

## CHAPTER: ONE

### Introduction

*Everything is Illuminated*, the first novel of Jonathan Safran Foer, is about the memory of the holocaust. The novel, published in 2002 has disruption of history and temporality. The simplest thing to describe this novel would be as a novel about holocaust. The novel discusses the holocaust and invites the readers to analyze individual and collective trauma. The novel mixes narrative with comedy, satire and tragedy. The narrator occasionally uses 'we' to describe them. The use of two narratives in the novel serves to evaluate the power of fiction as an ethical instrument. Divided into two narratives, the novel fluctuates between stories with mythical over tones about the creation and destruction of the Shtetl of Trachimbrod and a character's quest for roots on a trip to Ukraine. With two contrasting voices, the novel takes on some of the questions of trauma theory in its examination of both the pain and healing power of repetition. It argues an ethical reading through a dual narrative structure that contrasts a realist mode and set of literary and cultural sources centered on myth.

Jonathan Safran Foer was born in Washington D.C. in 1977, the son of successful Jewish parents. During his undergraduate degree in philosophy at Princeton University, he took an introductory subject in creative writing with Joyce Carol Oates. The course was a turning point in Foer's life; after studying briefly for a degree in graduate medicine, Foer dropped out to pursue a career as a writer. His first novel *Everything is Illuminated*, inspired to a degree by his maternal grandfather's experiences of the Holocaust. Usually for second- or third-generation Holocaust fiction, the novel met with rave reviews, earning Foer a National Jewish Book Award and a Guardian First Book Award. Given the novel's

imaginative treatment of the Holocaust—a subject where etiquette favors historical realism over the subversive potential of imaginative fiction—the lack of controversy surrounding its publication was especially noteworthy.

Foer's use of distancing devices in the text to highlight his twice-mediated access to the Holocaust underlie a complex metafictional narrative structure. Told from the dual perspectives of the serious Jewish-American student Jonathan Safran Foer (the narrator uses the author's own name) and his comical translator Alexander Perchov, the novel explores Jonathan's journey to the Ukraine to find Augustine—the woman who saved his grandfather from the Nazis. The narratives converge when it is revealed that Alex's grandfather (who served as Alex and Jonathan's driver in the Ukraine) was both a victim and a perpetrator of the Nazi massacre in the town of Kolki.

Foer's first novel with two distinct narratives that illuminate the truths embedded in historical events and acts of memory, can be said to have a difficult birth because it was rejected by 6 agents and none of the publishers in New York were interested when it was first submitted. "The Very Rigid Search", an extract from the novel, was published in "The New Yorker" in 2001. However, after its publication in 2002, it received a lot of praise, and Jonathan won The Guardian First Book Award, the National Jewish Book Award, and it was named Book of the Year by the Los Angeles Times.

It's generally argued that the great thing about fiction is that it has very little to do with the circumstances of our lives, it has much more to do with the things that are deep, deep down inside of us. Regarding this idea Jonathan Safran Foer's novel *Everything Is Illuminated* can be interpreted as an example of Holocaust fiction written by third-generation survivors. This research work will attempt to explore how Foer 'uses' the

Holocaust in his narrative; whether it is possible to speak of a change in the approach to history between the second and the third generation. In what way is the holocaust presented in the novel? How is it presented?

The novel is about the memory and identity of Alex and the Ukraine as it is about the American 'Foer'. Presenting three interrelated strands with two different authors, the novel focuses on the moment of illumination. It is a third generation survivor novel. As the novel is about holocaust, it is related to the historical event.

In writing *Everything is Illuminated*, Foer joins many writers who believe it is not only fitting, but necessary, to delve into the terror and mystery of the Holocaust. Countless memoirs of the Holocaust have been written, as well as fiction written by victims and survivors. As a member of a generation that did not live through the Holocaust, but living in a country where it is an active memory, Foer is in a unique position to evaluate its effects two generations out. Writing about holocaust trauma, being far removed from the Holocaust, presents certain challenges. For example, he must himself rely on memory-the oral and written accounts of others. More than sixty years on, this novel valorizes the role of fantasy in storytelling, not as a way to hide the facts but as a way to make their truth more real. Foer has confronted the difficulty of maintaining a connection to a past he can never truly know.

The Nazi extermination of the Jews was unique because never before had a state, under the responsible authority of its leader, decided and announced that a specific group of human beings, including the old, the women, the children, and the infants, would be killed to the very last one, and implemented this decision with all the means at its disposal. Telling stories or narrating is the important aspect of 'acting out' of the trauma. The narratives of

trauma run throughout the novel. Trauma, which involves a wound and the experience of great emotional anguish, is acted out through telling stories or narrating the events. Memory of the events is important. Trauma links past to present through imagination. As Cathy Caruth argues “it is not the experience itself that produces traumatic effect but rather the remembrance of it.

Although both the first and the third generation are represented in this novel, it is especially the form of the novel that invites a trauma-theoretical reading. The form is quite particular since the different stories are not told chronologically, and they intersect each other. The aged Augustine is (or perhaps is not) found, horrific tales of Nazi atrocities and of a bitter legacy of apostasy, betrayal, and guilt gradually unfold—and “illumination”—is ironically achieved, as these several stories fuse together.

Neither by sticking too deeply wrought in personal troubles nor by imposing his personal view about the holocaust that occurred sixty years back, Foer is able to reflect on the holocaust in the “healthier” way. With the main objective of evaluating Foer’s *Everything is Illuminated*, from the ethical aspect of the trauma, this research project will deal with the topic in four different chapters. First chapter is the introduction, which introduces the text relating to the major concern of the project. Second chapter entitled “Trauma, Memory and Ethics” will talk about the theoretical aspect of the concerned issues. Third chapter will relate the text to the major concern of the research. It will bridge the concept of memory, trauma and ethics to the text. The last chapter will be the conclusion, reinstating the major apprehension of the research work.

## CHAPTER : TWO

### Trauma, Memory and Ethics

Before analyzing the trauma of the Holocaust in the novel *Everything is Illuminated*, it is necessary to attempt to define the concept of 'trauma'. The verb "to attempt" is used rather than 'to define' because the notion of trauma has undergone significant changes in meaning throughout the years and its definition has never been completely fixed.

Cathy Caruth in *Unclaimed Experience* shows the relation of the word "trauma" to the Greek language meaning to be wound. The original meaning was thus "an injury inflicted on a body" (3). Later on, the concept came to be used in psychiatry, changing the meaning to "a wound inflicted ....upon the mind" (3). Throughout history, such psychological trauma was not perfectly recognized and the amount of attention given to the phenomenon changed in time.

Ruth Leys points out in *Trauma: A Genealogy* that the first periods of interest in trauma occurred when soldiers returned traumatized from the battle field after World War I. Physicians then began to see that "their wounds were psychological rather than organic in nature" and they labeled the soldiers' condition as "shell shock" ( 83). After some years, again the interest increased during World War II. For analyzing the war trauma, some theories were developed but soon forgotten again, when the wars were over. The Vietnam War contributed for the systematic study of the trauma. Codde confirms in "Postmemory, Afterimages" that only after this war, it was recognized that "the pathologies that had variously been identified as 'war neurosis,' 'shell shock,' 'combat fatigue,' or 'survivor syndrome' were really manifestations of one and the same condition that became known as

‘trauma’ or PTSD, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (2). Still, it took a few more years for the phenomenon to be officially recognized and only in 1980, the existence of PTSD finally acknowledged by the American Psychiatric Association.

Caruth defines this concept in “Trauma and Experience”, a definition that nowadays has been widely accepted – as follows:

There is a response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or events, which takes the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviors stemming from the event, along with numbing that may have begun during or after the experience, and possibly also increased arousal to (and avoidance of) stimuli recalling the event. (4)

Caruth is the one who transfers the psychoanalytical model of individual trauma to the study of collective trauma. The concept of the cultural trauma is based on the idea that when someone is hurt, the hurting is also psychological not only the physical one. If the victimized are in-group or more, the effect of the trauma also takes a specific cultural context. The traumatized group is reconnected to the event when triggered by a similar event.

Trauma, basically is a psychological aspect, though varied effect might be there based on the source of trauma. Traumatic experience and its effect also depend on the ‘source’ of the trauma. In nature caused trauma, victims may find some comfort by telling themselves “it’s nothing personal”. However, a victim of violent crime takes it differently “this was a deliberate attack on me personally”. One earthquake survivor though may not be physically injured by the events, who watches building collapsed, hears injured people cried or sees bodies of victims, is likely to suffer from emotional trauma. Though both accident

victims and crime victims may suffer from the event emotionally, it is needed to treat them differently.

There is a difference between trauma as it affects individuals and as a cultural process. As a cultural process, trauma is mediated through various forms of representation, linked to the reformation of collective identity and the reworking of the collective memory.

As Eyerman states:

As opposed to psychological or physical trauma, which involves a wound and the experience of great emotional anguish by an individual, cultural trauma refers to dramatic loss of identity and meaning, a tear in social fabric, affecting a group of people that has achieved some degree of cohesion. (2)

The literary texts, as considered to be the reflection of what happens in the society, presents the experience of the people victimized, survivors and witnesses.

Therefore, sociopsychological angle of the trauma is also to be analyzed in the holocaust literature. As understanding the holocaust trauma is understanding the historical trauma, there always has been question about authentication. The storywriter presents the event by villainizing some and showing sympathy to others. In most of the cases ‘oppressor’ is presented, to be hated victimized to be sympathized. But there can be question about the presentation of the context. There can be some exaggeration, both for villainizing or herorizing the opposites of the context.

