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Challenging grand narratives: Performing canonical texts in Dutch TYA

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ABSTRACT

Considering the ongoing debates concerning grand narratives and canonical texts it is of interest that several theatre for young audiences (TYA) productions in the Netherlands critically investigated ancient Greek tragedies or national narratives. By discussing the two Dutch TYA productions *Iphigenia, King's Child* (1989) and *Anne and Zef* (2009), the authors focus on the following: first, the image of childhood in recent history; second, the representation of violence, which is often considered unsuitable for children, though frequently inherent in heroic and national narratives; and third, the critical production of historical knowledge as expressed in the two plays.

Introduction

The last two decades of the twentieth century can be characterized by a profound critique concerning so-called grand narratives, including legitimizing myths, religion, ideologies, canonical bodies of texts or historiography (Lyotard 1984). Theatres turned out to provide for a space of critical evaluation and deconstruction of such grand narratives, by reinterpreting histories as well as national and classical plays. Closely linked to its etymology canonical texts (*kanona*, *kanones*, yardstick, standard, law) refer to an institutionalized, authoritative, founding, and compulsive, closed body of texts implying continuity of tradition (Mukherjee 2010, 1029; Gorak 2013, 14–17; Brennehan 1997). In the 1980s, the elitist and exclusive character of canonical texts has widely been criticized by suggesting an open and antidogmatic concept of canon.¹ The development of theatre for young audiences (TYA) in the Netherlands and Flanders in the late 1980s and early 1990s is deeply intertwined with critiques of the logocentrism of “canonical text” (Jordens 1989, 23–24; van Kerkhoven 1989, 34). A number of classical texts have been adapted in the 1990s for young audiences in the Netherlands, focusing on the perspectives of children. At the same time, theatre-makers started to consider history as a subject of interest for children, not to substantiate grand narratives, but rather to critically investigate the effects historic events have on the lives of children. In our following analysis, we will discuss two productions that are exemplary for these two notions of “canonical texts,” that is, classical texts from the history of (dramatic) literature on the one hand and well-known historical sources such as diaries or chronicles on the other.

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¹Criticism on the concept of canonical texts is deeply intertwined with literary criticism in general, with influential scholars like Stanley Fish, Harold Bloom, Jonathan Culler, Jacques Derrida, Judith Butler, or Edward Said, to name just a few.

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In both productions, children play the main role. Pauline Mol's adaptation of *Iphigenia in Aulis* by Euripides entitled *Ifigeneia Koningskind (Iphigenia, King's Child)* was first performed in the Netherlands (Pauline Mol/Tejater Teneeter) in 1989. This performance is generally considered to be the moment that Dutch Youth Theatre came of age by taking the child as dramatic persona seriously and putting her in the center of attention (Meyer 1996, 837, 1997a, 4). Since then, Dutch Youth Theatre has become and still is famous for its adaptations of canonical texts, both with regard to dramatic literature and historical texts. In 2009 Ad de Bont based his play *Anne en Zef* on *The diary of Anne Frank*, one of the most iconic texts of Holocaust literature, and juxtaposed her experience with that of Zef, an Albanian boy hiding from a family feud. Both productions are about and created for children/young adults, which allows reflecting on the historicity of the concept of childhood, from the perspective of both the depicted children in the plays and the imagined audience. Moreover, the two productions are about the impact of violence, trauma, and death on the lives of children, topics that nowadays are often considered to be unfit for a young audience. Therefore, the following elaborations will discuss how grand narratives are challenged by TYA productions. We especially focus on three layers of performing canonical texts for children: first, the image of childhood in recent history and its depiction in TYA productions; second, the theatrical reception of canonical texts by focusing on the impact of extreme violence on children; and third, the critical production of historical knowledge. As we show, performances of TYA not only critically scrutinize dramatic and historical narratives, but also shed light on implicit taboos concerning children and concepts of childhood.

