

Tribhuvan University

**Use of Historiographic Metafiction for the Purpose of Reconciliation in Jonathan
Safran Foer's *Everything Is Illuminated***

A Thesis Submitted to the Central Department of English, T.U.

**In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the
Degree of Master of Arts in English**

By

Rupa Joshi

Symbol No.: 280399

T.U. Regd. No.: 6-2-327-1309-2013

Central Department of English

Kirtipur, Kathmandu

October 2020

Letter of Approval

This Thesis entitled "Use of Historiographic Metafiction for the Purpose of Reconciliation in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Everything Is Illuminated*" submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, by Rupa Joshi has been approved by the undersigned member of the Research Committee.

Members of the Research Committee

Prof. Dr. Anirudra Thapa
Internal Examiner

Dr. Tara Lal Shrestha
External Examiner

Prof. Dr. Jib Lal Sapkota
Head

Central Department of English

Date: _____

Acknowledgements

First and most importantly, I would like to thank my thesis supervisor Prof. Dr. Anirudra Thapa for his incisive reading of my drafts and continual co-operation, guidance and valuable suggestion to accomplish this thesis.

I must also thank Prof. Jib Lal Sapkota, Ph D, Head, Central Department of English, TU who provided me precious support with materials and suggestion. I am greatly indebted and want to extend my sincere gratitude to respected lecturer Badri Prasad Acharya who provided invaluable comments and precious support with materials. I would like to extend my gratefulness to lecturers Dr. Shiv Raj Rijal, Dr. Tara Lal Shresha, Raj Kumar Baral and Hem Lal Pandey for appreciation and cherished advice during the beginning of the research. Meanwhile the entire tutors of Central Department of English, TU at present who help me to acquired knowledge in the course of my study, deserve a great share of thanks from the core of my heart.

Finally, I would like to express my special regard and immense gratitude to my husband Bibek Joshi for his continuous encouragement, parents Dilliraj Joshi and Yashoda Devi Joshi and my loving family and friends for their encouragement and constant support who have smoothed this path for me.

October 2020

Rupa Joshi

Use of Historiographic Metafiction for the Purpose of Reconciliation in Jonathan
Safran Foer's *Everything Is Illuminated*

Abstract

Jonathan Safran's Everything Is Illuminated deals with the conflict and separation of generation primarily because of holocaust. Using holocaust experience as a memory Foer writes novel with the combination of multiple structures, language, unstructured setting and fragmentation with surprising comic tone. And these features establish this novel as a metafiction. Infact I argue that Foer uses metafiction in order to effect reconciliation or healing trauma. So, this research demonstrates how Everything Is Illuminated is historiographic metafiction and how this use of metafictional element allows Foer to bring fast and frozen reconciliation between generations of characters on the context of holocaust. That meant, how the history of Ukraine is analyzed from the perception of reconciliation. To study in depth this research is accomplished in the light of Linda Hutcheon's "historiographic metafiction" which explores the role of history to reconstruct the fiction. Since this research allows to show elements of historiographic metafiction and blends some features of trauma theory to reflect the effect of reconciliation. To reach the final conclusion paper is divided into two parts, the first part of the paper explains how Everything Is Illuminated is historiographic metafiction and second part demonstrates how this metafiction leads characters towards the reconciliation.

Keywords: historiography, metafiction, reconciliation, memory, healing trauma, holocaust

This paper analyzes Jonathan Safran Foer's *Everything Is Illuminated* as historiographic metafiction which exhibits how history of Ukraine is portrayed in fictional form with the verities of stories for the purpose of reconciliation.

Everything Is Illuminated reflects on the effects of the holocaust. Specially, it focuses on memory, holocaust and healing trauma. It concerns with the relationship between writing and memory. Primarily it raises the perennial question how a writer can respond to the atrocities of the holocaust for the purpose of healing trauma. What strikes most about the fiction is combination of fact and fantasy, history and fiction. Though it blends two juxtaposed objectives Foer perfectly plays with the ideas to keep the essence of holocaust alive. Referring the historical facts through the imaginative way Foer creates historiographical metafiction for the purpose of reconciliation and generational conflict of holocaust. Narrators try to excavate the stories after stories and give life to the characters who were lost in the chain of chaotic past, they are grandfather and Augustine. In surface the chapters are about excavating the truth but in deeper level it's all about enforcement of artistic presentation of the illusionary suffering of these youngsters, who are unable to overcome or escape bitter past.