As how events in the past return to hunt the survivor later on, is the main idea of trauma *Everything is Illuminated* is a novel about holocaust trauma. In her, “The Wound and the Voice” Cathy Caruth argues that trauma as it first occurs is incomprehensible. It is only later after a period of “latency” that it can be placed in the narratives: “the impact of

the traumatic event lies precisely in its belatedness in its refusal to be simply located”

(8). The experiences itself does not produce the traumatic effect but rather the remembrance of it. Each text would be, in effect, a site of trauma with which the reader would have to engage. As Tal writes in “Literature of trauma”:

The work of the critic of the literature of the trauma is both to identify and explicate literature by members of survivor groups, and to deconstruct the process by which the dominant culture codifies their traumatic experience.  
(16)

And trauma has great value in the study of the history and historical event. Cathy Caruth in “Unclaimed Experience” writes:

A concept of trauma can be of great value in the study of history and historical narrative, and also of narrative in general, as the verbal representation of temporality. The idea of trauma also allows for the interpretation of cultural symptoms- of the growths, wounds, scars on a social body and its compulsive repeated actions (8).

The social suffering results the trauma and social suffering itself is the cause of the clash/violence. One of the notable impact of the violence related trauma is that it affects group consciousness. In Jeffery Alexander’s words: “a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways” (Toward A Theory of Cultural Trauma,1). When the trauma is constructed, the emphasize is on the victims and who is responsible.



Mostly traumatic literature directs the readers to an alternative reading of the master narrative. Writing about the traumatized past is based on the memory which can never be pure and unmediated. Jeffery C. Alexander writes:

Memories about the past guide this thinking about the future. Programs for action will be developed, individual and collective environments will be reconstructed, and eventually the feeling of trauma will subside. (3)

Based on the working through concept of the trauma, the storywriter makes the survivors, witnesses and the readers become retraumatized and relieve the past. Beerendra Pandey in “Historiography of Partition” writes: “A sharing of the traumatic experience through the mutual acts of speaking and listening helps the victims and survivors confront it and work through it” (32).

The trauma in relation to violence is specific and different with long lasting wound. Trauma that I intend to talk in relation to Foer’s novel *Everything is Illuminated* is emotional injury. Emotional trauma is not confined to the single shock that comes with an assault. Some people suffer trauma from continuing attacks on their emotional stability. Both physical and emotional wounds may be the products of the same experience. After some incidents took place, there might be some eyewitness to report the event. For example, in violence someone may be dead, survivors might be bleeding, unconscious or in shock.

The medical profession has, quite logically approached trauma in its most severe manifestation, the collection of symptoms that persistently troubles a person for a month or longer after a traumatic event. In looking at these long lasting cases, psychiatrists gave the name post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) to the group of symptoms they observed. The concept of PTSD depends on the idea that the sufferers are so haunted by a terrible event

that they can't forget it. Emotional reactions to trauma are not new, of course, they have always been parts of human condition. The term post-traumatic stress disorder, PTSD, often pops up now as writers try to report medical explanations of the long-lasting traumatic effects of such events. It is important for writers to understand PTSD so that they can alert their audiences to what trauma maybe coming, as well as how to cope with what's already there.

Sometimes it is seen abnormal that some are found coping very easily with the same event but some are not. There can be different reasons behind this. Maybe those who cope well successfully accomplish necessary tasks, maintain relationships with significant others preserve their self-esteem and keep that anxiety within tolerable limits. All are affected by the traumatic events but degree may be varied. As memory plays vital role in PTSD the role of someone who reminds the event or who retells the story is important. As Frank Ochberg envisioned in the "Survivor's Psalm":

I have been victimized.

I was in a fight that was not a fair fight

I didn't ask for the fight. I lost.

There is no shame in losing such fights,

Only in winning.

I have reached the state of survivor and

am no longer a slave of victim status.

I look back with sadness rather than hate.

I look forward with hope rather than despair.

I may never forget,

but I need not constantly remember.

I was a victim.

I am a survivor. (1993: 782)

Though the speaker 'I' has been used in the poem, 'I' is many there. A way out of the trap of cultural trauma is moving away from the dichotomy "I" and "You" to "We", that is sharing the suffering through an owning up of the responsibility.

As trauma is transferred from one generation to another, speech act theory is at the heart of the trauma process. While referring to black/white issue in "Formation of African American Identity", Ron Eyerman writes:

Without the means to influence public memory, blacks were left to form and own collective memory, with slavery as an ever shifting and reconstructed reference point. Slavery has meant different things for different generations of black Americans, but it was always there as referent. (78)

While talking about the ethical aspect of the trauma, trauma should be considered as something, which is constructed. Alexander writes, "Trauma is not something naturally existing, it is something constructed by society (2). The question of ethics is notable as the author has significant role in the construction. Presenting trauma as "naturalistic fallacy", Alexander says, "Events are not inherently traumatic. Trauma is a socially mediated attribution" (8). The pain becomes common. Alexander states, "By allowing members of wider publics to participate in the pain of others, cultural trauma broadens the realm of social understanding and sympathy, and they provide powerful avenues of how forms of social incorporation (24)".

Codde points out the origins of recent trauma theory by mentioning Jacques Derrida's 'Deconstruction' on the one hand as an important basis, while acknowledging Freudian Psychoanalysis, on the other hand as an equally important source from which, trauma theory derived many of its ideas. From deconstruction, trauma theory acquired the urge to look for hidden meanings and the belief that it is impossible to identify one single meaning in a text.

The most important Freudian concepts that are related with trauma theory are 'latency', 'acting-out' and 'working-through'. The concept of 'latency' has already been hinted in the above definition of PTSD by Caruth ("sometimes delayed") and is crucial to understand the meaning of trauma. Dominick La Capra in *Writing History* states:

In Freud's widely shared view, the trauma as experience is 'in' the repetition of an early event in a later event – an early event for which one was not prepared to feel anxiety and a later event that somehow recalls the early one and triggers a traumatic response" (81-82).

Caruth describes in *Unclaimed Experience* "the period between the early and the later event as the period during which the effects of the experience are not apparent" (17). Moreover, she declares that the central enigma revealed by Freud's example is not so much the period of forgetting that occurs after the accident, but rather the fact that the victim of the crash was never fully conscious during the accident itself. The experience of trauma, the fact of latency, would thus seem to consist, not in the forgetting of a reality that can hence never be fully known, but in an inherent latency within the experience itself.

Another important psychiatrist who relates trauma to psychoanalysis was Pierre Janet. He studied psychoanalysis and is said to have preceded Freud in many of his ideas. One of Janet's major contributions was his distinction among "habit memory," "narrative

memory” and “traumatic memory”. Especially the differentiation between the latter two would be of crucial importance to his work. “Habit memory” refers to what happens when people almost automatically assimilate new information, while “narrative memory” requires a certain kind of effort to be able to memorize well. The third type of memory occurs when something unexpected or even frightening takes place. Because of the unexpected nature, it will be remembered more vividly and in extreme situations, the memory may even withstand integration. Janet defines this “traumatic memory” as follows:

Under extreme conditions, existing meaning schemes may be entirely unable to accommodate frightening experiences, which causes the memory of these experiences to be stored differently and not be available for retrieval under ordinary conditions: it becomes dissociated from conscious awareness and voluntary control. When that occurs, fragments of these un-integrated experiences may later manifest recollections or behavioral reenactments. (160)

Caruth indicates that the reason why an event keeps returning through such manifestations lies in the fact that the traumatic memory cannot be transformed into a narrative memory, which means it cannot become part of a story about the past (“Recapturing” 153). She also explains why many survivors are unwilling to complete this transition: not only will they lose “the precision and the force” of a traumatic memory, they also fear the loss of “the event’s essential incomprehensibility, the force of its *affront to understanding*” (153-154).

According to Caruth, it is up to the listener to “not reduce them [traumatic stories] to clichés or turn them all into versions of the same story”. Codde states that one of the

major problems with trauma theory is the danger of overgeneralization. He mentions Freud's belief that all people begin their life with a trauma, namely that of the separation from the mother. Caruth adds that in every text or movie, one can find a moment of departure that brings this original trauma to mind. By suggesting that all people are in way trauma survivors, the gravity of undergoing an actual traumatic event may not be acknowledged. This may lead to the reduction or even the trivialization of the concept of trauma.

Regarding the historical aspect of trauma, prior to the age of Enlightenment, only little acknowledgement of traumas was there as senseless disasters, or as unconscious forces. As there was influence of religion everywhere, the concept of trauma was also not an exception. Religion explained traumatic events as punishment by gods for sins. Traumas in those days were explained as possession by the devil. Many sexually abused women were burnt alive as witches, or were exorcised of the devil who planted the evil thoughts in their minds. This kind of blaming of victims was common. After all, if God was just suffering must be deserved. But the age of Enlightenment challenged all these concepts and took a step forward in evolution. Toward the end of nineteenth century, the first seed of modern traumatology and the seeding of psychoanalysis occurred simultaneously.

Both concepts of trauma and psychoanalysis were concentrated in the figure of the great French neurologist Charcot, who intent to wrest hysteria from myths and religion to science. For him, possessed women were ill, suffering neither divine punishment nor possession by the devil, rather suffering the consequences of all too human causation. According to Charcot, many thousands of girls had died as a result of injuries due to sexual

abuse. Charcot surmised that many more women must have survived and carried consequences of major sexual abuse.

Freud noted that they derived only pain, not pleasure from the telling. They come to remember the events during treatment with reluctance and shame. In the process, they suffered concurrently both the original distress and their symptoms. Freud further talks about the consciousness of splitting. He states that at the time of trauma the mind splits, in a state of altered consciousness called a hypnoid or dissociated state, into everyday consciousness, and 'unreal', 'repressed' or 'unconscious' sectors. Reliving and avoidance are two major components of post- traumatic stress disorder.