Concepts of childhood and Dutch TYA

In 1762, more than two and a half centuries ago, Rousseau notified in the preface of his notorious treatise *Emile, or On Education*: “We know nothing of childhood; and with our mistaken notions the further we advance the further we go astray” (Rousseau 1957 [1762], 1). Even after Ellen Key's optimistic phrasing of *The Century of the Child* (1909) and a huge body of literature on children and childhood, these concepts are highly contested (Qvortrup 2005, 1–2; Shanahan 2007). However, the child, understood as a specific psychological and social being, who is essentially different from the adult, is a relatively new phenomenon in history (Ariès 1962, 33–49; Qvortrup 2005, 3). That does not mean of course that child culture as such did not exist in earlier periods, but the idea of childhood was undoubtedly very different from Rousseau's concept of a “natural” and “innocent” childhood (Rousseau 1957 [1762]) that emerged in the eighteenth century and became one of the predominant concepts of childhood during the twentieth century (Heywood 2001, 24; Shanahan 2007, 413; Dasberg 1984, 25). In his *History of Childhood*, Colin Heywood distinguishes four dichotomies concerning childhood: depravity/innocence, nature/nurture, independence/dependence, and age/sex (2001, 32–40). Suzanne Shanahan identifies two additional problematics which are of relevance reflecting productions of TYA: the conceptualization of childhood as a relational status, that is, “there is no childhood without adulthood” (2007, 414), and “the maintenance of childhood,” which conceptualizes the child as “buffer against the profound loneliness of modernity” (2007, 415). The latter problem thus engenders another dichotomy (i.e., the private sphere of the family in opposition to the impersonal public sphere; Wyness 2014; van de Water 2012, 63). These dichotomies and problematics result in two strands of images concerning the concept of childhood as a separate social category. On the one hand, the child is depicted as an incomplete creature that has to be educated and trained to become a fully developed human being; on the other hand, children are considered to be more pure, innocent,

and unspoiled beings than are the adults that they are about to become. In both cases, children are in need of protection and are thus highly dependent on adult supervision.

The Dutch pedagogue Lea Dasberg characterizes the differentiation between childhood and the world of adults with her well-known notion of “jeugdland” (“youth country” or maybe even “youth island” indicating an isolated place in time and space; 1984, 11–64). Dasberg illustrates that the main characteristic of the child is that of being socially dependent on adults and as such not capable of taking responsibility for itself (1984, 33–34). In her book, Dasberg pays special attention to the emergence of youth literature as a separate genre during the 19th century (82–99). Following Dasberg, Ton Panken reflects on youth theatre and youth film as the fourth “milieu” of socialization, next to the family, the school and the peers (Panken 1998, 13–15). The common denominator of youth literature, youth film, and youth theatre or TYA is that they generate artistic products that are targeting specific age groups. In that sense, they differ from other art forms, such as music and visual arts, that are usually not intended for specific age groups.

The fact that TYA is specifically directed toward young people does not, however, mean that there is no debate on whether TYA is or ought to be fundamentally different from “regular” theatre for adults (Allegaert and De Vuyst 1989; Meyer 1997b). In Dutch TYA, for instance, the separation of the children’s world from the adult one is often challenged by addressing topics that parents and educators usually consider to be unsuitable for children, because children are seen as vulnerable on the one hand and in need of guidance on the other. Although it seems attractive to consider youth literature, film, and theatre as a separate arena of socialization, we have to acknowledge that children seldom get to make their own decision in what books to read and certainly in what performances to watch (Jordens 1989, 22). So, the fourth “milieu” of Dasberg and Panken is often, if not always, incorporated by parents and educators into the family and the school as the most important environments where socialization takes place. These gatekeepers generally consider elements such as sexuality, violence, and death to be inappropriate for children. As a consequence, theatre-makers in TYA have to address not only the children for which the performances are intended, but also the adults who decide on the appropriateness of these performances. The result is, according to Manon van de Water, that theatre-makers in TYA “face a very complex interface between artistic desires, educational/audience expectations, and funding resources” (2012, 75).