Historiographic metafiction is a term coined by Canadian literary critic Linda Hutcheon in the late 1980s. In traditional writing fiction and history used to be taken as different entities. Aristotle clarifies relationship between fiction and history in former as general truth and later as universal truth. This clarification foregrounds the distinction between fiction and history; however still it is a debate in the realm of literary criticism. Hutcheon sheds light upon this through the line "historiographic metafiction acknowledges the paradox of the *reality* of the past but *its textualized*

accessible to us today” (114). Historiographic metafiction in this regard works to situate itself within the historical discourse without surrendering its autonomy as a fiction. It believes that history cannot claim authentic representation; it is an inconclusive project and can be subjected to interpretation through fictionalized narrative. Historiographic metafiction considers history as a shaping force which shapes human society and human destiny as Foer destines his characters to the final peace and reconciliation by revisiting the past.

This paper studies Foer’s *Everything Is Illuminated* in the light of Linda Hutcheon’s historiographic metafiction in which historical facts and imaginative fantasy overlap each other. It explores the technical features and functions of historiographic metafiction and its contribution to reach to the ultimate reconciliation. Therefore, the main objective of this research is to analyze how does Foer respond to the history while representing it by blending past and present, fact and fantasy and how it operates to heal the trauma of passed hunting memory.

Similarly, this study helps to find out the implication of writing passed memory in the present. It not only simply acknowledges the inevitable textuality of knowledge but rather examines the treatment of history and past in the present. Though *Everything Is Illuminated* has been studied by many on the basis of historiographic metafiction none of them have explored how it operates for the process of reconciliation. So, this research enables readers to understand how metafiction works as a tool for healing trauma. This research is useful to the students in English and Literature department who want to know deeply about historiographic metafiction and postmodernism proposed by Hutcheon. It will be beneficial for those who could not overcome their trauma and opens the door for further researchers in deeper level.

Analyzing the features of post – war novel, it’s obvious that literature is

containing multiplicity of meaning, multiple structure, multiple narrator with unusual narration, unstructured setting and fragmentation to find out diversity of implication in the text as Hutcheon underlines; “postmodern fiction suggests that to re-write or re-represent the past in fiction and in history, in both cases, to open it up to the present, to prevent it from being conclusive and teleological” (77). In this sense the concept of timelessness and discontinuity appears in the past, which is recreated in the fiction. Regarding the combination of fact and fantasy, history and fiction, it can be said that amalgamation of all these elements can be regarded as a major features of historiographical metafiction in literature as Onega asserts, the combination of history and fantasy can be regarded as one of the determining characteristics of the postmodern literature (93). To analyze it from the perspective of novel this novel speaks to the important tradition of Jewish American holocaust and proves highly responsive to the large body of literary, scholarly, and popular work on issues of holocaust memory and representation. This novel looks the holocaust from the third generation perspective. The third generation reflects an inheritance of trauma which leaves them as they do not have direct experience of the survivors. However this generation shares post memory. By quoting, Marianne Hirsch, Alan L. Berger further clarifies:

Post memory is a powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation. Post memory characterizes the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of previous generation shaped by traumatic events that can be neither understood nor recreated. (150)

As memory evokes struggle, the third generation often illuminates a cognitive darkness that was rarely found among the survivors of Holocaust and their children. In a true sense, the third generation present the trauma quite close to Cathy Caruth's definition, "a rethinking of reference [which] is aimed not at eliminating history but at resituating it in our understanding, that is, at precisely permitting history to arise where immediate understanding may not" (11). While seeking to transform trauma into history, the third generation writers either mourn their loss or work through their legacy in a process which helps them clarify their Jewish identity. For Caruth history is not only the passing of a crisis but it is also the passing on of a survival, "that can be possessed within a history larger than any single individual or any single generation" (71).

Therefore, *Everything Is Illuminated* can be regarded as a literary work containing the elements of both metafiction and history. Foer reflects the issues regarding multiple structures, narratives, fragmentation, destruction, peoples' position, language and love by creating historiographic metafiction in which the facts of history are mingled with the fictive mind of Foer. Foer employs multiplicity of narration, characters and setting, discontinuity of time by means of the different stories depicted in various chapters.

Thereby *Everything Is Illuminated* consists of multiple narrators and shift back and forth between hilarity, horror, and sentiment. Divided into two narratives with two contrasting voices, the novel fluctuates between a story with mythical overtones about the creation and destruction of the shtetl of Trachimbrod and an apparently more realist report of a character's quest for roots on trip to Ukraine. Two stories issued from the identity search undertaken by the young American student in his European trip. It is the invented story of the village, reported through historiographic

metafiction by Jonathan, and reviewed by Alex in his letters. The past eventually has to be recreated in order to not only overcome a lack of a historical referent, but also to cope emotionally with the Nazi's massacre of Jews and to come out of the hunting memory of the past.