On the other hand, traumatology has had its own history and is in the process of evolving world views. Like in psychoanalysis, it has been recognized and suppressed in different waves. It has been recognized when it could no longer be denied, usually in the wakes of war. Recognition has spread to a variety of situation – wars, genocide, torture, natural disasters, assault, rape, illness, and dying and so on. Now, traumatology has evolved as a discipline.

Most of the philosophers working on the issue of traumatic literature reviews the psychological literature on memory and concludes that the process of reconstruction of memories of trauma is unreliable and strongly influenced by motivation. They point out that the defensive mechanism most likely linked with trauma in childhood is dissociation rather than repression. Repression is thought to be a more mature defensive process – the immature and unstructured mind of the infant has no recourse to repression as a means of keeping unpleasing material out of awareness.

As the traumatic past haunts the present, the issue can be there about whether remembering or forgetting. Forgetting does not seem possible because it is like forgetting own self. Relating our life to the past is not the past, it is one of the essential parts of the present. This is the reason Jonathan made a trip in search of his ancestral past. In this regard, Cathy Caruth takes a very clear stand that traumatic past should not be forgotten where as Nietzsche seems in opposition. He argues that we are torturing ourselves by remembering the past. Maja Zehfuss in “Remembering to Forget/ Forgetting to Remember” says, “The consideration of forgetting reconfirms that remembering is valued, despite Friedrich Nietzsche’s intervention in support of forgetting (214)”.

No matter whether someone argues to remember or forget, everyone should be encouraged to remember. If someone says to forget, he/she is still promoting to remember. Looking away does not mean escaping from memory, “Looking away is always already looking somewhere else: there is no escape from memory such as (219)”.

After talking about the concept of trauma, link between psychological and cultural trauma; how psychological trauma (group affected) becomes the trauma process, I am going to write about ethical aspect in the trauma. The word derived from Greek word ‘ethos’ means something like ‘morals’. The ethical aspect in trauma, therefore, should be understood in its relationship to morality. Whether it is our obligation to remember people or events from the past or not, is the ethics of trauma. Avishai Margalit, one of the philosopher relating trauma to ethics, does not think that memory obligations are inevitable. He relates the issue to the ‘thick’ and ‘thin’ relations.

Like many philosophers, Margalit distinguishes between ethics and morality and their meaning more or less reverses their ordinary meanings. Mostly it is thought that



morality is what governs our thick personal relations, whereas ethics, considered as official committees and rules, covers our impersonal 'thin' relations. But for philosophers, they are just opposite. Morality, is thin, general detached, abstract, it is about how we should treat others whoever they are and whether you know them or not, by construct, ethics, is the thick, local, particular, personal stuff. Thick relations are those we have with family and friends, lovers and neighbors on tribe and our nation and they are all dependent on shared memories. Thin relations we have with total strangers with people whom we have nothing in common except our common humanity. On this base, ethics of memory is the concept that when radical evil attacks our shared humanity, as human beings, we ought to remember the victims.

Maja Zehfuss relates Margalit in her essay "Remembering to Forget/ Forgetting to Remember" that memory breaths revenge as often as it breaths reconciliation:

Avishai Margalit observes that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in south Africa similarly was established with the hope that it would bring social catharsis- that the truth about the past will , by being revealed, bring reconciliation. (217)

The issue here is not whether to memorize or not but the question is how to memorize. In this point again, ethical and moral aspect of memory has many more things to do. When the memory is ethically inflicted, it leads to revenge. However, morality inflicted memory brings reconciliation. On the same stand of thick and thin relations, personal and cultural memory also can be distinguished. Personal and cultural memory are somehow distinct. The former is not distorted, reduced and instrumentalized. Maza Zehfuss writes:

The fear of manipulation actually seems to suggest not so much that we should liberate ourselves from dangerous memories but in deed that the more we remember the better, for surely those who know more about the past are less easily manipulated. (218)

Cultural trauma is nearer to the thin relations. It should refer to morality, not ethics. Alexander in “Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma” states:

Collective traumas have no geographical or cultural limitations. The theory of cultural trauma applies, without prejudice, to any and all instances, when societies have or have not, constructed and experienced cultural trauma events, and to their efforts to draw, or not to draw, the moral lessons that can be said to emanate from them. (27)

With the occurrence of violence, some are dead, some injured and others are left to be traumatized as survivors. The trauma of the violence is both mediated and transferred by the writers in the textual form. Precisely because literature is not reality and precisely because it is fictional, it allows us to get in touch with the unbearable, while the characters can add love, care, humor and friendship to the story, while they guide or non-guide, the readers through the events. The questions of legitimacy and authenticity become more pronounced as generational distance from the holocaust increases. As an author whose Jewish grandfather survived the holocaust the ethics of representing the atrocity poses particular challenges and opportunities for the third- generation writer. Being third generation holocaust literature, Foer also has challenge. But Foer seems to be able to deal the issue very carefully.

Foer has used distancing techniques in the language of the text to highlight his twice mediated knowledge of the atrocity. By drawing attention to his remoteness from the

holocaust, Foer enables readers to compare their own dormant knowledge of the atrocity against the version being presented in the text. Foer's model suggests that an author's very distance from the holocaust, whether they are personally connected to the event or not, is in fact a necessary and productive ingredient of contemporary holocaust fiction.

The novel is essentially postmodern in its narrative techniques. Three storylines run next to each other, mixing realism, myth, autobiography and letter writing, and using techniques such as stream of consciousness, chapters from other fictional books, embedded stories etc. The result is an extreme postmodernism that could have been a spoof of the genre, except that it is about the Holocaust. It is precisely with these extreme postmodernist techniques that Foer achieves the novel's effects.

The experience of trauma and its effects are represented through the media of literature and film. The trauma is experienced by Holocaust survivors, their children and their grandchildren. Although it has been over sixty years since the Holocaust occurred, its impact is undeniable as it continues to haunt the present-day generation. This is of course especially true for the Jewish person, which explains why so many Jewish American novels deal with the subject of the Holocaust. Alan Berger in *Sicher Breaking Crystal* Clarifies this inextricable connection between Jewish American literature and the Holocaust:

Jew can be fully Jewish today; can be fully a man today, without being part of the Holocaust. All Jews are survivors. They have all been inside the whirlwind of the Holocaust, even those born afterwards, even those who heard its echoes in distant lands" (253).

In this way, Berger refers to the fact that not only the generation that lived during the Holocaust is influenced by these events, but also that the second and even the third

generation born after their occurrence still experience the consequences. The event that make up the holocaust play a significant role in a much larger array of fiction. As a member of a generation that did not live through the Holocaust, but living in a country where it is an active memory, Foer is in a unique position to evaluate its effects two generations out. Being this far removed from the Holocaust, presents certain challenges. For example, he must himself rely on memory--the oral and written accounts of others. More than sixty years on, this novel valorizes the role of fantasy in storytelling, not as a way to hide the facts but as a way to make their truth more real. Foer has confronted the difficulty of maintaining a connection to a past he can never truly know.

The structural strategies in *Everything is Illuminated* and the implications they have for an ethical reading of the text is important aspect of the novel. The two narrators Foer and Alex permit a release of repressed trauma. In his article "On literature and Ethics", Michael Eskin states, "Literature could be viewed as ethics in the second degree, as ethics of ethics or criticism of ethics, as that discourse which literally interpret ethics" (587).

## CHAPTER- THREE

### Jonathan Safran Foer's *Everything is Illuminated* in the

#### Light of Holocaust Trauma

Though Jonathan Safran Foer's first novel *Everything is Illuminated* seems to be a young man's search for Ukrainian woman who saved his grandfather from the Nazis, the novel is about everything else: love, narrative, memory, history etc. The novel contains two elaborately intertwined stories with two wildly different narrators. One story by Jonathan Safran Foer, is a fictional retelling of the history of his grandfather's town, the Galician Shtetl of Trachimbrod. The second story is about their recent search for Augustine and present-day Trachimbrod.

The first story, which proceeds in a series of magical-realist vignettes, begins in 1791, the year the Shtetl got its strange name. Trachim accidentally drove his wagon into the local river, the Brod, and drowned; his infant daughter, who was subsequently named Brod, too, miraculously floated to the surface and survived. It ends in 1942, when the Germans raze the village after most of its 1,204 Jews were drowned in the river.

It was the year 1999, when Jonathan made his legendary trip to the Ukraine on a mission to find the woman, who is supposed to have saved his grandfather's life during the Second World War. Although he could not find her, he discovered a plague relating the destruction of the Shtetl of Trachimbrod along with the tale of a drowning in the Brod River. His journey to the Ukraine formed the foundations of the novel.

Foer's novel *Everything is Illuminated* focuses on remembering to the past, connecting to the past. One of the main characters- also called Jonathan Safran Foer – travels to the Ukraine to search for his grandfather's past. Jonathan's aim is to find the

woman who supposedly saved his grandfather during the war. The only proof he has of her existence, is a picture with the note on the back: “this is me with Augustine, February 21, 1943” (60). Jonathan is accompanied on his search by his translator Alex Perchov, Alex’s grandfather – also called Alex – and a dog named Sammy Davis Jr. Jr. After the journey, both Jonathan and Alex write letters, and their chapters form the contents of this book. Jonathan writes a fictional story about the history of Trachimbrod – supposedly Jonathan’s grandfather’s birth village. Alex writes about their recent search for Augustine and present-day Trachimbrod. Jonathan does not know Ukrainian and hires the services of Alex as translator. Alex’s skills in this direction are dubious, but he makes up in enthusiasm what he lacks in competence.