Remarkably, one of the reasons why Dutch Youth Theatre is considered to be one of the frontrunners worldwide is exactly because theatre-makers choose not to refrain from these taboo topics. In quite a few Dutch plays of the last two or three decades, children have been portrayed as victims of extreme violence. To be precise, it is not so much the portrayed violence as such that is considered to be problematic by gatekeepers, for the aesthetic and symbolic representation of violence in TYA is usually far less realistic than in, for instance, films or video games. It is rather the subsequent confrontation with questions of death and trauma that the gatekeepers want to keep away from the supposedly delicate sensibilities of a child. Dasberg already claimed that historically the emergence of “jeugdland” not only meant that children did not have to be part of the adult world any more (as is the case in the abolishment of child labor) but also that they were not allowed to take part in it (1984, 20).² This separation of the children’s world from the

²Dasberg even goes one step further in remarking that children nowadays may have become unable or unwilling to be or become part of the world of adults (1984, 20).

adult one is consistent with the way children are usually represented in canonical texts. A lot of classical plays and stories are not so much deprived of children characters as such, but these children seldom appear on stage and almost never have a voice. And when they do, they are depicted as young adults rather than children. In this manner, the image of children as ignorant, innocent and in need of guidance is confirmed.

We would like to argue that in Dutch TYA children are not denied being a different category, but that, in portraying them as victims of violence, theatre-makers actually question the artificiality and hypocrisy of the separation of the children's world from the adult one. That they often do so by adapting canonical texts has different reasons. First, violence and other taboos are often, if not always, topics that are addressed in these texts and violence affects the children characters in particular. By retelling these stories from the viewpoint of the children themselves and also directing them towards a young audience Dutch youth theatre-makers rupture the grand narratives of these canonical texts, as well as the one of childhood as an innocent and isolated stage in the human development. Second, canonical texts are highly appreciated by adults as being educational in itself. Thus, taboo topics in TYA are more easily accepted by adults if they are presented as part of a canonical text than as a topic of a new text. Past debates on the appropriateness of TYA topics focus mainly on new texts, rather than on adaptations of canonical texts (Dieleman 2013, 33–35).

Performing theatre history: *Iphigenia*

In the 1980s, adaptations of Greek tragedies played a crucial role in what Hans-Thies Lehmann conceptualized as “postdramatic theatre” (2006). One of the crucial elements of postdramatic dramaturgies is a profound shift concerning the status of the dramatic text in performances (Lehmann 2006; Swyzen and Vanhoutte 2011). In a sense, postdramatic dramaturgies deconstructed canonical texts and their inherent concept of the heroic, of violence, sexism, nationalism, and patriarchal structures, thereby calling into question the status of canonical texts. It is of some interest that 10 years before Lehmann's influential publication, Patrick Jordens delineated the “radical” aspect of TYA as follows: “Causal-linear narrative structures increasingly are disrupted and replaced by montage-theatre based on association, suggestion, and creation of atmosphere. A sequential development prevails coherence regarding content” (1989, 24).

Tejater Teneeter, one of the leading Dutch TYA makers in the 1980s, chose a somewhat different approach, by applying an epic rather than a postdramatic dramaturgy. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Pauline Mol adapted two tragedies of Euripides for children: *Iphigenia at Aulis* in 1989 and *Medea* in 1994. In her adaptation of the plays, Mol clearly follows one of the main principles of politicized TYA, that is, that children, too, stay in the center of struggles and abundantly experience the backlash of social problems (cf. van Maanen 1997, 161). Given that in 11 of the 18 or 19 plays of Euripides that survived, children are threatened or murdered by adults—eight times by their own parents (Koolschijn 2010, 138)—his tragedies provide plenty evidence for the impact of (heroic) acting on children. However, while Euripides tells the stories from the point of view of adults and their conflicts, Pauline Mol shifts the focus in her stage adaptations to the experience of the affected children.

