Nazis came to power, whether by force or by "legitimate means:"

A newcomer to Auschwitz asks a veteran about getting out. The old timer points to the smokestacks and says, "That's the only way out."

Residents of one ghetto, where the Nazis pledged to keep some Jews off the trains to the death camps would ask, "What is a protected list?" "A collection of names of the Jews who will be deported next" (Lipman 152).

This is some of the darker humor that has come to light in Jewish humor, as well as a type of gallows humor really. In the first example the real joke is that the newcomer believes there to be a real way out of Auschwitz. There is no way, hence the joke that the only real way out is through the furnaces. The second joke involves, again, the Jews making fun of themselves. Examples of Nazi cruelty toward their captives is well documented. There are photographs of the golden teeth taken from the mouths of gassed people, piles of clothes, piles of hair that would eventually be used for things such as wigs, and also piles of human corpses.

One of the somewhat less well known facts of how the Nazis operated, though, is that they would sometimes mislead their victims into thinking that they could gain their freedom by bribing the guards. Usually this would involve the Nazi Guards taking "bribes" to ensure that relatives of some people would not be chosen to be deported to the Concentration camps. Naturally, those people named would then be the next to be deported. Many people fell for this evil trick, among them the Jews, and from this fact the second joke came into existence.

The Jews realized that the Nazis had used their gullibility and belief in some form of decency to deceive them. This joke was not only a poke at their past, but also a way to remember that people were willing to take advantage of them. It was a reminder of the necessity of vigilance, and the perils of trust. Many of these people learned this lesson the hard way, and by remembering this joke they could at least attempt to ensure that no one else would fall victim to that same deceit.

Many jokes were also made about the situation that the Jewish people lived in during the time of Nazi Germany. Little was known about the true plight of the Jews in Nazi Germany by the Allies, and that which was published was naturally denied in the strongest terms by Germany. Even so, through the use of irony and sarcastic humor, the Jewish people were able to show their plight through such things as letters:

Dear Cousin Shlomo,

Everything is going splendidly for us. Everything that the American newspapers report of the mistreatment of Jews is pure horror propaganda.

We wouldn't wish to live anywhere else—except maybe Aunt Sarah,
zichrona l'olam [sic]" (Lipman 182)!

According to the source listed in the footnote, this is an actual letter that made it through the censors in Nazi Germany. This is likely because the censors did not look at what "zichrona l'olam" meant: "*The Hebrew expression zichrona [zichrono for a male] l'olam [May her memory last forever] is a traditional way to honor a deceased loved one*" (Lipman 183). If the censors had known what this Hebrew sentence meant, then they would have flagged the letter and the sender would have ended up in a concentration camp with the rest of his or her family. This is an example of the use of ironic humor. One opinion is given so that the censors will not see the hidden message in the words, but for those who know the writer, the irony would be apparent.

A less subtle variation of this type of joke is shown in the following letter which was also sent from Germany:

Dear Yossel,

All is going well for us. Everything your newspapers write about the mistreatment of Jews is a lie.

P.S. We've just come back from the burial of Jankew Katz, who asserted the contrary" (Lipman 183).

This variation is somewhat less subtle, although it could be argued that the censors may have assumed that the sender was being unsubtle enough that no one would have taken his message seriously. As it is, there is no record on whether or not this letter ever made its way out of Germany. Likely this message was

flagged, and the sender found him or herself on a train to a Concentration camp shortly thereafter. That being said, though, it must still be pointed out that both letters used humor to poke fun at their different, and yet similar situations. They were not willing to just take their situation sitting down, and decided to make the best of the life that they had been forced to accept.

Some of the best examples of dark, self-deprecating humor come when the Jews are making fun of being Jewish:

An Austrian needs his Aryan documentation and applies to the appropriate parish. When he goes to collect the result of his enquiries the priest in charge seems rather put out. "I have to tell you something rather awful," the clergyman says, "about your grandfather." "Well, what was the matter with him?" asks the Austrian. "He was a robber and murderer," says the priest, full of pity. "Oh, is that all?" says the man. "I was afraid he might have been a Jew" (qtd. in Hillenbrand 72)!

There is a variety of levels of subtlety to this joke. Not the least is the fact that the argument is being made that being a Jew is far worse than a murderer. The joke here, too, is that with the Nazis being in power, the idea of what was acceptable in proper society became completely skewed from what it normally would be. Suddenly religion became more important to everyone. If you were a Jew, then you were pretty much the lowest form of "slime" on the face of the planet. In today's society a murderer is far from being what one would think of as a respectable member of a family tree. Commonsense would indicate that a person would attempt to keep the fact that they had a murderer, as well as a robber in the

family, as silent as possible. The mere fact that this was not the case in the countries controlled by the Nazis shows us how very badly the scales had tipped when it came to people who were socially acceptable. When robbers and murderers are suddenly more acceptable in society than certain religiously inclined people, then there is something very wrong with the government that is controlling the society and the people who elected them. This is what the Jews manage to convey in this self-deprecating humor:

"A woman in a Jewish cemetery is busy pouring water from a watering can onto several graves. An attendant comes along and asks her what she is doing. 'I am baptizing my ancestors,' she replies." (qtd. in Hillenbrand 74).

This quote is another example of Jews making fun of their Jewish beliefs, and as such is an example of self-deprecating humor. It seems that in the Jewish faith no one is ever baptized. The joke here is related to the fact that Christians believe in baptism. When becoming a Christian one had to become baptized. If a family member was baptized, it could be argued that he or she was a Christian and not Jewish. It is a fact that many Jews converted to Christianity after and sometimes before the Nazis took over their countries of origin, and in the case of Germany gained power after the elections, for the purpose of having some protection from the Nazis. This type of joke poked fun at the people who did this, as well as showing to what extremes some people were willing to go in order to save themselves. Given that this joke also mentions the dead members of a family, and the fact that this joke takes place in a cemetery, this is also an aspect

of gallows humor. Although no one is actually dying in this joke, the mere fact that it can be somehow related to death makes this a form of gallows humor. Let us be honest with one another here, is it in any way normal for a person to be watering a grave? And it is in any way or form normal or natural for that person to respond to a query for information by saying that they are attempting to posthumously baptize their forefathers? In no way or form is this what we would consider normal activity for a decent person. In fact, it seems almost sacrilegious in nature, to attempt to do something like this. That is what makes this additionally an example of gallows humor. The mere idea of attempting to do something like this brings an unnatural dread and feeling of unease into being.

Sometimes the Jews even made fun of the fact that their lot could have been much different if only they had ended up in territory controlled by one of the other powers:

Für seine Invasionspläne in England 1940 läßt Hitler auch den Oberrabbiner von Amsterdam zu sich kommen. "Sagen Sie, der Moses hat doch so einen Stab gehabt; wenn er den ausstreckte, teilten sich die Wogen des Roten Meeres, und man konnte trockenden Fußes hindurchmarschieren. Verschaffen Sie mir den, ich würde dann auch für die Juden Erleichterungen eintreten lassen." Der Oberrabbiner antwortete: "Das ist leider unmöglich. Der Stab befindet sich im Britischen Museum" (qtd. in Gamm 129).