The two narrators exchange chapters and Alex even reviews those of Jonathan by sending him letters, which are also included in the novel. Although Jonathan’s letters are not included in the novel, it is clear that he also sends letters to Alex. Jonathan’s voice is thus omitted and is only visible through comments that Alex makes on Jonathan’s preceding remarks. Only at the end of the novel, a third voice is introduced: Alex’s grandfather writes a letter as well. However, for the letter to be understandable to Jonathan, it had to be translated by Alex. Even though this letter is written by the grandfather, it is still mediated by Alex. This supports to the idea of constructedness of the trauma in the literary texts. The real event is somehow mediated after some time span.

Alex in the first chapter of the novel hears the following lines while talking with his father before they begin the journey, which also presents his attitude towards Jonathan before he sees and meets him:

He is looking for the town his grandfather came from. Father said, “and someone, Augustine he calls her, who salvaged his grandfather from the war. He desires to write a book about his grandfather’s village.” “Oh”, I said, “so he is intelligent?” (6)

During the journey, Jonathan (re)constructs the (his)story of Trachimbrod. We first hear his voice when he asserts: “It was March 18, 1791, when Trachim B’s double-axle wagon either did or did not pin him against the bottom of the Brod River” (8). The seriocomic, partly surreal picture of life in Trachimbrod, is presented with the story of a newborn baby who inexplicably survives when her father’s wagon tumbles into the Brod River (for which she’ll be named) and he drowns. Thereafter, Foer keeps the reader both hooked and pleasingly disoriented, as the narrative careens between Jonathan’s sedulous exploration of “the dream that we are our fathers” and Alex’s ingenuous accounts of their travels.

Young Ukrainian man, living in Odessa, aged similar to Jonathan, also the narrator; Alex becomes unofficial guide on his trip to Ukraine. Though he has never been to America, he feels competitive to Jonathan and wants to prove that he is more than just a tourist guide. As his father works for Heritage Touring (a travel agency that specializes in helping American Jews to trace their roots in small town in Poland and Ukraine), making Grandfather the driver, father assigns him to work with Jonathan. Jonathan was in search of Trachimbrod and Augustine. Grandfather, one member of the trip, is presented as a sad character, mourning his wife. It is also going to be a new experience to Alex. He states that he had never met Jewish person before the voyage. As a narrator, Alex in the beginning of

the novel talks about their purpose of the voyage, which prepares the readers for the further part of the novel:

It is for Jewish people, like the hero, who have cravings to leave the ennobled country America and visit humble towns in Poland and Ukraine. Father's agency scores a translator, guide, and the driver for the Jews, who try to unearth places where their families existed. (3)

Heritage Tours itself has very significant meaning in relating the holocaust. Alex sees it as an important service that satisfies the 'cravings' of the Jews who want to see where their families once 'existed'. American Jews like Jonathan Safran Foer. Trachimbrod, to which Jonathan has traced the parental roots, has its own history. One day, a horse drawn wagon plunges into the Brod river, which runs through the town. To end the conjecture about who was driving the wagon, Sofiowka said that the driver was the man named Trachim. After that event, the town people continue to assume that the wagon belonged to Trachim and he was made the legend. Suddenly a newborn girl rises from the water. The baby was born just before or during the accident. It is said that she floats. About that baby as well there is a long story.

As she appeared there without any parents to claim, Rabbi kept that baby in the ark and all the towns people lined up outside the synagogue to see her. Brod is hated by the women in the beginning. It was because they were not allowed for the direct view. Countless applications were collected, when the Rabbi published the advertisement in the Shtetl Newsletter offering the baby. But no one stands out as a perfect father, so that Rabbi devises a lottery. The baby was supposed to take one slip to choose her father but she lies without grabbing any for two days. After that a compromise was made in the system. Rabbi



forced to open the ark and she made the mess on Yankee's application and he was chosen to be her father. The compromise, which is one of the major themes of the novel, is introduced by this event for the first time.

Two major themes of the novel are introduced by the event of drowning the wagon and birth of a girl. The ambiguity that lies in relation to the accident and adaptation of the baby introduces the theme of fantasy and reality intermixing in the history of Trachimbrod. The wagon may or may not have belonged to Trachim, he may or may not have been killed in the accident. The same event relates to the next major theme of relation of death and life. The end of Trachim can be related with the birth of newborn baby girl. The girl represents the hope.

The very beginning of the novel introduces almost all major themes of the novel. The history of upright synagogue introduces the theme of cultural identity. Though the life there seems to be simple, it is not untouched by the conflict. Even among the Jews there has been division mainly on the basis of sacred and secular. The culture they are practicing reflects the town peoples' small-town mentality. Along with the theme of cultural identity, the baby's choice of Yankel as her father furthers the theme of chance. While relating the story to the context of his own life, Jonathan in the last sentence of Chapter 3 writes, "We were to be in good hands" (22). By writing this, he is telling the story, which affects him very much.

Focusing on the trip, chapter 4 of the novel reveals many more things about the characters and about the trip itself. Jonathan not only asked Alex to write summaries of the trip from his point of view but also gave him an English thesaurus to help him write. As they are exchanging their writing, the communication is stilted because of cultural

differences and misunderstandings. To avoid questioning himself, Alex plays the 'cultural card'. The words that he does not understand he thought that they are Jewish words. The first letter of Alex to Jonathan mainly is about the English language of Alex.

“If you are not happy with what I have performed, I command you to return it back to me .....I strived to perform the next section as you ordered me”.

“like Ernest Hemingway or you”

“please be truthful, but also please be benevolent, please. (23-26)

By asking to be truthful, Alex shows concern to the ethical aspect on the one hand and likes to be forgiven by requesting to be benevolent. The next chapter of the novel is about the first encounter between Alex and Jonathan. Both of them are away from their original realms. Both have different geo-political, religious and historical backgrounds: Jonathan is a Jewish grandson of a Ukrainian survivor of the Shoah and Alex is the secular Ukrainian grandson of a man who betrayed his best friend to the Nazis. Alex is from Odessa. Jonathan is from America. Alex wants to leave his place and move to America, which his father did not like. His father liked him to be there with him. Alex states:

A few days before the hero was to arrive, I inquired Father if I could go forth to America when I made to graduate from university. “No”, he said. But I want to, I informed him. “I do not care what you want.” ...Why?,I asked .....”it is because Great Grandfather was from Odessa, and Grandfather was from Odessa, and Father, me was from Odessa, and your boys will be from Odessa. (28)

After this chapter, Jonathan is addressed as a “hero”. The end of the novel proves Alex’s announcement “I do not care what you want”. Maybe because of his strong desire to

move to America, he seems not to be very nationalistic Ukrainian. He could proudly announce to Jonathan that the station is decorated to celebrate the anniversary of new Ukrainian constitution but he did not. In this context, two issues are to be discussed. From the point of view of cultural trauma, addressing Jonathan as a hero can be related to the idea of making victims the hero. But till this point it can not be said so. It is mainly because Alex considers him to be “Hero” because he is from “America”. The next thing is that Alex does not seem to be very nationalistic Ukrainian. Relating this to thick and thin relations, is he humanistic? Is his relation with Jonathan going to be the ‘thin’ one, not caring nationality? This question will be addressed later.

Alex is shocked to see Jonathan because he neither resembles the American in the magazine nor the Jews in holocaust photos. Jonathan, as presented in the title of the chapter to be the hero of the novel, could not prove the same in the first encounter. To their meeting point, Alex and grandfather were few hours early. They didn’t like Lvov, mainly the grandfather says “I hate Lvov!” Jonathan was afraid to see a dog with them. He showed the wound made by a dog but he was forced to sit with the dog in the back seat. Here, Grandfather’s attitude towards Jews is revealed, “The bitch and the Jew will share the back seat. It is vast enough for both of them” (35). Here, the grandfather shares ‘thick’ relation to Jonathan.

The chapter “The book of Recurrent Dream, 1791” relates Slouchers’ creating collective fantasy that dreams had meaning. They locate the holy and sacred not in the synagogue or in the traditional ceremony but in the imagination. The dream of “disembodied birds” 4:516 recalls the dreams actual memory. When she was mourning her son, a bird crashed through the window and died. The bird in the floor and window is more

lusting, haunting and real than the bird really was. This chapter also connects Jonathans' ancestral root. As Yankel received a baby, Jonathan received an adoptive great-great-g-g-grandfather.

The chapter entitled "Falling in Love" also relates the theme of fantasy. After naming the baby with the river where she was found, Yankel made many stories and produced many letters that his wife had written to him. He created a fantasy woman and loved her. He rereads the fake love letters and fantasizes so much about her that he can no longer distinguish fantasy from reality. No matter how many times he repeats, "I am not sad" he could not be distracted totally from his past. "I had to do it for myself". This repeated line supports the theme of fantasy. The real note by his wife was found one day by Brod but she did not mention to him about the letter. They know really to each other what they are doing but they pretend that they have not understood what they are hiding.

The chapter, entitled "Another Lottery 1791" is about the naming of the place. Throughout the novel, it is clear that Trachimbrod does not concern much with outside business but it is also interesting that they accept every result. Firstly, it was named by semi democratic vote and next by the chance. Though they themselves may not be aware about the purpose, they seemed ready to change the name in the name of purpose "But we must have a reasonable name for our own purpose" (51). As voting could not decide, by chance Yankel again got the chance and he named Trachimbrod. "YANKEL HAS WON AGAIN, he said. YANKEL HAS NAMED US TRACHIMBROD" (51). It seems that Jonathan has presented this context for more sympathy towards the victims. They seem to be so simple and did not think about harming others even they were victimized. The readers hate the one who made them victimized.