Talking about the narrative technique, Francisco Collado Rodriguez further clarifies:

Foer builds a narrative structure in which myth and fantasy end up in helping readers-and eventually Alex himself-to come to a better understanding of unsayable traumatic events that are gradually disclosed in Alex's reports rather than Jonathan's. Paradoxically, Jonathan's magical- realist passages eventually bring illumination to the historical darkness that pervades Alex's letters and Alex's story. (57)

In fact, Alex's and Jonathan's writings are the two central stories of the novel. Alex's narrative looks back from the present to the atrocities of the Holocaust whereas Jonathan's moves slowly forward from the birth of Trachimbrod to the present. Going back to the past is an attempt toward recovery in the present in order to be able to construct a fruitful future. These two narrators allow a release of repressed memory, and Foer's use of them positions characters and readers as non- referential witness of the events reported. Foer's protagonist visits to past formulates new identity as Alex at the end writes to Jonathan "I am complete with happiness, and it is what I must do, and will do it. Do you understand me? I will walk without noise, and I will open the door in darkness and I will" (276).

These two third generation grandsons- Jonathan and Ales- are trying to recount the tales of their grandparents, who were direct victim of holocaust. These narrators could not escape from the psychological traces of the holocaust. These

traces question regarding the consequences of its impact upon the third generation. Though being physically untouched these narrators undergo the psychic pressure of their ancestors suffering. These characters have been victimized by distress followed by hunting past. The issues about narrative and history help to formulate historiographic metafiction in the novel. Combination of facts and fictions and juxtaposition of facts and fictional elements of grandson's and grandson's life experience makes *Everything Is Illuminated* historiographic metafiction. Novel is totally about the construction of imaginary journey for the finding of grandfather and is able to establish the relation with fiction. It is a metafiction written from memory about the past.

Hence, *Everything Is Illuminated* is replica of how the past generic experience has impact on the present generation. The stories of Jonathan and Alex narrate the incident of how ever after the ending of the holocaust still operates the mind of distant third generation. The characters of the novel have been the victim of inner distress followed by disturbing experience. Through in this novel Foer shows holocaust ordeal in the form of narrative. Innocence becomes tragic in Foer's description of Trachimbroders to the arrival of the German's in 1941. In this part of the story there is nine months gap between hearing the first bombs nearby and the Nazis' destruction of the shtetl itself. Why did they not attempt to flee to shafty? Jonathan writes:

Activity was replaced with thought. Everything remind everyone of something, which seems winsome at first when early birthdays could be recalled by smell of an extinguished match of all the feelings of the one's first kiss by sweat in the palm but quickly became devitalizing. Memory beget, memory beget memory, villagers became embodiment of legend they had been told to so many times, of mad Sofiowka, swaddled in white string, using

memory to remember memory, bound in an order of remembrance, struggling in vain to remember a beginning or end. (258)

Foer's novel thereby reflects on the use of fiction as a means of dealing with the past. In our story telling we have choice: we either portray what happened as we experienced it or we create a fiction that alters the value of the truth. Both are ways of dealing with the unbearable parts of our parts. By incorporating both ways in the novel writer enables new ways of judging what is wrong and what is right, what is bearable and forgivable and what is not it seems as though his message is that many oppositions that we thought were given might not be so 'black-and-white' as we thought. Augustine and Grandfather bring Alex to realization. Jan Ceuppens argues:

What stands out about the recent fictions under discussion here is the degree to which they emphasize the now- vast temporal and cultural distance between late twentieth and twenty-first century America and the Holocaust, as well as the gap between our time and the American experience of the Holocaust for previous generations. (60)

The novel is postmodern in its presentation of fragmentation and flashback. Multiple discourses are shown: on the one hand a magical and mythical story of the history of Yankel, Brod and Safran Trachimbrod's ancestor is narrated, while on the other hand Jonathan and Alex's journey is recounted in a more realistic manner. The first is written by a writer of a fiction and later by a 'bad' translator. In Alex's translation the meaning of language is often lost. Idiomatic language cannot be translated correctly; what Jonathan means figurative Alex takes to be literal: the results are comical dialogue in their conversation. In their conversation in letters, they write about writing and their problem which makes the wonder what is true and what imagined.