This twist in humor has a lot to do with the history of the Jewish people, as well as the fact that the British Museum is "the" place to find anything that is

of important historic consequence. The dark humor lies in the fact that the Jews could have been better off if they had supported the Nazis in some way, although the undertone suggests that the Nazis did not want the help of the Jews anyway. The other part of this is the humor of the fact that if the Jews had only stayed in Egypt and areas around it, they would have been British citizens, and would not have found themselves under the foot of Adolf Hitler. Another aspect of this joke goes to the idea of influence. Since Egypt became a part of the British Empire, and the British were able to get "the staff of Moses" it indicates the influence and might of the British Empire. The subtext here, then, would be that the Nazis were taking on a powerful Empire that could eventually bring much more in terms of resources to bear than the Germans ever would be able to bring to the war effort. Eventually, through its resources if for no other reason, the British Empire would be able to prevail against the Nazis. Because of this there was no way that the Nazis would be able to prevail in the end. Eventually they would have to be overwhelmed if only based on the ideas of economics. Although it might take a while, the balance would eventually tip in the favor of the Allies, and the British Empire. That sentiment can be seen in the following joke made by Jews:

Two Jews meet in their favorite café in Berlin. 'You know, Samuel, come to think of it, Moses was a real nincompoop!' 'How can you insult our great prophet, Isaac? After all, he did manage to get us out of Egypt.' 'That's just it. If he hadn't done that we would both have British passports' now (Hillenbrand 78)!

Jewish dark humor could even go so far as to incorporate the names of important people from their past:

Aaron: "Gott der Gerechte, was gibt's Neies?"

Moses: "Wass soll's gutes Neies geben? Schlechtes gibt's Neies!"

Aaron: "Nu, was gibt's denn schlechtes Neies?"

Moses: "Der Hitler soll sein tot!"

Aaron: "Gott der Gerechte, das ist doch nichts Schlechtes!"

Moses: "Nein, aber es soll nicht wahr sein" (qtd. in Gamm 128)!

This joke, about Adolf Hitler, involved the names of two people who are very important to Jewish history, and by the choice of words, it seems that this may be a joke between the actual Moses and Aaron about the "death" of Adolf Hitler.

The simple fact is that it is a joke about the supposed death of Hitler, which turns out to be a false statement. The real joke here seems to be that they are hoping for the death of their people's enemy, however they are not ready to believe that it is possible. The Jews see that the possibility of this actually occurring is little to none. It points to wishful thinking on the part of the Jews. Hopefully this will happen soon, however until this does happen we can still look forward to it.

On occasion, the Jews would even use dark humor to poke fun at the fact that even if they did a good deed, they would still be criticized for having done that deed:

Im Zirkus bricht bei einem Dressurakt ein Löwe aus und springt ins Publikum. Ein beherzter Jüngling schlägt ihn mit dem Spazierstock derart über den Schädel, daß er bewußtlos wird und abtransportiert werden kann.

Ein Reporter bittet den Jüngling um seinen Namen. "Moritz Levi", ist die Antwort. Am nächsten Morgen steht im Völkischen Beobachter:

"Frecher Judenlummel mißhandelt edle Tiere" (qtd. in Gamm 125)!

This joke seems to be in part self-deprecating humor, as well as anti-government humor mixed into one simple and yet expressive joke. The self-deprecating aspect of this joke is twofold. In and of itself, it seems to indicate that even if you do a good deed you should not expect anything positive to happen from it, when in Nazi Germany. It also seems to point out that you should not expect any praise from anyone in Nazi Germany when a Jew, even if your actions saved the lives of others. In a sense, though, this is a Catch-22 situation. If the Jew had stood by and done nothing, then the Nazis could have trumpeted the fact that: "Jew watches lion maul innocent people," or something like it, while in this case he was criticized for doing something to prevent this. That, I believe, is another message of this joke. The idea of being: "Damned if we do, and damned if we don't," comes to mind here, which is a quote from Franz Kafka. Also, it seems to be a joke that is critical of the Government, too, because of the fact that in the joke a person is being criticized for willingly risking his or her own life to help other people who otherwise could have been critically and seriously injured.

Another good example of this kind of humor can be found in the following joke: "A man is standing before a judge in Germany. "'Are you a Jew?' the judge asks, 'or previously convicted of some other crime?' (Lipman 186)." This is another example of one of those Catch-22 jokes that the Jews made about themselves, as well as jokes against the National Socialist government. This one

reflects, just like the previous joke, the inability of the Jewish people to do anything right in the Germany ruled by the Nazis. This joke goes even further than the other one, though, as it is stated here that the mere fact of being Jewish was now a crime. It also reflects the idea of the Jews making fun of their own status. With this joke, the Jews could poke fun at the fact that they were criminals merely for existing.

There is also this joke that follows that specific line of humor:

What is the difference between a judge before and after the Nazi takeover?

Before, the judge thought: "He's a Jew, but he is innocent."

After, he thinks: "He is innocent, but he is a Jew" (Lipman 185).

Once more we see the plain and simple fact that the Jews were considered guilty for merely existing. They might not have committed any crime whatsoever to speak of, but merely because of the fact that they were Jews, there was absolutely no way that they would escape punishment. The Jews were a condemned people, because of the Nazis, no matter what way you looked at it, and as such they could use humor such as this to poke fun at their own situations.

One more joke that follows this same humor about a Jew not being able to do anything right in Nazi Germany can be found in the following:

Rosenstein was on the way to the market in Munich with a chicken under

his arm. He was accosted in the street by a Nazi bully who demanded,

"Jew, where are you going?" "I'm going to the market to buy some feed

for my chicken." "What does he eat?" the Nazi asks. "Corn," replied

Rosenstein. "Corn? The nerve of you people. German soldiers go hungry

while you Jews feed your chicken on native German corn." He then slapped Rosenstein and continued on his way. A moment later another Nazi stopped Rosenstein. "Where are you going, Jew dog?" "To the market, to buy some feed for my chicken." "What does he eat?" "Perhaps some wheat." "Wheat? Of all things. The Jew's chicken eats wheat while German children go hungry." And he promptly knocked Rosenstein to the ground. Rosenstein picked himself up and continued on his way, when he was accosted by yet another Nazi. "Where are you going, kike?" "To the market, to buy some feed for my chicken." "Feed for your chicken? What does he eat?" "Look," said Rosenstein, "I don't know. I figure I'll give him a couple of *pfennings* and he'll buy whatever he wants" (Lipman 181).

As previously mentioned, this is another joke that pokes fun at the difficulties that the Jews experienced in Nazi Germany, and the fact that no matter what they did they were still going to be reviled and persecuted anyway. The historic context of this joke is that the Jews were the last to get any food in Nazi Germany and likely were on the receiving end of a lot of anger because they were even getting food at all. Partly as result of this, and to make it more bearable, I would argue that this joke came into existence. I would also argue that this joke is almost an example of a humorous story, since we have a main character (the Jewish man, Rosenstein), who is on his way to get food for his chicken. The entire point of this joke is about the experiences that Rosenstein is going through while trying to get that "feed" for his chicken, and the obstacles that he faces, and

tries to overcome, while attempting to do this. These are obstacles that a normal German would not have to deal with, and the only reason that he must do so is because of the fact that he *is* a Jewish German. Hence, I believe that this is a good example of what a humorous story would look like. We have the beginning, the confrontation, and eventually the conclusion when Rosenstein seemingly gives up with attempting to find a way to bring the confrontations that he has to a good conclusion.