Imagination has many more things to do in the novel. Though Alex wants to be opponent of the father, he thinks that “father is not all bad.....we are our father”. It also presents Augustine being existed in the realm of fantasy. Each person in the novel imagines her in different way. The next chapter very clearly shows how identity can be changed from generation to generation. Alex talks about being accountant and moving to America. This shows that he is ready to accept ‘others’ culture. But grandfather is rude about the fact that Jonathan is a Jewish. Alex tries to balance the situation by not translating the rude words both Jonathan and Grandfather speak to each other. He does not translate Jonathan’s comment about the cruelty of Ukrainians during the holocaust nor he translated Grandfather’s rude comment about him. Alex seems to be in ‘thin’ relation with Jonathan in reality.

I said to Grandfather, “You do not have to be kind to me, but do not blunder to the Jew.” He said, “I can say anything I want to him. I rotated my head vertically to benefit the hero. “He says it will not be long until we get to the superway to Lutsk.” (57)

Alex further admits to his unreliable translations in his narrative prose:

‘Fuck,’ Grandfather said. I said, ‘He says if you look at the statues, you can see that some no longer endure. Those are where Communist statues used to be.’ ‘Fucking fuck, fuck!’ Grandfather shouted. ‘Oh,’ I said, ‘he wants you to know that that building, that building, and that building are all important.’ ‘Why?’ the hero inquired. ‘Fuck!’ Grandfather said. ‘He cannot remember,’ I said. (58)

However, grandfather seems totally changed when he saw Augustine's photograph. We are left to wonder whether he knew Augustine or is just touched by her beauty. Alex states: "when I rotated back to Grandfather, I saw that he was examining Augustine again. There was a sadness amid him and the photograph, and nothing in the world frightened me more" (65).

The novel in this point presents the emotional attachment of the victims to the event. Jonathan imagines to be there not as an outsider but as a native, if his grandfather would not have to move to America. "I want to see Trachimbrod", the hero said "to see what its like, how my grandfather grew up, where I would be if it were not for the war". He further says: "And I want to see what it is like now. I do not think there are any Jews left, but maybe there are. And the Shtetls were not only Jews, so there should be others to talk to (59). Here, Jonathan expects 'thin' relation. Even if the people are not Jews they would show concern about him.

With the help of map, he was in search of Augustine but the doubt is still prevailed about who she really was. Jonathan only got a photograph where there was a girl standing with his grandfather and in the backside it was written that his grandfather was with Augustine. Jonathan himself mentions that the photo and backside writing may not have any connection. He got that photograph from his grandmother after his grandfather was dead. Jonathan thought that there should be something behind his grandmother having the photograph kept secret for fifty years. Not only that he had not informed his grandmother about his trip as well.

Alex could not agree when Jonathan blamed Ukrainians for being more cruel to Jews than the Nazis. Jonathan's grandmother also fled before the war whereas all her family

members were killed. No one saved her family and she fled on her own. Being one member of the same community, Alex could not agree about what Jonathan was saying about Ukrainians. But Jonathan tries to make the environment easier: “It’s nothing to do with you. We are talking about fifty years ago” (62). Here, Jonathan focuses on the need of reconciliation. Jonathan here talks about the need of compromise from all aspects. This point can be related with why Grandfather seems to be so cruel to Jews.

As the novel progress, Alex begins to question the morality of ‘improving’ the facts of the holocaust to better fit Jonathan’s story:

We are being very nomadic with the truth, yes? The both of us? Do you think that this is acceptable when you are writing about things that occurred? ..... If your answer is yes, then this creates another question, which is if we are to be such nomads with the truth, why do we not make the story more premium than life? (179)

As talked in the above quoted lines, the novel attempts to deal with the ethics of its own production. Alex’s question not only encompasses the ethics of writing imaginative holocaust fiction but also Foer’s ability to access the subject from the historical distance of the third generation.

The novel further talks about place relating Trachimbrod to Shtelt. The chapter also talks about Yankel and the child. Yankel cannot imagine his life without Brod and he cannot imagine Brod’s life without him. This chapter also focuses on the issue of memory. Yankel writes on the ceiling so that he will know who he is, even as his memory fades. It is strange that he must remind himself, “You are Yankel. You love Brod” every night before bed.

Memory at least can be the key to love. Jonathan may find something of family love on his journey by unlocking memories and drawing closer to his ancestors.

In chapter 12, Yankel reads Brod's diary while she is in the bath. This chapter again presents the importance of writing. In the diary Brod writes about how young and old are lonely in their own ways.

Deep down the young are lonelier than the old, I read that in a book  
somewhere and it is stuck in my head. Maybe it is true. Maybe it is not true.  
More likely the young and old are lonely in different ways, in their own  
ways. (87)

Both Yankel and Brod are living together by having secrets themselves. Brod fantasizes far into the future, past her own rape, all the way in being made a part of history. She even sees the writing in the back of the picture of Augustine. In this point, it is suggested that even fantasizes have their boundaries. Though she can see hundred years in the future, she can not affect what happens. In the similar way, as Jonathan's reality is limited, he turns to fantasy. Chapter 13 focuses on liminal space, that is, the boarder state between two opposites. Trachimday is shot with interweaving love and violence, death and life. Yankel dies and Brod has the nakedness of the newborn, but the newness of this time is different, her sexual life begins.

Chapter 14 of the novel presents a new twist in the story. Grandfather, who is there just as a driver to support Jonathan to find a woman named Augustine, himself seems too much affected by her photograph. He seems more depressed. Again, the question is raised whether he knows her earlier or was simply touched by her beauty but this question remained unanswered throughout the whole novel. About Jonathan's writing, Alex expresses



wonder about why they think about the things that cause them pain. The victims of the traumatic event are affected by the event but they need to express it, write about it, reveal it, no matter it may cause pain on them.

Alex not only has a quite idolatrous relation to the image of Augustine, he also imagines falling in love with her. Not only Alex but also Jonathan have fathomed this feeling. Alex's grandfather, who drove Jonathan and Alex around during their search for Augustine, is, as a viewer of the photo, exchanges the figuration of the image itself:

As for Grandfather, he is always becoming worse .....I have witnessed him crying three times this week, each very tardy at night when I was returning from roosting at the beach .....The first night I witnessed him crying he was investigating an aged lather bag, brimmed with many photographs and pieces of paper, like one of Augustine's boxes. ....The second night he was crying he had the photograph of Augustine in his hand. ....the third night he was crying he had a photograph of you in his hands. It is only possible that secured it from my desk where I keep all of the photographs that you posted me. Again, he was saying "Augustine", although I do not understand why.

(102)

In this quoted passage, Augustine transforms from a person with boxes of photos into a photograph and a generalizable name, one which might be used to transfer to others, regardless of their gender, nationality, age or religion. Augustine, thus becomes the most generalizable name imaginable, while on the other hand, it is the specific feeling that she triggers which makes her so exceptional: people love her, feel soothed, cry when they look at her.

As the dog chewed Jonathan's map, they moved ahead by asking people about Trachimbrod but almost all people whom they asked presents their ignorance about the place. The question again is to be asked here whether the place really exists or not. Alex's meeting with one woman is to be noticed in this chapter. Alex displaced the photograph to that woman many times asking whether she has ever witnessed anyone in the photograph but she denied many times. However, he continued to ask her the same question. Finally, she admitted that she was the woman they were looking for. Alex states:

“Have you ever witnessed anyone in the photograph?”

“No.” she said No.” I saw a tear descend to her white dress. It too would dry and leave a mark.

.....

.....

“Has anyone in the photograph ever witnessed you?”

Another tear descended.

“I have been waiting for you for so long.”

I pointed to the car. “We are searching for Trachimbrod.”

“Oh,” she said, and she released a river of tears. “You are here. I am it.” (118)

Two aspects are revealed by this textual adaptation. First one is remembering and the next one is tear. He has to repeatedly ask about the photograph to make her reveal something about the photograph. It seems as if she is recalling the past as he is asking her. Next one is about tear it is said that: it too would dry and leave a mark. It means many more tears left the mark already. About the place, as well it is confused. None of the asked could

tell anything about the place. The woman relates herself to the place. She says “I am it”. Is she Trachimbrod?

The birth and death occur together in the chapter 16 again. Two very clear references in relation to the past events are presented. The hole in the wall between the places where Brod and Kolker live is a refiguration of the hole in the synagogue wall, the one through which the woman had to look to see Brod when she was a child. Now Brod is the one who is looking at her husband through the hole and he can look through the same hole at her. This hole is a breach in the wall; it brings two people together, while the earlier hole brought frustration and jealousy in its reminder that the women were outsiders.

The women of the Shtetl were happy to see Brod suffer. Even after sixteen years, they still thought of her as a product of that terrible hole, because of which they could never see her all at once, because of which they could never know and mother her, because of which they hated her. (129)

After the Kolker is dead, he is treated in the same manner as Trachim B. He becomes a symbol, and everyone makes his figure into what they wish. Even though the relation of Brod to Kolker was full of tragedy and abuse, the men in that society pray to them for good luck in their own marriages. Their fate as a continually rebuilt statue, looking a bit different in each generation, being rebuilt in the image of each generation, shows that history and memory are malleable. To some degree, we can make them what we want.

The text again focuses in the trip. Alex returns to the car and told that he met Augustine. They went to her house where Alex introduces Jonathan as American but she wonders whether it belongs to Poland.

What are you talking about? The hero asked. “has she mentioned my grandfather?” “ He does not speak Ukrainian?” she asked. “No”, I said.