Her 1989 adaption for Tejater Teneeter of *Iphigenia at Aulis* entitled *Ifigeneia, konings-kind* (*Iphigenia, King's Child*) closely follows the storyline of the Greek tragedy and she extensively quotes Euripides' play. But Pauline Mol accentuates from the very beginning a double time structure: the time of Euripides' play *Iphigenia at Aulis* written "two thousand and four hundred years ago" (1989, 8) and the story being told now, in the theatre. Mol emphasizes the different layers of time by applying an epic dramaturgy. The most decisive epic moment is Mol's introduction of a character called Child which actually supplants the chorus of women from Chalcis in Euripides' play. It is exactly by introducing this character, functioning as a focalizer of the story and as a mediator towards the contemporary children's audience, that Mol shifts the perspective from the conflict between Agamemnon and Clytemnestra to Iphigenia. The performance starts with all players—except Child and Iphigenia—reciting Agamemnon's account of the background of the Trojan War as depicted in Euripides play (Euripides 2002, 171–173; Mol 1989, 7–9). The actual words are unintelligible, the words only resemble a distant murmur we can somehow hear but do not understand anymore—as if the text is deeply engraved in the collective memory of adults even though not comprehensible. This mode of staging the classical text emphasizes the distance between adults and childhood on the one hand but at the same time visualizes theatre histories (i.e., Greek tragedies as citation). As Marianne van Kerkhoven states, such a choice puts into perspective generally accepted standards in order to open up other possible social orders (1989, 34).

In the prologue, Mol stresses the here and now of the theatrical space vis-à-vis the space and time of the story being told. All actors explicitly introduce their parts in the prologue, as, for example: "Menelaos: I play the part of Menelaos/the story strongly revolves around me/you see, I have a wife/called Helena/[...]" (1989, 8).³ At the end of the prologue, Iphigenia and Child introduce themselves. Iphigenia—not quoting from the script—introduces herself in the present tense: "I am Iphigenia/and actually I am playing the leading role/and you?" (3). By contrast, Child introduces itself in the past tense:

CHILD I was the child
 My part has not been written
 I don't know why
 But it doesn't matter
 I am here nevertheless
 Well then?
 Then it is calm now. (13)

The effect of this juxtaposition is remarkable, as it simultaneously emphasizes that Iphigenia *was* a child at the time of her sacrifice, but that the concept of childhood was not yet actualized when Euripides wrote the tragedy. To be precise, it was a different concept of childhood than in the moment of presentation. After all, the Chorus in Euripides' play praises Agamemnon's decision not to kill his child at the end of his controversy with Menelaus by commenting: "[...] a fine sentiment it is, to spare one's children" (207). Iphigenia denies her sacrifice in the first instance by pleading Agamemnon: "Do not kill me before my time [...]. You used to say, 'Shall I see you happy in your husband's house, living a flourished life worthy of me?'" (297). The

³All translations from the Dutch plays are by the authors.

contrast between a promised marriage implying procreation (future) and the planned sacrifice bringing along a disastrous war constitutes the core conflict of Euripides' play. Finally, the scandal of killing one's children in Euripides' play rests on terminating their inherent promise to provide for a future and procreation of the family line.

Pauline Mol adopts this line of the Chorus as a recurrent motif of the Old Man, who time and again states in the play "One has to save the lives of children" (14, 20, 23, 47). However, in Mol's play the sentence, spoken by the Old Man, who has already incorporated the future, emphasizes the taboo of killing one's children *because* they are children. The difference between these two concepts of childhood becomes apparent in the dialogue between Iphigenia and Child after Iphigenia has made her decision to agree with the sacrifice for the sake of her country's glory.

IPHIGENIA when I go to the altar
I am a heroine
so important
that the whole nation rejoices
my life suddenly makes sense
I am history
immortal

CHILD Dead you are!
Completely breathless dead!
They simply will fight a war in order to
do even more to death.
You are crazy
You must not do it! (64)

Iphigenia argues her decision by shifting her personal future to the future of her nation (by recollecting fundamental categories of drama, that is, heroism and transcendental meaning), and it is noteworthy that she also refers to the expected audience effect of her decision by saying "I am their strong daughter/this is touching" (64). And finally, when she is taking leave from Child as child, she is explicitly referring to the gap between childhood and the life of grown-ups by stating: "Honestly, you are a little bit foolish/[...]I am awfully sorry/but I am in the middle of real life now/it has to be" (66). This gap is marked by death, a death Iphigenia is transcending to the idea of heroic immortality.