Other forms of the Jewish dark humor that existed during the time of Nazi Germany were much more risqué in the sense that the tellers of the joke could have ended up in tremendous trouble, given the fact that these were anti-Nazi jokes:

Schacht and Hitler are conversing more or less amiably. The former maintains that the persecution of the Jews should not be pushed too far. —In business— he states categorically — the Jew is very useful. Hitler stubbornly states the contrary. Schacht then proposes that they carry out a quick experiment. —Come with me. They enter a shop whose proprietor is one hundred percent Aryan. —We need teacups with the handles on the left. —I don't have any, replies the merchant. They go into another shop, also run by a pure Aryan, and the same thing happens as at the first shop. They then decide to visit one run by a Jew. Schacht explains to him what they are looking for. And the Jew cheerfully replies: —What marvelous luck! Just today I received a shipment of cups of the kind you

want. And he shows them the teacups, turned in such a way that their handles are on the left side (Raskin 170).

As can be seen from this joke, even in the darkest of times the Jews could not resist the opportunity to poke fun at the people that were abusing them, and even more specifically the ring leader of their persecutors. These people were supposed to be "supermen," and yet they could not even tell when they were being fooled. Hitler was supposed to be the "epitome" of the "master race" and yet he could easily be tricked. The persecutors of the Jews could be made to look as fools, if the Jews tried. This joke would also give hope to those struggling to find something positive in their plight. It would give them the courage to think something along the lines of: "Maybe if we can outsmart these men, we will have an opportunity to escape or at the very least survive this catastrophe." Although they would most definitely get into trouble if they were caught making such jokes, the dark humor of the time gave them the opportunity to fight back against their oppressors.

With it common knowledge during that time in Germany that cruelty was occurring towards the Jews, jokes about the Nazi cruelty of course became another source of amusement in this time period:

Jüdische Opfer sollen von der Gestapo erschossen werden. Der kommandierende SS- Sturmführer, von einer Laune gepackt, tritt auf einen Juden zu und schnarrt: "Na, Sie sehen ja leidlich arisch aus. Ich will Ihnen eine Chance geben. Ich habe ein Glasauge, das aber nicht leicht zu erkennen ist. Wenn Sie sofort richtig raten, werde ich Sie noch

zurückstellen!" Ohne zu zögern erfolgt die Antwort des Juden: "Das linke!" "Woran haben Sie das erkannt?" "Es hat einen so gütigen Ausdruck" (qtd. in Hillenbrand 130)!

Although not all Nazis were inhuman and cruel to the Jewish people, there is no doubt that many were. The idea that a glass eye could look more human and kind than the actual "human" eye of a person really symbolizes the extent to which the Jews were persecuted during the Third Reich. It is a symbol of everything that was wrong with this government, neatly packed into an incongruous joke. The joke can also signify that the Jews at this point also began to believe that one Nazi was just like another Nazi. They became linked to these cruel people who were willing to toy with people's lives in order to amuse themselves. Offering to let someone live if they could make a correct decision in a fifty-fifty chance shows how little regard the life of that individual was really held in. This joke could serve as a reminder to the other survivors of the concentration camps that the Nazis never really considered the Jews to be worth living, but that they were wrong. When someone believes that your life is less than precious, you automatically appreciate every moment a bit more. You consider your life to be worth that much more. This joke can be a reminder, too, that even though the Nazis did not consider a Jewish life worth anything, it was in fact still worth a lot more.

Another joke that follows this pattern and still reflects the steely determination to survive:

In 1938 when all the Jews in Germany still had not grasped how dangerous the situation was for them, a Jewish representative of a foreign pharmaceutical firm came to a German doctor. "Aren't you afraid of the Nazis?" the physician asked. "Why?" asked the representative. "We came through the Red Sea, we can come through the Brown Excrement too" (Lipman 183).

This is an example of toilet humor. It contains a word play involved that makes it especially interesting. We have the fact that the Jewish representative says that they will survive the "Brown Excrement too." The representative is talking about the SA brownshirts that were around until 1934 and were the first "face" of the Nazis, the enforcers of Hitler. Although by 1938 the SS had taken over the "protection" of Hitler and Germany, the brownshirts symbol was still there. The other way that makes this joke interesting is the other definition that can be used for "Brown Excrement." This is when the joke becomes a piece of toilet humor, no pun intended. In that case it also gives yet another example of the opinion that the Jews had for the Nazis. The Nazis thought that the Jews were less than nothing, and the Jews considered the Nazis to be the results of a bowel movement. Vivid as that might seem, it shows a note of defiance when combined with the statement that the Jews also "came through the Red Sea" an even greater trial. They had survived the attempts of a previous, and historically more important and long lasting, people attempting to bring about the destruction of the Jewish race and identity, so why should they be overly concerned about this latest attempt. They survived this attempted purge by walking through the Red Sea. They could

take what the Nazis threw at them, and survive that by walking through this "Brown Sea," as well. Throughout history the Jews have always been the target of violence, and they have always found a way to keep on going. This time would be no different.

The Jews also made fun of the leader of the Nazis with their gallows humor, in a tongue-in-cheek way that could be denied if it ever came to light:

Early in the Third Reich a deputation of Jews asks for an audience with Hitler, during which they beg him for better treatment for their co-religionists. He agrees, on one condition: once a week all Jews in Germany must observe a day of prayer on which they must pray for Hitler's eternal youth. They gratefully accept this proposal. Hitler, remaining suspicious, has the main synagogue bugged by the Gestapo. To his horror he hears the Jews imploring Jehovah, "May the Führer of the Third Reich never get old" (Hillenbrand 76)!

This dark joke can have many different meanings and messages behind it. The most straightforward idea here is that after meeting with Hitler the Jews were attempting to prevent Hitler from becoming old and dying, as he wanted them to. The humorous version, though, is that the Jews were praying to Jehovah that Hitler would never grow old. In other words, they were praying that he would die prematurely. Legally, there was not a thing that Hitler could do or say, because the Jews were doing exactly what Hitler had asked of them. The second portion of this joke, then, is that although he might have wanted to punish the Jews for

making this prayer, he could not. The Jews were able to bring a secondary, their own, meaning to the prayer that they were supposed to make.

A good example of a Jewish joke on the health of Hitler is the following: "Müller meets Cohn, an old acquaintance of his, on the street. Sarcastically he greets him with 'Heil Hitler!' 'Am I a psychiatrist?' replies Cohn" (Hillenbrand 79). The humor here, of course, is in the ambiguous use of the word "heil" and the definition that goes with it: it can be used to mean both "hail" and "heal." In addition, we have the idea that something is wrong with Hitler. He must be sick somehow, because there is no reason for a healthy person to need to see a psychiatrist. It goes back to the idea that many people, even if only privately, thought that Hitler was not the great and awesome leader that everyone thought him to be.

Hitler was not, however, the only member of the Nazi leadership to be targeted by Jewish humor:

At about the same time Blumenthal travels to Berlin. When he comes back he tells his friend, "I have seen Goebbels. He looks like Apoll...". "Are you crazy?" exclaims his friend. "That miserable cripple!" "Don't interrupt me. I was going to say he looks like a Polish Yid" (Hillenbrand 78)!