“Where is he from?” “America”. “Is that in Poland?” (149)

After they talk sometimes, she rejected that she is Augustine but she says that she knows the man in the Photograph who, she said, is Safran. Alex says that they should go forth but Grandfather refused and said that they should help her to remember. “We are not going anywhere. We must help her to remember. Many people try to rigidly forget after the war that they can no longer remember.” (151)

She approached with a box labeled “Remains” from where she produces many photographs and tells stories about them. As she talks about Herschel, grandfather likes her not to talk anymore but she did not listen. Herchel lived in Kolki, who shot his best friend. Though the grandfather did not like, the woman says, “He lived in Kolki, which as a Shtetl near to Trachimbrod. Herschel and Eli were best friends, and Eli had to shoot Herschel, because if he did not, they would shoot him” (152). She says that she is the last survivor but he said that she is not from Trachimbrod. She says that she was a good friend to Jonathan’s grandfather and he was the first man she kissed. Alex found Jonathan crying when the woman told that Safran lost his wife and two babies in the war. She shows Safran’s photo with his wife, Zosha, in front of her house after their marriage. Jonathan asks to see the house in the photograph but she says that Trachimbrod is gone. It shows that even the place is renamed after the war.

The Chapter “Falling in Love” again raises the question – who falls in love with whom? The love in this chapter is neither eros nor romantic. Jonathan falls in love with his grandmother as a child. Grandfather seems to fall in love with the old woman even though

she becomes very rude and angry towards him. At first all of them fell in love with her because they thought that she is Augustine but later also the feeling endures. In truth, they are falling in love with their ideas of an older time, and with ideas rather than reality.

Augustine and Grandfather had long private conversation. Though it is not given what they talk about, it can be assumed that they talk about what it is like to remember the very difficult old times. Though they did not share good time, it is grandfather, who convinces her to take them to Trachimbrod. They have an unspeakable bond to the past. Jonathan was there in search of Trachimbrod, and with his link to the past it is only the grandfather who can take them there. No matter how stubborn and cruel, the Grandfather is, Jonathan does not have one thing that he has. It is firsthand experience. Having lived through the war, he can have an intimacy and mutual understanding with the woman that Jonathan and Alex can not.

Mainly being focused in the wedding of Safran and Zosha, Chapter 19 presents the idea of nothing being perfect, the role of chance in the life and sex. Zosha's parents have many luxuries in their house. Her father loves the idea of improving the house but he never wants it to be completed. He hires men repeatedly to renovate the house so that it looks as if it is unfinished. In writing as well, Jonathan is not following the pattern, as Alex would wish. He imagines: why would Jonathan create such a morally disappointing view about his grandfather, when the fantasy and the power of written word give him the freedom to make the man into anything he wants? Safran is presented immorally in the sense that he had sex with Maya, his wife's younger sister as the wedding reception continues. This characterization is perhaps an example of acknowledgement that nothing can be perfect. No matter how many renovations Zosha's father makes to his house, it is never finished. He

does not want it to be complete because there would be no hope after that. In the same way, Safran is never satisfied no matter how many lovers he had at a time.

The wedding of Safran and Zosha is said to be the town's big event of 1941. Every people from Trachimbrod are invited. The place is represented by one event of a single family. Last census of Trachimbrod was taken there because all people were there. It was the last census because after that neither many citizens from there survived nor the place also survived as Trachimbrod. The woman, whom Alex met and talked said: "You are here I am it", to response to their quest about Trachimbrod.

As Safran makes love to Maya in the cellar, he realizes that every event in his life is a product of chance. He has no control over his life, so he cannot feel guilty for anything, not even having sex with his new wife's younger sister. It is the same that Jonathan cannot have control over what he is writing. Although Alex wants him to write something positive about his grandfather, he did not. He wants everything as it happens. He presents ethics in writing. The idea of nothing being perfect is also supported by Safran's lame arm in the sense that he lacks something.

Jonathan has taught Alex to be honest in his writing, even at the expense of dignity. Alex can barely believe the things Jonathan writes about his grandfather's sexual exploits, especially considering the immorality. Alex wonders if Jonathan could write the same about his grandfather if he had been alive. As the two writers develop and exchange their voices, they are working together to make one narrative. In this point, Alex shows his dissatisfaction the way Jonathan is instructing him. He considers him to be hypocritical, inconsistency regarding the issue about the use of fantasy. He likes to make the fantastical account the happy one. As writers, they have conflicting ideas in relation to the fantasy in

the writing, but they may have to resolve their conflict about the role of fantasy in order to reach synthesis in their common project.

Lista's story in the chapter 23, reintroduces the major theme of the story: guilt and responsibility. In the dark, the woman took them to a place which she announced as Trachimbrod. She said "we are here". She says we are here I told to the hero. She said, "It was all destroyed." Grandfather said to me," We could see more if it was not dark". She said, "this is all that you would see. It is always like this always dark" (184).

The woman explains how Trachimbrod was destroyed in a single day. The Nazis came and burnt the Synagogue. After making the line, the Nazi General commanded each man to spit on a torah scroll and threatened to kill the family if not. She explained, pointing to the dark, saying it to be the middle of the town. She further says that first few men obeyed but her father refused to desecrate the Torah, the General killed his wife and daughter. Jonathan does not want to hear anymore. Why does not he like? He is there to dig up the history but it is said that he does not like to listen. It can be interpreted in the sense that it was too terrible to listen that. After that the general targeted to the woman's older sister, who was pregnant. Her father refused to spit time and again. They shot her in the womb but let her to suffer instead of killing. They killed her father and went away. She lived to suffer as a victim. None of the gentiles in the town help her as she crawled away. She is the one who "knows" about Trachimbrod, in fact, as a only survivor of the Shtetl whose inhabitants have all been killed in cold blood, shot one by one, made to spit on the Torah, made to watch their relatives died, Augustine is Trachimbrod. She says she is not Augustine, only her strange walk links her to one of the stories of Trachimbrod, in which a woman is shot through her vagina and survives because she is heavily pregnant. This story

might be hers but she does not recognize as hers. She claims it is a story of someone close to her, her sister. But then if the story is not her, how can she do what she does? Namely collects the remains of the village: the watches, hair-pins, diaries and the dust?

In this point, another important concern of the novel is talked about. Grandfather asks if she can forgive the gentiles, the woman responds that she cannot but grandfather responds that he could because he takes the response of the Jews not as their desire but as their compulsion. Before they leave Trachimbrod, the woman leads them to the monument that proves the existence of the massacre. The woman says that she met Jonathan's grandfather a few years after the war as he returns to the Trachimbrod. She says that Jonathan resembles his grandfather before the war. It means both are untouched by the war. As Jonathan is not touched directly by the war so was the grandfather before the war. The woman says that there were some Jews lived but she does not know where they are. She gives Jonathan a box labeled "In Case" as well as her friend's wedding ring which she hid before she died. She says her friend saved the ring in case someone came looking for Trachimbrod someday to respond when Jonathan posits that she hid the ring so that there would be proof she existed. She says:

She wants to know why her friend saved her wedding ring when she thought that she would be killed. "So there would be proof that she existed", the hero said, "What?" "Evidence. Documentation. Testimony"(192).

Lista suffers a terrible tragedy during the Holocaust, but she survives. Rather than regarding her survival as a miracle, she is filled with guilt. She punishes herself for her own survival just as grandfather punishes for his survival though his survival is more



complicated. As there is no other person to be responsible for, she directs her responsibility towards objects and an imaginary child.

Chapter 24 and 25 again presents the combination. Though Safran does well in the school, the school bores him. The school is devoted to religious studies taught by an Uprighter for half of the session and by Sloucher for rest half of the session. Uprighter and Sloucher, one devoted to the religious aspect and next one to the secular studies, taught at the same place to the same student. It again relates to the idea of compromise. The school students were taught the history of Trachimbrod. The book of Antecedents, including every important events of Trachimbrod. It is updated constantly. When there is nothing to add, the people write, “We are writing .....We are writing .....We are writing .....” (196) to make sure that the writing is continuous. The students considered the book to be the part of their own life and they will be in the pages in the future. Alex says that his grandfather was not an exception. He has read the volume and some major issues are highlighted in the text. From many topics presented, I like to pick up only three relating to the major aspect of the task.

Jews are said to be with extra sense than others, which is memory. Memory is the sixth sense of the Jews which is the vivid perception of the past. As writing is the continuous process so is the memory for them. Next issue is of the plagiarism, which is said to be loved by the God. This is because God created man in his own image, which is self-plagiarism. Plagiarism is inherent, natural and unavoidable. Next topic presents the generational link between Brod and Safran. Brod and Kolker’s first two sons die in the flour mill. The third one became the great-great-great grandfather of Safran. The name between

them also suggests that their link to their origin is inseparable: Trachimkolker, Safranbrod, Trachimyankel and Kolkerbrod.

Grandfather insists Jonathan to open the box marked “In Case”. The book of Antecedents is also there. There they found a photo taken in Kolki before the war. The grandfather himself is there in the photo. In this point, another identity of the grandfather is revealed that he is not from Odessa but from Kolki, the same Shtetl from which Jonathan’s grandfather fled. There is a man standing in the photograph with grandfather’s family. He is his best friend, a Jew named Herchel. Before the story told, grandfather expressed his compulsion of the past. He says, “I am not a bad person. I am a good person who has lived in the bad time” (228).

Alex again imagines the story to be different one. He desires that Safran should take the Gypsy girl to America or at least kill himself so that Jonathan would never be born to write such sad things. As writers, both Jonathan and Alex are accomplishing their task as a younger generation. They have led the old generation to reveal the past so that it can be passed down to the future. They may not have found Augustine but they have found Grandfather.