In contrast, Child harshly refers to the fact that the child Iphigenia will be dead. But even though Child embodies the nonutilitarian concept of childhood, it knows the future of the past. It knows the outcome of the Trojan War and in a way the outcome of all the wars that follow. So in the end, Child formulates the disenchantments with a heroic concept of history at the end of the twentieth century.

Pauline Mol applies epic means of dramaturgy to enact the anachronism of a stable and timeless understanding of canonical texts by repeatedly emphasizing the lack of comprehension vis-à-vis Euripides' play. At the same time, while she does of course re-enact the play, she does so by stressing a history untold that is, the history of children. Iphigenia is depicted as a dependent child, which also implies to be completely at the mercy of the arbitrariness of adults. Mol implements a scene showing Iphigenia and Child torn by the ways adults try to keep away subjects considered as inappropriate for children from children. While Child is asking questions like, "Why does mama say yes and why does

papa say maybe and why are they scolding each other and why are they then laughing and why do we have dust in our ears?” (41), Iphigenia answers in a refrain “That’s why” (40–41), thus echoing a familiar answer of parents tired of answering endless questions of children. The quarrel between Child and Iphigenia ends by Iphigenia stating “You don’t understand them” and Child noticing “and they don’t understand us”, whereupon Iphigenia concludes “That’s why they call us children” (43). The difference between childhood and adulthood turns out to be unbridgeable; and with regard to Iphigenia, the gap is marked by death. The character Child expresses the unspeakable, from the beginning it insists on enunciating the secret that Iphigenia will be sacrificed. Finally, Child exposes notions of heroism, patriotism and eternity as violent illusions. Child therefore is depicted as the Other, also the Other of the concept of the child as innocent or in need of education, at the same time Child is highly aware and understanding and, in this regard, it is always already part of the world of adults.

Since the first performance in 1989, Pauline Mol’s play has been translated into German, French, and Swedish. In October 2017, a new production of *Ifigeneia Koningskind* by NTjong, one of the major Dutch youth theatre companies, successfully premiered in Den Haag, the Netherlands. Mol’s adaptation of Euripides’ canonical drama text turned out to address still relevant subjects for a young audience and their parents and has thus become part of the repertoire itself.

Performing history: *Anne and Zef*

Immediately after its first publication in 1947, Anne Frank’s diary received huge attention and an epitomic status for its description of the ways in which a Jewish family in Amsterdam sought to escape persecution during the Second World War. Nevertheless, the international appreciation of Anne Frank’s diary as an iconic text also engendered remarkable criticism from the very beginning. After all the diary itself has been written in hiding and therefore does not depict the violence of deportation and concentration camps which became the ultimate symbol of the atrocities of National Socialism and World War II (Bettelheim 1960, 46; Rosenfeld 1980, 51; Arnoni 1982, 283; Young 1988; 27–28; Langer 1996, 158; Bachmann 2010, 137–185; Barnouw 2012). Scholars of Holocaust education have suggested that one of the reasons the book has been so successful and considered to be appropriate for young readers is because the atrocities of concentration camps are missing (cf. Hughes 2011, 53–55). In his play and performance *Anne en Zef*, intended for children from 10 years up, writer and director Ad de Bont brings forward exactly these elements missing in the book by adding three fictional monologues that tell of Anne Frank’s life in Westerbork and in Auschwitz–Birkenau, and finally of her death in Bergen–Belsen.

It was not the first time that de Bont portrayed children as victims of war and violence. He received international recognition with his piece *Mirad, a boy from Bosnia* in 1993. That play was about a Bosnian boy who had lost almost all of his beloved ones in the war in Bosnia–Herzegovina. Ultimately, he comes to Holland as a refugee, but returns to Bosnia to find his mother, almost the only one of the family who has not been murdered. The story of his wanderings through the war zones is told by his uncle and aunt, who also arrive in Holland as refugees and find a letter by Mirad in his former shelter. Dramaturgically remarkable is the fact that Mirad as the main character of the play is

present and not present at the same time. He is the silent witness of the war. His voice is heard *through* the voices of his uncle and aunt. This epic technique is reinforced by the setting of the performance: it was performed in a classroom with almost no theatrical resources. Nowadays, when Europe is again confronted with thousands of refugees trying to escape from war and violence, this play by Ad de Bont has gained further relevance.