Goebbels is a person that many jokes have been made about over the years. There had even been rumors during the times of Nazi Germany that he, himself, was a Jew by ancestry. The dark humor in this joke, then, is that the Jews were being persecuted by someone who could himself be a Jew. The irony that would come

with that idea would be the epitome of dark humor, because of the fact that some Jews did indeed help the Nazis in such places as the concentration camps. Also, there would be the fact that Goebbels was ashamed of his ancestry, and was hiding it instead of being willing to embrace it. Lastly, for this joke, we have the apparent irony of the situation that existed here. The fact that the "master race" has an apparent "sub human" not only in its midst but as a *leading member of the race* is really the height of irony, as well as the height of sadness really. When we add this to the currently knowledge of the fact that Hitler was, himself, a descendant of Jews this makes the joke even more amusing in this ironic form, since we now that the people who were trying to wipe out this "abomination" were actually leading the charge in destroying their own ancestry. They were quite simply attempting to exterminate their own people. Another joke that follows this exact line of thought is the following one: "Lieber Gott, mach mich blind, daß ich Goebbels arisch find" (Gamm 118)!

The gullibility of the Nazis, as well as their dedication to being thorough, was also sometimes a point of laughter in the Jewish dark humor:

During the early stages of the Nazis' anti-Jewish persecution, a squad of Gestapo agents raided a farm on the outskirts of Berlin. The husband, a Jew, was taken to a concentration camp. His wife, a Gentile, remained behind. She was able to smuggle a few letters in and out of the camp. In one letter she complained that she was unable to plow the field and plant her supply of seed potatoes. Her husband considered the problem for a few days, then openly mailed a letter in which he ordered her to forget

about plowing the field. "Don't touch a single spot," he wrote. "That's where I buried the rifles and grenades." A few days later, several truckloads of Gestapo agents again raided the farm. For a week they dug in the field, searching each shovelful of earth for a trace of the guns and grenades. Finally, finding nothing, they left. Confused, the wife wrote her husband another letter, describing the raid. "The field," she related, "has been sifted from one end to the other." The husband wrote back: "Now plant the potatoes" (Lipman 178).

This is another one of those more extreme jokes. It is also a joke that has more layers than some other do. We have, of course, the dark humor about Jews being dragged-off by the Gestapo merely for being a Jew, as well as for owning property, in Nazi Germany. We also see what can be thought of as grudging respect for the German work ethic, though since most German Jews still considered themselves to be German this respect is more natural, as well as respect for the determination for these people to do their jobs correctly. We also see the gullibility of the Gestapo portrayed here, though, which is something that most would find funny. It shows the Nazis to not be as smart as they, themselves, thought that they were. This would be something that any victim of the Gestapo would find wonderful in a twisted way. Finally, we also see humor in the fact that the Jewish husband could use this German work ethic against the Nazis, and by doing so he was able to help his wife in a time of crisis. While this would all only be theoretical, jokes such as this could very well keep hope alive in some people, that they would be able to help their families outside of the camp in some little

way. It would also show that the Nazis were not infallible. This, then, is a perfect example of the superiority theory. The Nazis were supposed to be these super humans, and the Jews were supposed to be sub-human. Because of this, there is no way that the "super human" Nazis should have been able to be tricked by the Jews. Once again, it hints towards the disbelief and defiance that the Jews held towards the Nazis.

Another one of these risky jokes that the Jews made about the Nazis was the following one:

A Jew is arrested during the war, having been denounced for killing a Nazi at 10 p.m. and even eating the brain of his victim. This is his defence [sic]: In the first place a Nazi hasn't got any brain. Secondly, a Jew doesn't eat anything that comes from a pig. And thirdly, he could not have killed the Nazi at 10 p.m. because at that time everybody listens to the BBC broadcast (Quoted by Hillenbrand 77).

This form of dark humor on the part of the Jewish people has some of the most obvious features of defiance that I have seen when looking at Jewish dark humor and gallows humor. The joke, itself, is obviously an open attack on the Nazis, and the interesting fact is that it does not even really attempt to disguise this fact. It mocks the Nazis by saying that all Nazis are brainless, and that they are "pigs." This is not just a plain and obvious insult to their captors and persecutors, but it additionally mocks the Nazi insults. This eventually leads back to the idea of the Jews labeling people of other nationalities as different animals, as can be seen in the books *Maus 1&2*, by Art Spiegelman, for example. In these two books, just

as in this joke, the author describes the other people as different animals ranging from pigs to cats and dogs (Spiegelman). This joke additionally shows the defiance growing against the Nazis with the mention of the BBC. One must assume that this example came later in the war, as before it would almost surely be a death sentence merely to mention the BBC. The maker(s) of the joke could have merely been attempting to show that they still had faith in the idea that the Allies could save them from their predicament.

Another joke that the Jews came up with that was anti-Hitler, as well as humorously linked to their religion, was about Hitler's end:

Shortly before he came to power Hitler made one of his famous speeches. In the front row sat a little Jew who shook his head and smiled the whole time. Hitler had the Jew brought to him afterwards and asked him why he had behaved as he had. "I was amazed and asked myself some questions," said the Jew. "To remember Pharaoh we eat matzos. To remember Haman we celebrate Purim and eat three-cornered poppy-seed cakes. I wonder what holiday we will celebrate and what we will eat after your exit" (qtd. in Hillenbrand 76)!

This joke makes one think. It literally links the past of the Jews to the present, in terms of the enemies that the Jews had in their history as a people. As people who have studied the history of the Jews would know, the Pharaoh and Haman were two of the greatest single enemies of the Jews in the past, and as such they [i.e. the Jews] celebrated their demise. In this joke the Jews are first of all equating Hitler with their main two foes of the past, showing how much they

thought he could affect their lives, as well as the fact that they believed that his downfall was assured, no matter when it happened.

Hitler's intelligence was another item of mirth during Nazi Germany:

In den ersten Jahren des Dritten Reiches, als die jüdischen Kinder noch in gemeinsamen Schulräumen—aber auf gesonderten Bänken—mit den anderen unterrichtet wurden, stellte einmal ein Lehrer die Frage: "Wer von euch weiß, wer das Buch 'Mein Kampf' geschrieben hat?" Niemand meldete sich, nur in der letzten Bankreihe der kleine Moritz Goldstein.

Nachdem der Lehrer seine Zöglinge gebührend auf das Beschämende des Vorfalls hingewiesen hatte, fragte er: "Nun Moritz, wer hat es geschrieben?" "Ich nicht, Herr Lehrer," versicherte der kleine Moritz mit betuernd gespreizten Händen. Der entrüstete Lehrer ließ den alten Goldstein kommen und hielt ihm eine Standrede. Der alte Goldstein erwog den Tatbestand und sagte dann treuherzig: "Herr Lehrer, ich werde Ihnen mal was sagen: Mein Moritz is [e] vorlautes Kind; er ist vielleicht sogar ein freches Kind. Aber lügen tut [mei] Moritz nicht! Wenn er sagt, er hats nicht geschrieben, dann hat [ers] nicht geschrieben!" Und nach einer Weile gütig zuredend: "Aber, Herr Lehrer, wenn [ers] wirklich sollte geschrieben haben,—nu bitt ich Sie, e Kind!!——" (qtd. in Hillenbrand 123-124)!