Another critic Antonia Strakosch views *Everything Is Illuminated* as the

constructive distance as a model for third generation holocaust fiction. Debates surrounding representations of the holocaust inevitably revolves around a single key question: whose past is it to tell? If second generation authors lack the authority to represent a disturbance that they experience only vicariously, as some critics claim, it follows that the fiction of the third- generation is doubly suspect for being twice removed from the holocaust. Obviously, in third generation fiction, the author's distance from events of the holocaust must be passed through a further generational removal. Many second-generation authors describe a sense of absence or void as a key reason why they are compelled to explore the holocaust. Third-generation authors arguably suffer this absence even more. In an interview for the *The Times* in 2002, Foer articulated the extent of the absence he experienced when he travelled to Ukraine to research his family history for writing *Everything Is Illuminated*:

There wasn't grandgather, there wasn't dog, there wasn't a woman I found who resembled the woman in the book- but I did go, and I just found-nothing. It is not like anything else I have ever experienced in my life. In a certain sense the book was not creation so much as it was an act of replacement. I encountered a hole and it was like the hole that I found was in myself and one that I wanted to try to fill up. (50)

Further Jonathan narrates his grandfather was died when he was ten, years before he understood the term Holocaust, or the magnitude all he suffered. Everything he knows of his life was learned from a single cassette-tape interview conducted by his uncle in 1980. In his experience then, and similar to the 'hole' Foer (2003) encountered when he travelled to the Ukraine, third-generation post memory filled with a twice-mediated distance from the holocaust so significant that critics may argue our connection to the atrocity does not exist at all. However, a small group of third-

generation authors including Jonathan is exploring simultaneous distance from and connection to the holocaust in their fiction. The narrative converges when it is revealed that Alex's grandfather, who served as driver in the journey to Ukraine, was both victim and perpetrator of the Nazi massacre in the town of Kolki. As the novel progresses, 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 we 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)

In this regard, *Everything Is Illuminated* attempts to deal with the ethics of its own production. Alex's question encompasses not only the ethics of writing imaginative holocaust fiction, but especially Foer's ability to access the subject from the historical distance of the third-generation.

Further, Menachem Feuer from D'youville College describes *Everything Is Illuminated* as a novel of an adversary or hidden hero. Alex describes his grandfather using a friendly tone. He is "fat", has "gold teeth, and cultivates an ample hairs on his face to comb by the dusk of everyday" (4). He is also bad-tempered and had a tendency to punch or yell at list. At the beginning of the book, Alex has an explanation for this: his grandfather has become "very melancholy, and also, he says, blind" after the passing of his wife. His dog, Sammy Davis Jr. Jr, a "seeing eye bitch" was "purchased" to compensate for his blindness. Nonetheless, this blindness does not keep him away from driving: the grandfather is the driver of the taxi, which is licensed under Heritage tours. The grandfather's adversarial nature is brought out in

his relationship with Jonathan by Alex. Throughout the first half of the novel, the grandfather calls Jonathan “the Jew”. “I hate Lvov, I hate Lutsk, I hate the Jew in the back seat of this car that I hate” (57).

Despite the numerous criticism and reviews done on this text, the issue about postmodern narrative have not been sufficiently explored yet. The issue about narrative and history helps this novel to be historiographic metafiction. To give justice to the issue this research attempts to analyze the various metafictional elements like nature of multiple truths, parody of past life, combination of facts and fantasy and juxtaposition of factual and fictional elements of grandsons’ and grandfather’s life experience. It tries to find the intertextuality, self-reflexivity, open endedness in *Everything Is Illuminated* that points out Foer’s self-critical stance and release of subjugation that was genetically transformed from his grandfather. The novel is totally about the construction of the imaginary journey for finding of grandfather and is able to establish the relation with fiction. It is the metafiction written from memory about history.

In traditional writing fiction and history used to be taken as different entities. Aristotle clarifies relationship between fiction and history in former as general truth and later as universal truth. This clarification foregrounds the distinction between fiction and history however; still this is a debate in the realm of literary criticism. Hutcheon seeds lights upon this through the line “historiographic metafiction acknowledges the paradox of the *reality* of the past but its *textualized accessibility* to us today” (114).

Children and grandchildren of the survivors are conferred as a “measure of authority by right to birth”. Their families have suffered and are still suffering, suffering of holocaust have been imprinted in their memory. Jonathan and Alex often

write from victim's perspectives or experiences, relating stories to their own family and impact of holocaust in their own life. Foer is able to create a sense of trust between himself and reader by drawing attention to his imaginative power and characters personal experiences. Foer is speaking beyond his own gender, race, culture, nationality he had told the story that lie outside the boundary of his actual lived experience i.e story of imagination and research. Through fictionalization of history/ holocaust Foer is addressing complex issue which frame holocaust in a way history and fact cannot, Foer allows both readers who may or may not be interested in pure historical record.