Like in his play *Mirad, a boy from Bosnia* Ad de Bont depicts the impact of war and conflict on children in his play *Anne en Zef*. De Bont situates the piece in the hereafter and portrays Anne as a young girl looking back on her life and her death in Bergen-Belsen. In this setting, he juxtaposes the character of Anne with an Albanian boy of the same age, named Zef Bunga, who has spent two years in hiding to prevent blood revenge. But in the end, he leaves the house and falls victim to the regime of the so-called *kanun*, a set of traditional Albanian laws that foster bloody feuds between families.

The play starts with a film that shows Zef leaving his shelter and being shot by a member of the rivaling family. Subsequently, he wakes up on stage in the hereafter, meeting Anne Frank. Consequently, the story of Zef is presented as present, while Anne Frank's story is set in 1944–45. By doing so, Ad de Bont not only brings together different time frames, but also combines fictional characters (Zef is based on the 1980 novel *Broken April* by Ismail Kadare) with historical figures (Anne Frank). Their violent deaths constitute their encounter after death, but it is the common experience of hiding for years, that makes them feel connected and attracted to each other.

Although the two characters are connected by age, years of hiding, and their premature and violent deaths, it is important to emphasize that the years of hiding are not equated as being the same experience. De Bont cautiously refers to and simultaneously challenges the assumption that the Holocaust is incomparable to other forms of violence (Des Pres 1988, 217; Levy 1999; Rothberg 2009, 1–12; Dieleman and Zangl 2015, 31). Zef anticipates the discourse by stating: “For you, it was even more difficult. [...] Your distress was planned” (de Bont 2009, 38). Anne Frank does not agree with Zef, but he insists on the difference between the persecution of Jews during National Socialism and the laws of the *kanun* (38). By identifying symmetries and asymmetries of their victimhood the unique character of the Holocaust is shifted into a multidirectional field of traumatic memories (Rothberg 2011, 523–25).

Furthermore, Anne and Zef are also juxtaposed in the sense that Anne is represented as a witty, but nevertheless quiet girl, who has come to terms with her experience in her own way, while Zef is characterized as an upbeat teenager, but also a desperate child in need of guidance. Thus, Ad de Bont challenges the historical but still existing image of the child as pure, vulnerable, or incomplete and in need of protection. Through similar experiences, Anne and Zef have been forced out of these images and involuntarily thrown into the adult world.

De Bont chooses two different theatrical means to depict Anne's and Zef's stories. In accordance with the iconic image of Anne as the writer of the diary, Anne the character of the play narrates her past. But it is not the past that we all know from the famous diary. The audience is assumed to know what happened during her years of hiding. In Ad de Bont's play, Anne relates the story of what happened during her stay in the three concentration camps and what led to her death in Bergen-Belsen. Laura de Boer, who plays Anne Frank, enacts three long monologues in a modest, almost introverted mode. In contrast, Floris Verkerk as Zef applies a comic means of acting (Dieleman and Zangl 2015, 32–33). The story of the family and the blood revenge is shown mainly through the conflict of Zef's parents, the two other characters of the play, the mother insisting on

tradition and thus putting up with the death of her son, the father arguing for stopping the vicious circle of violence and revenge (de Bont 2009, 9–12).⁴ Zef's clownish depiction of the desperate situation sheds light on a different way of coming to terms with the past.

The *mise-en-scène* of the performance stresses the different historical layers. An important element of the minimal set design is a tower representing both a “kulla,” a typical Albanian tower house, and at the same time the chimney of a crematorium as a reference to concentration camps. The costume of actress Laura de Boer, playing Anne, is a red checked skirt suit. Thus, the costume not only cites Anne Frank's famous diary, but in this manner Laura de Boer as Anne also embodies the diary and the last seven months of Anne's life that were not yet part of it.