This somewhat longer joke is an extremely interesting one. First of all it gives the impression that the history of the leader of the Third Reich was not as well known, by the youth, as the older Nazis would have wished it to be. Secondly,

and perhaps more important, this joke pretty much relegates Hitler's ravings in that book to the status equal of what a child would write. In the joke Mr. Goldstein says that if his son really did write it then, please, a child! The idea here is that no one should have ever believed what Adolf Hitler was saying in the first place, as his ideas were too impossible to believe anyway. The idea, for example, that the Jews were to blame for all of the issues that Germany was having was too crazy to believe anyway. What he wrote should never have been believed or taken for the truth, because an adult would never believe a child if he or she wrote something like that. In that way, this joke also makes fun of the people who have believed the ideas of Hitler, saying that they had little to no intelligence to them.

During the first years of the Nazi Government, the Jews were already being persecuted by the Nazis. In this case, they were being mistreated by the SA or the Brown Shirts. Many of the SA veterans ended up joining the SS when the SA was eliminated following Hitler's rise to power. Given this situation, and who this group was, there are numerous jokes directed against the SA:

In the early years of the Nazi movement, an SA officer is killed in a street fight with the Communists. His comrades want to organize a solemn burial. They go to a funeral home to find out how much it will cost. The firm demands 200 marks for its services. But the soldiers don't have enough money, so they go to another funeral home. The undertakers there ask for 150 marks for the burial. That is still too much money, but the SA men, wherever they ask, find no undertakers who request less than

100 marks. Finally, they find a small firm: they explain who they are, and ask for a price to bury their comrade. The owner answers, without thinking it over, that he is ready to bury the SA officer for 10 marks. The SA men are astonished and happy at the same time: "How did you arrive at that cost—the other firms want no less than 100 marks?" "You see, we are a Jewish firm. For 100 marks I'd be ready to bury your entire SA" (Lipman 164).

The SA was known for its brutality toward those who opposed Hitler's views or who were seen as enemies by him. The Jews being one of the main enemies of Hitler, along with the German Communist Party, it is no surprise that the Jews would be so decidedly anti-SA. The SA and the SS both routinely referred to the Jews as "sub-human," while the Jews managed to return the favor through jokes such as this:

A Jew is on a train from Berlin to Frankfurt. Opposite him sits a Brown Shirt who fixes a fierce look at his traveling companion. The Jew becomes uneasy and begins to repeat, "Long live Hitler. Long live Hitler." "Shameless Jew!" yells the Brown Shirt. "During the Weimar Republic, you shouted 'Long live Rathenau!' and now you have the audacity to shout, 'Long live Hitler!'" "Well," asks the Jew, "is Rathenau alive" (Lipman 165)?

This joke, as the previous one, has much to do with the history of Germany, as well as a tinge of gallows humor within it as it is talking about death. From the context of the discussion, we can see that this Jew supposedly was cheering for

Rathenau (1867-1922), a former secretary of state during the time of the Weimar Republic, who was by that time dead. Also, judging by the derision that seems to be conveyed in the conversation, we can assume that Rathenau was a Jew.

Evidently this Brown Shirt scared, or unnerved, the Jew so much that he started saying Hitler's name, in the hopes that he [Hitler] would suffer the same fate as Rathenau. Namely, that he would die. The joke here, really, is that unless someone knew about Rathenau, the jokester could pretend to be supporting the government.

Since the Jews did not think much of the Nazi Party, they naturally did not think much of those who did eventually join the Party either. As such, the Jews came up with many different jokes that were against party members:

Ein Parteiführer, der in der Zeitung von dem großen Empfang gelesen hatte, den man Professor Einstein nach seiner Emigration aus Deutschland in den USA bereitet hatte, fragte einen anderen Nationalsozialisten: "Ich weiß, daß Sie ein wohlbeschlagener Mann sind; können Sie mir die Ursache der großen Begeisterung für Einstein im Ausland nennen?" "Die liegt zweifellos in seiner Relativitätstheorie begründet," war die Antwort. "Aber das ist es eben, was ich nicht verstehen kann. Was soll denn diese Theorie schon bedeuten?" "Ich will es Ihnen erklären", sagte der Gutbeschlagene. "Wenn Sie beim Frisör fünf Minuten warten müssen, so scheint es Ihnen, als ob es eine Stunde wäre, aber wenn Sie eine Stunde mit einer netten Frau verbringen, dann scheint es, also ob nur fünf Minuten verstrichen wären." Der andere dachte eine Weile nach, dann

sagte er: "Und für einen so blöden Witz feiert ihn die ganze Welt" (qtd. in Gamm 120)?

The Jews came up with this joke to make fun of the Nazis and their inability to understand things such as examples, obviously. It all goes back to the idea that the Jews, and also the Nazis, considered the other to not be really human in terms of beliefs and intelligence. The idea here seems to be that anyone should be able to understand the idea of an example, however this man cannot, hence the reason that he is a Nazi. The fact that the other man in this joke, also a Nazi, does know what is going on is ignored. He is a learned man, and as such he can be considered human and their equal. This is yet another example of the superiority theory of humor. The teller of the joke is arguing that the Jews cannot even understand the most basic of examples and ideas.

In addition there is dark humor related to the fact that some Jews were so much a part of the German culture, that they were not discovered when the Nazis began to round them up:

At Innsbruck Railway Station in 1939: SS officers have arrested several Jews and drag them into a waiting train. On the platform two Tyroleans in their *Lederhosen* observe the scene. "Aren't those Jews rather stupid?" remarks one of them. "Why don't they wear *Lederhosen* like the locals? Then nobody would take them for Jews." "Who do you think you are talking to?" replies the other "Tyrolean" (Hillenbrand 79-80).

The fact is that in every situation where a group of people is attempting to round up and exterminate another group of people, they are bound to miss at least some

of those individuals. Now do not get me wrong, I am not saying that this fact is a bad thing. Over time some of the Jews would have become so deeply entrenched in the ways of the German culture, that they would have completely adapted and become less Jewish in their habits. This would affect how they clothed themselves, how they ate, and how they talked. While this is a piece of dark humor, mainly because of the bitterness felt by some Jews that they were not themselves able to adapt well enough to submerge themselves into the German culture to escape, it still shows a streak of defiance. It shows that the Jews would somehow survive, because they were able to adapt to circumstances, if they were not already adapted to the German culture. It could also indicate that some people were willing to help them to a certain extent, because some might have just been given German clothing, which could have had consequences, as the Jews usually had to wear a star of David on the clothing to distinguish them. For this joke, though, we have to keep in mind that not all of the Jews had not adapted to the German culture. Many Jews were themselves already German, or at least considered themselves to be German until the Nazis told them otherwise. Some of the Jews, though, were from East Europe, and so were not fully adapted to the way that the Germans and Austrians dressed and lived. Additionally, we have to consider the Orthodox Jews here who were somewhat easier to distinguish because of their strict beliefs, and how they approached life, in terms of dress and action, as a result of these beliefs.

Another good example of an irony filled joke that the Jews told is this joke:

During the Nazi era, it was almost impossible for Jews in Eastern Europe to get a visa for the United States.

A teacher asked a student, "Moritz, do you know why Columbus has become so famous?"

"Yes. Because he came to America without a visa" (Lipman 183-184).