Back to hotel, Grandfather told Alex and Jonathan about Herschel. Grandfather responds negatively as Alex requests him to take them to Kolki. He left Kolki because he did not like his generations to grow up around the ghosts. The Nazis invaded Kolki with tanks and the General ordered everyone to be in line at synagogue. The General told everyone either to point one Jew or be considered one himself. All the Jews except Herschel were pointed out. Symbolically, Herschel requested Grandfather not to point him out but he

did. They dragged him to the synagogue as he screamed for Grandfather to save him, but grandfather had to save his wife and baby.

The Nazis lit the synagogue on the fire, which illuminated the people lined up outside it. As the synagogue burnt, grandfather squeezed father so tightly that he cried. He wanted to tell that he betrayed Herschel for his love to him. In this point, Alex tells Jonathan that everyone is pointing fingers to everyone. The title of the chapter “Illumination”, the title of the whole novel, is the process by which everything is illuminated. Though almost all chapters of the novel contribute to the major title of illumination, this chapter in particular expresses illumination well, both literally and figuratively. There is revelation of many things in this chapter. Jonathan uncovers Grandfather’s past. It is as important and meaningful for him as to uncover his own grandfather. Grandfather can be his own grandfather and Lista be the Augustine. He seems to be the lover of illumination, explanation and embellishment of truths. For him, relating his grandfather to his root is important and Augustine has been important for him because he believes that she is related with his grandfather’s past.

The chapter titled “Illumination” directs to the outcome that whether they can find Augustine or not, but they dig up some factual past relating to Trachimbrod. Trachimbrod is more history than only a place. Maya’s father says that he is happy in the wedding of Safran and Maya in spite of the war and its destruction. This event suggests the essentiality of continuing the life at any cost. The lived ones had no other option than continuing the life. The “note” that one Gypsy girl writes to give to Safran, also has significant meaning in this context. The note slips to the floor because of the wind. It slips to the garbage and ends up in a field where the first of the mass execution will occur. There it burns with others

belongings of Shtetl. The note says: “Change”. It can have double meaning. It may be that Gypsy girl changes her mind to live the life in her own way and letting him to live on whatever way he likes or it also may be requesting him to change his mind and come to her. It does not mean anything important for Safran and it burns like many other secrets of Trachimbrod. Again there has been blend of life and death. Gypsy girl commits suicide in the same day of Safran’s marriage. Zosha loses her virginity, it is to begin new life but girl loses her life to end it.

The activities before Nazis invaded Trachimbrod is also notable. The bombs exploded as Safran was making love with Zosha. The bombing was not in Trachimbrod, it was in a nearby village. The Nazis will not come to Trachimbrod for nine months but the bombing raid changed the Shtetl. The people there sit around remembering instead of doing new things. This pattern sucks the life out of the Shtetl. First, they have memory and the memory generates more memories. After the few months of the bomb explosion, people are too wrapped up in memory. They were not afraid of Nazis: “Memory took the place of terror”. As a result, they did not try to escape or come up with any plans to defense. Here the novel again gets the sympathy of the readers towards the victims.

Finally the day of Nazis attacking Trachimbrod came. All townspeople jump into the river, including Safran and Zosha. She imagined herself as the river. Zosha drowns just as the baby is born and floats to the surface. Zosha dies with the baby in her arms. The bodies of the townspeople float to the surface. The river is like a carcass, and they are like butterflies flocking to the carcass. The narrative ends: “we’ve killed our own babies to save them.”

Violence and love are intertwined again in the story. Safran is violently sick because he is in love with his unborn daughter. The statue explains why love is mixed with pain: love means doing things for others which one may not like to do or it hurts him/her. Love is hating the absence of being in love. Love is hope for an ideal than reality.

The last chapter of the novel is about the letter as a suicide note that Grandfather wrote to Jonathan, which Alex has translated. Alex and his father had a quarrel and they were separated. After the Father left, Grandfather said he was proud of Alex and called him by his name “Alex” for the first time. When Alex desired to take over the Heritage Touring, Grandfather urged him to take his own path. Why does he say so? It seems that he wants Alex going ahead on his own being detached from the past, from the history, which is the history of war and destruction. He suggested Alex “Try to live on”. It can have double meaning. It may be to encourage him not to be disappointed from what he heard about the past or it may be it is compulsion to live whether he likes or not. The second argument is supported by the event that he commits suicide. He further says: “You can always tell the truth”. As the responsibility of transferring history to the forthcoming generation is on their shoulder, they must dare to tell the truth. In this point, Grandfather seems close to Jonathan when he refuges Alex’s suggestion not to present his grandfather as immoral.

Grandfather, who is himself a history, shows his disgust towards the war as well. After kissing Little Igor on the forehead, he prayed for him to be strong and never know the war. After that he sat to write letter to Jonathan where he wishes “Peace” for his grandsons. Now he realizes that peace is possible and the realization of this makes him happy. He wants both Alex and Little Igor to start something new to achieve peace. He is writing to Jonathan himself because he does not like Alex writing to Jonathan. If he does so, he could

not begin any new. For Alex stopping to write Jonathan would also be new beginning. The grandfather wrote the last part of the letter to Alex. He declares that he will kill himself quietly and alone in the dark, not because of weakness but because he is happy.

In the last chapter, Grandfather wrote the last words as if his sins are forgiven. It is clear that Alex forgives Grandfather as he translates his letter to Jonathan. Alex in the letter to Jonathan writes about his grandfather. About Grandfather he says:

I parrot: Grandfather is not a bad person, Jonatahn. Everyone performs bad actions. I do. Father does. Even you do. A bad person is someone who does not lament his bad actions. Grandfather is now dying because of his. I beseech you to forgive us, and to make us better than we are. Make us good. (145)

Even the last chapter of the novel focuses the same issue of beginning something new with the end of something old. Another beginning of the world comes with Grandfather's death. The new generation takes charge. Both Alex and Jonathan have been illuminated in maturity. It means they have achieved the clarity of purpose and drive to pursue their goals as they make good on the past. Because of their separate illuminations, they no longer need each other, they do not need to write any more chapters together; their correspondence ends.

Almost everything is illuminated for grandfather at the end. Though Jonathan could not meet who he was looking for, he met grandfather, who is himself the living symbol of what he was looking for. Grandfather feels that he has everything for which Jonathan's relatives strove: love, happiness, and peace. The novel ends with the death of Grandfather, which can be considered as the end of one part of history as Trachimbrod was ended when Nazis killed many people there. Like other ends in the novel, this end also is the beginning

of something new. Alex decides to live independently both in his life and writing. He left his father and Grandfather wrote the last letter to Jonathan, not Alex. The process of exchanging the letter is ended and Alex could write on his own.

*Everything is Illuminated* is about many things. It is about memory and the pain of recall; about identity; about the past being a place as well as a time. The search of Augustine culminated in the woman outside the hut who is presumably Augustine, even if her name is Lista. “It was seeming as if we were in the wrong country, or the wrong century, or as if Trachimbrod has disappeared, and so had the memory of it” (115).

There is the occasional element of suspense in the novel. Brod’s meeting with Kolker at the time of Yankel’s death in fact conceals the truth that is revealed much later in the retelling of the event. Moreover, the fine line between experiment and affectation is occasionally blurred such as towards the end of the novel, where the three words “We are writing.....”run to over a page.

Alex, who starts boastful, becomes more honest and profound as the novel continues. The story of Foer’s visit is Alex’s narrative. Alex and his grandfather drive Foer around the Ukraine, looking for Trachimbrod. They do not find it, but an elderly women, who when pressed says, “You are here I am it” (118). She lives in a house full of boxes remained from the town. She is a living memorial and a survivor of an atrocity. To the grandfather, she brings up his memories of the war, and to ‘Foer’ she gives the ring: “this ring does not exist for you” she says, “you exist for the ring” (192). Though it does not fit, it cuts his finger. It is the symbol of community. It is about the grandfather’s involvement in the massacre of Trachimbrod.

There is strong contrast between two aesthetic traditions that Foer adopts. One is apparently realist; the other encompasses the modernist tradition. The novel is a realist story of Jonathan's quest for his family roots in the present day Ukraine. Jonathan's search for his roots gradually advances in both a metaphorical and a geographical sense to the place where his grandfather's village used to be. But only live trace of Trachimbrod's reality that Jonathan finds is an old woman named Augustine, who shows him some pictures and objects from the so far silenced past. The first narrator, Jonathan comes to relate a series of fantastic events describing the deeds of magical and super human characters that apparently lived more than one hundred years ago. By contrast, the second narrator "Alex" has a very limited capacity of understanding. The past eventually has to be re-created in mythical and magical realist terms in order to not only overcome a lack of an historical referent, but also to cope emotionally with the Nazis massacre of Jews.

Both Augustine and Alex's grandfather have remained silent for sixty years, affected by the traumatic experiences they had to endure. But their long silence must end, the two young men- and readers need to be illuminated about what happened when the Nazis fell upon the village. No doubt, the memory might have some vagueness but the same "vagueness" should be recognized.

However, in the chapter entitled "Illumination", Alex discloses an excruciating truth that openly demands readers' ethical concern: the truth of somebody who is not only a survivor but also an alleged collaborator with the Nazis. In this chapter, Alex's grandfather – perhaps himself a Jew- explains how he had to expose his close friend Herschel as a Jew to the Nazis. This was the only way to save himself and his family. The Nazis would force to choose whom among relatives, friends or neighbors they would kill, first. The result of



such choice would be for the victims to die by the Nazis weapons. But in the case of collaborators, collaborators had to endure a continuous remorse.