By setting the piece in the hereafter and letting Anne and Zef narrate and enact their stories from the point of view of their death, De Bont like Mol uses an epic form of dramaturgy to distance their stories from the actual violence, with which the young audience is thus indirectly confronted. The play and performance can thus be considered as a multilayered example of what theatre scholar Freddie Rokem terms “performing history.” According to Rokem, “theatre ‘performing history’ seeks to overcome both the separation and the exclusion from the past, striving to create a community where the events from this past will matter again” (2000, xii). It is capable of “connecting the past with the present through the creativity of the theatre, constantly ‘quoting’ from the past, but erasing the exact traces in order to gain full meaning in the present” (xiii). In TYA, this seems especially important, because children are hardly familiar with narratives and images of cultural memory which theatre performing history brings to the attention of its audience. In this sense, *Anne en Zef* is not only performing history, but also producing a multilayered perspective on historical knowledge. As Rokem elaborates in his introduction, the “time-lag between the historical event and the performance is of central importance” for his notion of “performing history” (2000, 7). One possibility to emphasize the time-lag is to introduce a multiple time register (Rokem 2000, 19). De Bont not only creates different time registers but also confronts different registers of cultural memories by juxtaposing Anne Frank's diary as an iconic piece of Holocaust literature with another, lesser-known part of European history. In both cases, children turn into victims of violence. The play depicts various ways in which children have to deal with violent conflicts and finally become victims of atrocities. As such it offers to children and adults as spectators an awareness of how war and violence invade and define the lives of children, not only in these two historical events, but also as an ongoing reality in many parts of the world.

Conclusion

Like in Greek tragedies, explicit violence is barely depicted, only narrated in both *Ifigeneia Koningskind* and *Anne en Zef*, but death as a devastating consequence of violence is ostentatiously present in the basic setting of the plays: as Anne and Zef are already dead at the beginning of the play and Child represents the violent shadow of Iphigenia's story.

⁴It is remarkable that in both plays the mothers become the negative antipodes of the children. Clytemnestra is fighting against Iphigenia's fate, but she is depicted as a rather hysterical woman, who is acting out her whims on her child without restraints. Zef's mother again is executing the patriarchal norms even though her husband is ready to break with traditions. It would be worthwhile to study the family constellations in more detail in TYA productions.

It is striking that both de Bont and Mol apply epic dramaturgies to present violent (theatre) histories. Furthermore, both emphasize the difference between the historical event/play and the present performance and thus visualize what Freddie Rokem designates as “time-lag.” By the dramaturgical means of alienation or distancing the re-presented event/rewritten play, they enable children to relate to the histories and stories as perceived in the performance. Rewriting canonical texts thus becomes a means of critically questioning the implications of a Western dramatic and historical canon and by shifting the perspective it opens up new opportunities to relate to it for both children and adults.

Both plays actually challenge the assumption that the world of children can be separated from the world of adults. The conceptualization of childhood as both innocent and vulnerable and in need of protection and guidance to become an adult (i.e., a complete human being) is critically questioned as being untenable and hypocritical in a world where violence is so predominant that neither adults nor children can escape from it.

Epilogue

In the spring of 2017, another adaptation of a canonical text for a young audience was performed in the Netherlands. It was entitled *Hendrik IV. Niet geschikt voor kinderen* (*Henry IV. Not suitable for children*). It is a rather loose adaptation of *Enrico IV* by Luigi Pirandello about a man who falls on his head and when he gains consciousness, thinks he is king Henry IV. At a certain moment, the performance is interrupted by a character from the so-called Theatre Bureau. She is there to investigate if the performance is suitable for children (i.e., if it does not portray subjects such as violence, foul language, and sex). The performance shows not only that canonical texts are still being adapted for children, but also that the mentioned taboos continue to be an important topic in discussions on TYA. TYA productions like *Henry IV. Not suitable for children* not only implicitly problematize concepts of childhood, but also apply meta-theatrical means to emphasize the shortcomings of a complex debate. One could argue that this is a discussion “not suitable for children,” which forgets in the heat of the moment that children themselves are completely deprived of taking decisions in this debate. The children in the audience obviously had great fun watching a performance in which parts they were supposedly not allowed to see were unsuccessfully hidden from them. And sometimes they could even decide for themselves if and how they wanted to see something, a rarity in the theatre because children are seldom given a choice in what they are allowed to watch or listen to.

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