This joke goes back to history and context. Everyone knows why Columbus is really famous. The historic context here is that the Nazis at first wanted all of the Jews to emigrate out of Germany to such places as the United States, Great Britain etc, but these countries did not want to accept the immigrants. As such these people were stuck in a country that did not want them, merely because of the fact that they could not get a visa. A man is celebrated for the fact that he entered a country "illegally" and yet people who wanted to "legally" enter a country were denied said entry.

As another example of this first level of humor (namely the self-deprecating, cynical, incongruity theory, and superiority theory) , we have a joke that was made by a famous Jew:

Albert Einstein: "If my theory of relativity is proven correct, Germany will claim me as a German, and France will declare that I am a citizen of the world. If my theory should prove to be false, then France will say that I am a German, and Germany will say that I am a Jew" (Hillenbrand 77).

This is an amusing form of Jewish dark humor, partly because of the complete accuracy of the prediction. In this day and age we all know about Albert Einstein, and the theory of relativity. Although Einstein was German, he would have been

claimed by the Germans if they would have known what he would discover, and seeing as he really was a Jew they would have sent him to a concentration camp after declaring him a Jew if he had failed or was proven wrong in his conclusions.

The Jews also made jokes about the state of the war:

During the war Hitler hears of a miracle rabbi who can foretell the future.

He has the rabbi brought to him, and asks: "Who will win the war?" The

rabbi answers, "For that I have to flip a coin." He explains: "If the coin

lands with the eagle side facing up, then the Soviet Union will win. If the

other side faces up, England will win. If the coin stands on its side, then

France wins. But should God perform a miracle and the coin remain

hanging in the air, then Czechoslovakia will win" (Hillenbrand 77).

This final example of dark humor is also another example of true defiance humor.

The idea here is that somehow or another the Nazis will lose. There was no possibility for Germany to win the war that they were embarking on. This could also be used as a source of hope for the Jews during the darker times of the war.

They could have used the joke as a reminder that even though they were in a difficult situation at the moment, so was Germany. They were surrounded by the Nazis, yes, but the Nazis were surrounded by the Allies, and someday they would eventually turn back the German advances.

Another joke, told by the Jews, that also follows this patten in this joke:

1937—in Vienna—one year before the *Anschluss*.

Grün to a Jewish friend: "I don't think that Hitler will ever march into

Austria. If he did there would certainly be a war. Just look at the globe.

There is little Germany in the centre, and all the rest belongs to some other nation— France, England with her Empire, Russia— not to mention America." "Yes, yes, Grün," replies his friend, "but does Hitler know it" (Hillenbrand 79)?

As can be seen from this joke, at least some people in Europe never really grasped how serious Hitler was about his hopes and dreams for a "greater Germany." On the other hand, we can once more see that distinctive bit of defiance aimed against Hitler. In this case said defiance is expressed more along the lines of Hitler living in his own land of dreams, as indicated by the question of whether Hitler knew that Germany was surrounded. We also see the idea given here that if Hitler *did* go to war, then there was no possible way that Germany would win the war. They would be defeated somehow, if only because of the fact that Germany was surrounded and outnumbered.

The joke also once more hints towards the superiority theory of humor that the Jewish liked to use to amuse themselves. The humor here is that any realistic and normally thinking person should be able to see that a country that is surrounded should never even consider attacking its neighbors. Only an insane person would do such a thing. If the "sub human" Jews could see this, then what did that say about the "Master Race" Germans? If they were supposedly superior to the Jews, then why could the Germans not see that by attacking everyone around them they were just asking to be destroyed? How could these people call themselves superior if they could not see what was so obviously right in front of them? Through this joke, they could console themselves every time the Nazis

claimed to be "superior" to the Jews, by remembering what the eventual outcome of the War would be.

CHAPTER 4

ALL SELF-DEPRICATING HUMOR

There were many different variations of the everyday gallows humor by the Jewish people in the time that the Nazis were in control of Germany. Many were humor about death mixed with humor about others.

Moses Abraham wrote a letter about conditions in his concentration camp:

"We get up at 8 o'clock. Breakfast is at 9—coffee, tea or cocoa, bread, butter, sausage or marmalade. Then a little exercise. Whoever wants to can do a little light work. Lunch is simple but plentiful—soup, meat, vegetables, and potatoes. Then two hours of rest and a little more light work. After a hearty dinner you can go to the theater or the movies.

There's a well-stocked library as well." The letter ended with one short postscript: "Josef Levy, who did not believe all of this, was shot trying to escape" (Lipman 163-164).

This is a good example of gallows humor for a variety of reasons. First of all, we have the fact that the Nazis always were trying to force the inmates in the concentration camps to lie about how they were being treated in said camps. Sometimes members of the Red Cross, and other organizations, would gain access to the Camps, and sometimes the inmates were allowed to send letters to the outside world. This did not happen very often, and as a result the Nazis did not want the truth about what they were doing to get out. The "humor" in this statement is the way that the truth about the concentration camps is still told in this statement. The writer of this letter, Moses Abraham, wrote his letter in a way

that the Nazi censors would not find anything wrong with the letter, and no reason to censor it. He also, though, gave enough subtext to the writing, that it would be easier to read the sarcasm in the text, and with the addition of the person who "did not believe all of this" at the end of the statement, Abraham is still able to get the true meaning of life in the camp across to the reader. In addition to the form of dark humor, this yet another good example of the incongruity theory in use, since a mockery is really being made of the everyday life in Germany through the letter. The incongruity of the statement, combined with an aspect of irony and gallows humor, makes this letter a perfect example of multiple variations of humor, all that combined well to bring the full and totally true idea of life in the concentration camps across to the recipients of the letter.

Another favorite joke that the Jews told each other was a very short, but pointed one: "After 1933, the Jewish pessimists went into exile; the optimists went to concentration camps" (Lipman 178). This follows the form of Jewish gallows humor for some very specific reasons. First of all, we have the self-deprecating humor that appears very often in Jewish jokes about themselves. The idea with the "optimists" staying, and the "pessimists" leaving. The joke is being made by those who stayed behind, of course, and as such they are making fun of the fact that they made the wrong decision. The real "gallows humor" portion of this joke is based on the fact that if they had merely given up on hoping for change, and left when they had the chance, then they would not have found themselves in the situation that they are in.

Another good example of this type of somewhat skewed sense of humor can be found in this following quote:

Im Urwald des Sudan treffen sich Levi und Hirsch zufällig, jeder mit einer schweren Büchse über der Schulter und an der Spitze einer Trägerkolonne. Große Freude! "Wie geht es, was machst du hier?" "Ich habe doch in Alexandrien eine Elfenbeinschnitzerei, und zur Verbilligung des Rohstoffeinkaufs schieße ich hier meine Elefanten selbst, und du?" "Ganz ähnlich, ich fabriziere Krokodillederwaren in Port Said und schieße hier Krokodile." "Wie steht es eigentlich mit unserem gemeinsamen Freund Simon?" "Ach, der ist ganz zum Abenteuerer geworden. Er ist in Berlin geblieben" (Gamm 122)!