*Everything Is Illuminated* consists of three different narrative strands that constantly interact and finally come together in the events of the Holocaust. The first is narrated by Alex, Jonathan's Ukrainian translator, who tells the story of Jonathan's trip to the Ukraine to find the small town of Trachimbrod where his grandfather is from, and also to find Augustine, the woman who allegedly saved his grandfather from the Nazis. Alex tells the story in a kind of self-studied English that causes a lot of hilarity: "My legal name is Alexander Perchov. But all of my many friends dub me Alex, because that is a more flaccid-to-utter version of my legal name" (1). Apart from Alex, Jonathan is accompanied by Alex's grandfather (the 'blind' driver) and his dog, Sammy Davis Junior, Junior (the grandfather's "seeing-eye bitch").

The second narrative is written by Jonathan. He narrates the history of the Jewish shtetl Trachimbrod. He clearly stages himself as the author inventing a mythical tale of origins, beginning in 1791 "when Trachim B's double-axle wagon either did or did not pin him against the bottom of the Brod River" (8). After this accident a child floats to the surface of the river, a baby girl who appears to be Jonathan's great-great-great-great-great-grandmother, named Brod after the river. Brod's birth in 1791 marks the beginning of Jonathan's family lineage, founded in a traumatic, mythical event. Both novels (Jonathan's and Alex's) come together in the end and at the quite devastating climax of the book, you realize how the two tales are related, a connection that forever sunders Alex from Jonathan.

The third line of narrative in the book consists of letters that Alex writes to Jonathan, in retrospect, about the search for Trachimbrod. It becomes clear that Alex sends the

different chapters of his story along with the letters. Conversely, Jonathan does the same with his story; he sends his chapters to Alex. However, Jonathan's letters are remarkably absent from the novel. The reader only gets to know Jonathan from what Alex tells about him – in Alex's Trachimbrod-story as well as in his letters – and from what Jonathan himself tells in the mythical tale of Trachimbrod's and his family's origins. Therefore, while Jonathan is the protagonist and was even given the name of the author, Jonathan at the same time appears to be the most mediated and least accessible character of the two. It is remarkable that the character, with which the reader is 'forced' to empathize most, is Alex, the grandson of a perpetrator, and not Jonathan, the grandson of survivors. This undoubtedly is an important point of discussion, a decision with which Foer challenges ethical boundaries; a decision that seems to be understandable only when considering Foer's substantial distance from the historical events. However, it is – quite paradoxically – his personal connection – as a member of the third generation – that 'allows' him to do this.

By thematizing absence and loss and engaging in a more extreme form of postmemorial invention, Foer takes the way of dealing with the troubling 'absent presence' of the Holocaust to another level. This poetics of absence, together with the ethical and political questions he raises (e.g. concerning the perpetrator's view and historical truth), could be seen as third-generation characteristics. Foer distances himself as a writer from the more emotionally involved second generation and puts the responsibility for making an all-encompassing narrative in the reader's hands. He does so by engaging in a game of language and postmemorial invention.

In *Everything Is Illuminated*, the character contemplating his guilt is Alex. Towards the end of the novel, Alex discovers the secrets his grandfather has lived with all the time.

When the Nazis came to his village, they lined up all inhabitants (as happened in Trachimbrod) and asked them to point out the Jews. In order to save himself, as well as his wife and child, from the Nazis, Alex's grandfather pointed out his Jewish friend Herschel. As mentioned before, this is narrated by Alex in a stream of consciousness that ends as follows:

. . . he said these things to us and Jonathan where do we go now what do we do with what we know Grandfather said that I am I but this could not be *the truth is that I also pointed at Herschel and I also said heisaJew* and I will tell you that you also pointed at Herschel and you also said heisaJew and more than that Grandfather also pointed at me and said heisaJew and you also pointed at him and said heisaJew and your grandmother and Little Igor and we all pointed at each other so what is it he should have done  
he would have been a fool to do anything else *but it is forgivable what he did can he ever be forgiven* for his finger for what his finger did for what he pointed to and did not point to for what he touched in his life and what he did not touch *he is still guilty I am I am I am I am I?* (252)

Alex feels guilty for what his grandfather has done; this is represented by the traumatic retelling of the events in the form of a stream of consciousness. In his letters, Alex asks Jonathan several times to forgive not only his grandfather but also himself. He constantly stresses the fact that his grandfather "is a good person, alive in a bad time" (145). Also when reflecting on Brod's fate: "I have been very dispirited for Brod. She is a good person in a bad world" (103). And when he comes to narrating his grandfather's testimony, the conversation goes like this: "'I am not a bad person,' he (Alex's grandfather) said. 'I am

a good person who has lived in a bad time.’ ‘I know this,’ I (Alex) said. (Even if you were a bad person, I would still know that you are a good person)” (227).

He wants Jonathan to forgive him through his writing, wants him to use the power of fiction to alter events: “[g]randfather interrogates me about you every day. He desires to know if you forgive him for the things he told you about the war, and about Herschel. (You could alter it, Jonathan. For him, not for me. Your novel is now verging on the war. It is possible) . . . I beseech you to forgive us, and to make us better than we are. Make us good” (145). His plea for forgiveness is presented throughout his letters: “please be truthful, but also please be benevolent, please” (26), “as always, I ask for your forgiveness” (55), and finally, just before the last part of his story where he recounts his grandfather’s testimony, “for the first time in my life, I told my father exactly what I thought, as I will now tell you, for the first time, exactly what I think. As with him, I ask for your forgiveness” (242).

Contrary to what might be expected, the reader is forced to empathize more with Alex than with Jonathan. Mostly because of the fact that Alex’s voice is more present throughout the novel, in his letters and in the story he tells, but also because Alex is made, in the words of Dr. Codde, the “moral centre” of the book. The reader never really gets to know Jonathan’s reaction to the confession of Alex’s grandfather, and no sign is given that Jonathan answers Alex’s pleas for forgiveness. Even in the end, as Marion Spies notes, “forgiveness for Nazi murderers is implicitly denied by the grandfather’s taking of his own life” (258).

## CHAPTER: FOUR

### Conclusion

Despite their ethico-political and historical positioning, two major characters and narrators of Foer's *Everything is Illuminated*, Jonathan and Alex, must negotiate and construct a complicated legacy with the past. The style, content and narrative voice of their letters differ: as a character Jonathan remains absent from the story he tells. Alex, on the other hand, is rendered in multiple but more realistic way.

In *Everything is illuminated* the role of the translator symbolizes both the difficulties of transmitting the unimaginable trauma of the Holocaust, and the impossibility of receiving that trauma as reader or listener. By including, a translator as one of his two central narrators, Foer emphasizes the narrative and mediated character of Holocaust testimony. However, as a member of the third-generation, Foer is already twice- distanced from the events he seeks to represent. The character of the translator Alex thus adds a third level of mediation to the text. As he travels through the Ukraine in search of Augustine, Jonathan must rely on Alex to 'illuminate' information about the present and the past. Moreover, Alex raises doubts about whether or not his translations were reliable. The question, then, is why Foer would seek to draw attention to his distance from the Holocaust by choosing an *unreliable* translator—a figure already responsible for providing a further layer of mediation in the text.

Alex chooses to spare Jonathan from the emotion his grandfather is suffering as a result of returning to his traumatic past. Curse words become commentary on the landscape and its significance, allowing humour to bubble up in the spaces between the grandfather's expletives and what Alex chooses to convey. This discrepancy between what is uttered and what is conveyed is an effective distancing device, as it creates distance between the

witness's testimony and its translation. In this way, Foer encourages the reader to question the textual reality, even as he attempts to explore the subject of the Holocaust with some authenticity or truth. Foer uses this technique, drawing attention to his generational distance from the Holocaust. This distance serves to remind readers of the mediated and subjective nature of third-generation fiction. By asking readers to remain vigilant about questioning the version of events being presented in the text, Foer prompts them 'to take another look—a deeper look, a more thoughtful look—at the event'. The device of the translator, then, serves as an example of how an author can utilize generational distance in an ethical and instructive way.

By presenting Augustine as a proof of her being given-to-life (her survival) and her giving-of-life (by saving the life of Jonathan's grandfather), Foer transfers the hope of survival in Augustine. Ending with a promise, "And I will" (276) the novel develops a post memorial ethics precisely by asking what kind of relationship one might develop to the legacy of the past and by displaying impossible hopes for the future. Alex and Jonathan represent the third generation after the Shoah. Differently to their grandfathers, they hopefully have better, still possible choices.

Foer increased historical distance through his writing to the facts and is able to reflect on the Holocaust in a 'healthier' way. He is not stuck in too deeply wrought personal troubles but is able to foreground ethical questions concerning guilt and responsibility. Ending the novel with the grandfather's suicide note makes Jonathan's silence even more obvious. The reader learns how for the Holocaust survivor, who was forced to make an immoral decision, the past is unbearable. But why should it still be for his grandson? Alex vents his frustration by saying that "everything is the way it is because everything was the

way it was. Sometimes I feel ensnared in this, as if no matter what I do, what will come has already been fixed” (145). This is precisely what Foer wants to question: does Alex still have to feel guilty? And does Jonathan have the right to not forgive after all these years? Foer stimulates critical reflection on the aftermath of the Holocaust, on the consequences for offspring of survivors, by making the perpetrator’s descendent the moral centre of the novel. The readers are tempted to choose their side but history seems to demand otherwise.

The readers are left to make a decision of their own since once again Foer provides no clear answers, he only raises more questions. On the other hand, that may be all that is left for the later generations; questions without answers.

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