This piece of humor, just as many of the others, is multi-layered. First of all we have the joke about Simon going "adventuring" because of the fact that he stayed in Nazi Germany when both of his two friends fled while the Nazis still allowed this to take place. We also see here, based on the carriers that these other two Jews are following, that they consider Simon's job more adventurous than their own jobs of hunting elephants and crocodiles. This is an especially effective form of gallows humor, because of the fact that hunting these two types of animals can be extremely dangerous. In plain words, these two men are saying that their friend Simon is undertaking an even more dangerous, and potentially more fatal, job than either of them is. Along with this part of the joke, there is a subtle undercurrent that may not be quite as apparent. In this joke, the Jews are really comparing the Nazis to dangerous and wild animals. Crocodiles and elephants

can both be quite dangerous if aggravated. They can even be dangerous if they are not antagonized in any form. It is just in their nature. In this way, the people who made this joke are pointing out that the Nazis were even worse than those animals when aggravated. Even by simply being there, Simon was already taking more of a risk than either of these men were taking out in the wastelands. In Nazi Germany there was no way to avoid the danger of being stalked and hunted. Finally, we also have a little bit of dark humor shown in this joke. This portion is really found in the choice of jobs that these two Jews have decided upon after escaping from Nazi Germany. One of the individuals is working with elephant ivory, while the other is working on crocodile leather. Both choose to cut out the "middle man" by hunting these animals themselves. The Jews who lived in Nazi Germany knew that the Nazis considered them to be nothing more than animals to be used and then eventually discarded. Here these Jews are doing something similar, although in a different way and with real animals instead of the "sub-humans." After what these Jews have been through, this type of work is now normal and tame for these people. They see no real challenge, or manner of excitement in it. It is just another kind of job meant to bring money and survival. It does not give them the "thrill" that it gives to the Nazis, which also shows a difference, in a humorous way, between these two.

A good example of dark humor that incorporated elements of defiance in the joke, as well, can be found in jokes such as the following one:

One Nazi sees another walking out of a rabbi's home. "Why were you in a Jew's home?" he asks. "I'm having the rabbi teach me Yiddish," the first

Nazi answers. "That way I can listen when they are talking and discover their devious plans." "That's really clever of you." "Yes," boasts the linguist, pointing to his head. "That's using my *tochis*" (Lipman 180). This joke is more multipronged than some. It is more of a joke leading to defiance, than any other. It can be classified as a piece of dark humor, though, because of the fact that it involves the Nazis and their trying to listen to and monitor what the Jews were saying and doing. This leads to the recollection that the Jews were never free in the Third Reich, and were pretty much simply prisoners in the country. The other portion of this joke, and the part that makes this joke an act of defiance, is centered around the word "tochis." This word does not mean "head." It means quite the contrary, actually. "[*Tochis is Yiddish for one's derrière*]." (Lipman 180) So the defiance that we can see here is that the Jews were aware of why the Nazis would want to know Yiddish, and were willing to risk the wrath of the other Jews in order to ensure that even if the Nazis did know some Yiddish they would still not be able to understand the real discussion that would be occurring. Hence the giving of the false definition of "tochis" and the Nazi really saying that he was thinking with his hindquarters instead of saying that he was thinking with his head. Once again, this example also gives an idea of the superiority theory of humor, as we are seeing that the Nazis are shown to be quite human.

Defiance was shown in many ways by the Jews. In some cases, though, it was cleverly concealed in what the Nazis would consider to be pro-Nazi materials, as is shown in the following example:

A Jew's house is being searched in Berlin. The Gestapo officers find a ledger and hope to discover black market dealings. But as they leaf through it, they find on the first page:

God keep Adolf Hitler!

On the second page:

God keep Hermann Goering!

On the third page:

God keep Dr. Goebbels!

The soldiers joyfully return the book and leave, convinced of the man's loyalty. "God of mercy," the man says to his wife, "what luck that they didn't turn to the next page!" He shows her the fourth page, on which is written:

God keep Ernst Röhm!

And added underneath:

Already kept on June 30, 1934. (Lipman 186)

The joke here is centered around the definition of the word "keep," and the various meanings that this specific word can have. In some cases the word "keep" can be used to indicate the safety of a person, which is what the Gestapo officers thought that the Jewish man was saying. "Keep" can also have a possessive meaning, though. It can mean to retain something, and this is the definition that the man was using, as can be seen in the ledger under the entry of Ernst Röhm. By using a word that could be misunderstood and mistaken as meaning something else, and by gambling on the fact that whoever read the first three entries would

assume that the Jewish man was a loyal pro-Nazi Jew and stop reading, the man was able to put his real thoughts on the last page. Through tricks and wordplays such as this, the defiance that definitely existed could be not only craftily concealed, but also denied if someone smart noted the discrepancy in the entries. Incidentally, the date given is when Röhm was arrested. He was shot the next day, because Hitler thought that he was gaining too much power and influence. God had already "kept" Röhm, and so the Jews could hope that He would decide that He had given these other people enough time to wreak havoc on the world and "keep" them for the rest of eternity. The Jews could pray for the death of these Nazi leaders, while the Nazis would think that the Jews were praying for the continued life of these men. Given that this is a joke about death it is absolutely an example of gallows humor. Additionally, it has a slight tone of ironic humor to it, as well, given the wordplay involved in the joke.

Intimately making jokes about death was something that the Jewish people very often did. The following example is a mixture of both dark humor and gallows humor, mainly because it shows different aspects of the more general dark humor:

Old Davidsohn, lying in his home dying, and surrounded by his family who believe that he has breathed his last, opens his eyes once more and says, "I could laugh if it were the same shlamassel on the other side" (Hillenbrand 77).

Gallows humor has everything to do with death and pain. What kind of joke, then, could be more appropriate than some deathbed humor? The fact that it is a

joke from someone on the verge of death alone makes it gallows humor already, without a doubt. The actual joke, though, makes it also a form of dark humor. The joke, itself, revolves around the idea that everyone always assumes that "the grass is always greener on the other side." In the case of religious people, it is assumed that the "next life" will be better, whatever that is (and depending on your religion it can be different things). The fact being, though, that we expect things to be better after death, so it *would* be really incongruous if life were the same after death. The Jews in Europe were suffering extremely. It would only be natural for them to at least comfort themselves with the thought that if they do die, then they will be in a better place. Eventually, though, they would be faced with the question: "What if it is not better?" The fact that this joke was made shows that the concern was there, but that it was not all-consuming. In spite of all that had been suffered, the faith was still strong within these people:

Gallows humor usually had more to do with death than anything else.

This is shown clearly in these next two quotes:

In Treblinka, where a day's food was some stale bread and a cup of rotting soup, one prisoner cautions a fellow inmate against gluttony. "Hey Moshe, don't overeat. Think of us who will have to carry you."

Also from Treblinka: The consolation to friends upon leaving was, "Come on, cheer up, old man. We'll meet again some day in a better world—in a shop window as soap." To which the friend would reply, "Yes, but while they'll make toilet soap from my fat, you'll be a bar of cheap laundry soap" (Lipman 151).

Certain portions of these two jokes seem to be key to understanding the nature of the gallows humor shown here. The first joke is quite simply a joke about death. The real punch line is that the man being called "Moshe" is going to die, and will have to be carried by his compatriots to wherever the bodies are being taken. The humor here is that it is already expected that this person will die. There is no doubt about it, whatsoever. Also, we see here the humor linked to food. Those who have never experienced such hunger as these people have, would not understand the idea that someone having a piece of bread and bad soup could be overeating. When you do not eat much and lose your strength, though, it can be very hard to carry anything, let alone a body that has been filled with anything.

The second joke is also about death. Although the word "death" is never mentioned, the fact is that "leaving" in this case means death. This gruesome joke has much to do with the fact that the Nazis were re-using everything possible as the war continued on, no matter how gruesome it might be. They already used such things as gold from teeth and the hair from the heads of the inmates, so why not go further and use their bodies. The joke here, though, is that even after death they will still be of some use to others. Also, there is still some competition for their remains. One will still do better than the other, just like one would have done better than the other in an ideal world. No matter what circumstances people find themselves in, they will usually find some way to remove some of the tension using an idea of competition. If you are competing about anything, then you are less likely to focus completely on the perilous situation that you may find yourself in.

Another good example of defiant gallows humor is this joke told by the Jewish people:

A band of Nazis stop a Jewish-looking man on Berlin's main street. After questioning him they discover he is an Egyptian diplomat. The leader of the Nazi band apologizes. "Excuse us, excellency. Of course, this won't happen in the future. For soon all the Jews will be exterminated."

Responds the diplomat: "We Egyptians said that 4,000 years ago—and you see what the result was" (Lipman 179).

This joke, more than any other, notes the defiance that the survivors of the Holocaust and Nazi Germany seem to embody. Not only do the Jews, as is the case in many of their jokes, manage to make fun of the Nazis again, but they also prove that history is definitely on their side in terms of their survival abilities. First of all, they make the point in this joke that the Nazis are incapable of even telling the difference between a Middle Eastern diplomat and a Jew, which then begs the following question: "Were all of the people that the Nazis arrested, as Jews, really of Jewish descent? Or did the Nazis sometimes arrest people just because they *looked* Jewish?" It also would make one wonder if the Nazis sometimes used the excuse of possibly being Jewish as a convenient excuse in order to be able to arrest some "Aryans" that they thought could possibly cause trouble to the establishment and the Nazi government. Either way, this joke calls into question the judgment of the Nazis when it came to arresting people. They reference the fact that in the times of the biblical figure of Moses, the Egyptians attempted to subjugate and in some form even exterminate the Jewish population.

The Jews escaped this fate, and who was to say that they could not survive this new attempt at extermination. In this joke they seem to be telling the Nazis: "Take your best shot. We have survived worse, and we will survive this, too. Look at what happened to the last leader who tried to kill us. Just wait and see what happens to you, when you fail." Finally, we also see more irony used in this joke, since it points out that the common Nazi was unable to even identify a diplomat, even though these were high ranking people and likely accompanied by some form of security guard. Again this points out the fact that these "supermen" were just as capable of making an error as the next person.

There is this example of gallows humor, along with a quote by Rudolph Herzog, that seems to really put this idea into context:

"Two Jews are about to be shot. Suddenly the order comes to hang them instead. One says to the other "You see, they are running out of bullets."

Such jokes told by the Jews were a form of mutual encouragement, an expression of the will to survive. "Even the blackest Jewish humor expressed a defiant will, as if the joke teller wanted to say: "I'm laughing, so I'm still alive," says Herzog (Crossland).

Rudolf Herzog is well known for his collection on humor in the Third Reich, this quote from Crossland is actually directly from his book Heil Hitler, das Schwein ist tot!: Lachen unter Hitler - Komik und Humor im Dritten Reich, which received good reviews. He also directed a Film on the same topic, and as such I would assume that he is very knowledgeable in this field. The joke, itself, is an excellent example of gallows humor, since the focus of the joke really is death. We have

two people who are about to die, and yet they still have the ability to turn the situation on its head by making a joke out of it. Along with the joke, there is a situational awareness that is historically relevant to the times, that makes this joke even more important.

First of all we see the defiance that is still portrayed by the mere ability to make a joke about the circumstances that these people found themselves in, which of course follows the pattern of many of the other jokes. Additionally, though, we also have the undercurrent of hope that is concealed in this joke. The mere fact that these two Jews were to be executed by hanging instead of from a bullet could have indicated the fact that everything was not going well for the Nazi forces. In that case, we could assume that this joke would have to take place during the latter days of Nazi Germany. We would then assume that this joke is not only defiance, but also a hope that even though the liberation would be too late for them, the friends and relatives of these Jews might be saved by the on-coming Allied forces.

One the other hand, we also have to consider the other idea that this joke may be portraying. Namely the fact that this joke is occurring at the beginning of the purges of the Jews by the Nazis. If this were to be the case, than we must assume that the Nazis were running out of bullets due to the fact that they had already killed many Jews before their number was called and they were brought forward to meet their Maker. Even if this darker and more disturbing case was the actual circumstance of the joke, the fact would still remain that this joke was used to lighten the final moments of the condemned people's moods. They would

still be showing defiance, and would still be attempting to leave this world on a good note. The makers of the joke would still be attempting to make the passing easier on their compatriots, family, and friends.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

In the end a shield is only as good as its user. A shield, whether physical or mental, will always have the characteristics of its designers. In the case of this Jewish dark humor shield, this meant defensive humor that was not altogether offensive. There was no use for this violently sexual humor that is the mainstay in many versions of dark humor. Instead, the Jews opted for the forms of dark humor that would make their lives somewhat easier and more survivable for themselves. They used self-deprecating humor, gallows humor, superiority humor, and many other variations of these forms of humor to make everything just that little bit more bearable for themselves and for those around them. Through the use of this shield humor they were not only able to stay defiant, but were also able to comfort themselves.

When you are in a bad situation you have two choices. You can either decide to lay back and let yourself be trampled by the situation that you are in, or you can choose to do something about it, and make the best of any given situation. Are you going to let yourself be consumed by the misery of the situation that you can find yourself in, or will you choose to comfort not only yourself but also those around you by making a joke and poking fun at your situation? I can never hope to fully and completely understand the horrible situation that these people found themselves in, and hope that I never will have to experience it. That being said, though, I am of the opinion that at least some of these people decided to do something to help their fellow Jewish people. They

decided to make jokes, and in doing so brought some relief and protection to their fellow prisoners. If that is not a brave act of defiance, then I do not know what is.

Eventually, we know that humor is always going to change. This is a natural occurrence, as when time comes between a person and an event, they are likely to attempt to repress those memories, or forget the extent of the emotions connected to those memories. What is un-acceptable shortly after an event occurs, can later be fully viable and allowed. Over time, we also have to take into account the effects of collective memory, as well as post memory. How do these survivors act around the next generation, and how is that new generation affected by this past? Would the humor necessarily change? Would new jokes be made about the past events, and would more aspects of dark humor be allowed now that time has come between the travesty of the Holocaust and the present? Would it still be too soon to re-address these issues? These questions, as well as the question of how well the memories would really still be recalled by the survivors of the Holocaust, is something that I would be very interested in studying further on this topic.

We as the generation following the Holocaust survivors-need to keep a few things in mind. Firstly, these people did survive a horrible event. There is no getting around this fact, nor should there be a way to do this. We need to remember, though, that they did not just take what happened to them lying down. They did fight against their tormentors in whatever fashion that they could, often through the use of humor. Because of this, it is an injustice to simply call these people victims. They did suffer, but they were not forgotten. They were victims,

but some faced death with humor and defiance. Their shield of humor gave many the protection and strength to survive the times that they found themselves in. It was they who got the last laugh.

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