To fictionalize the history, Foer raises many complex questions that cannot be easily answered like "Memory. Memory and reproduction. And dreams of course. What is being awake if not interpreting our dreams, or dreaming if not interpreting our wake? Circle of circle! Dreams, yes? No? Yes?" (36). Foer compasses the necessity of writing literature for the purpose of reconciliation. He engages with his family's past and has adopted postmodern and magic realist strategies for dealing with his difficulties in fictionalizing the holocaust.

The novel consists of three prose styles: first, fictional letters written by Alex, a tour guide, to a fictional Foer, second, Alex's account of his trip around the Ukraine with Jonathan, which he is ostensibly posting to Foer with the letters, and third magic realist folk tales of Foer's ancestors' Jewish shtetl life in the late eighteen and early nineteen century. *Everything Is Illuminated* in this regard explores the inherent manipulation involved in writing through the construction of fictional Foer. The reader is actually unable to identity what is real and what is imagined.

Apparently, the author Jonathan just like the character Jonathan went to the Ukraine in search of the woman called Augustine, who rescued his grandfather from

Nazis. It is impossible for Foer to represent the history without documentary material. His ancestor's inhabit a world that is a construction, a place he is unable to physically visit because it no longer exists. Alex's narrative is another marker that suggests unknowability, as his accounts are written in broken and inaccurate English, further filtered through Jonathan's authorial manipulation. The presence of Foer in the novel gives imaginative weight which is not undercut by the reflective and non-realist techniques he adopts. It is believed that presence of author in the text breaks the 'spell' of fiction, but here it gives a sense of authenticity and a sense that the events actually happened and were witnessed, rather than invented.

Historiographic metafiction as fiction shares the characteristics associated with metafiction in general and takes history or part of history as its subject, as it creates its fictional universe, archived historical figures or events. The genre questions the separability of history and literature, arguing the two modes of discourses that have a lot in common and thereby it redefines the relationship between fictional writing and history. One of the issues treated in historiographic metafiction is history's claim to absolute truth it sometimes challenges the truth of historical records by deliberately altering the particulars of known historical details as Alex narrates "I had the opinion that Jewish people were having shit between their brains. This is because all knew of Jewish people was that they paid father very much currency in order to make vacation *from America to Ukraine*. But then I met Jonathan Safran Foer, and I will tell you, he is not having shit between his brains. He is an ingenious Jew"(3). Hutcheon's view helps to clarify above mentioned idea in her *The Poetics of Postmodernism* where she replaces the term 'postmodern fiction' with 'historiographic metafiction'. The phrase uplifted towards scholars' interest and tried to find how postmodern fictions are called historiographic metafiction and how they soften boundaries between fiction and

history, recognize the epistemological and methodological challenges and how they explore the history in the present.

Specially, Hutcheon suggests that postmodern works through parody to “both legitimize and subvert that which is parodies” (101). “Through a double process of installing and ironizing, parody signals how present representations come from past ones and what ideological consequences derive from both continuity and difference” (93). Instead of dehistoricizing the present postmodernism can rethink history and shed light on new critical capacities. For Hutcheon postmodern does not disregard as the past is represented, rather it makes an ironic acknowledgement of the fact that we are somehow separated from the past in regard to time we are in. Though the narrator falls into temptation that he has been suffering from the direct effect of holocaust, it clearly makes the parody or intertextuality with inevitable separation from past generations.

Similarly, Patricia Waugh talks about Metafiction as it is the term originated in 1970 by the American critic and novelist William H. Gass. However it might be the concept that came into existence out of nowhere in particular. Here, Waugh’s intention is not about the origin or development of metafiction rather to conceptualize the notion of metafiction around different issues, especially in relation to ideology and literary issue. Waugh says that metafiction is the formulation that one would not want to quarrel with is “a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to itself as artifact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction reality”(2). She regards this systematical reflexivity as a feature of post- modernism.

Metafiction, then, does not abandon the real world for the narcissistics pleasures of the imagination. What it does is to re-examine the conventions of

realism in order to discover- through its own self-reflection- a fiction from that is culturally relevant and comprehensible to contemporary readers. In showing us how literary fiction creates its imaginary worlds, metafiction helps us to understand how the reality we live day by day is similarly constructed, similarly written. (2)

According to Waugh, metafictional writers want to show relationship between fictional and real characters from the text. The real world only exists outside of the text in terms of metafiction. She convinces that metafiction does not leave the real world behind for its own sake. The conventionality is maintained while discovering the practicality or the realism through self-reflection. So it is all about creating a fictional world that is relevant and coherent for modern day readers. She further also suggests that it helps us to understand the reality of our day by day living.

Everything Is Illuminated can be defined as an innovative postmodern fiction which concerns with the writing of memory and how that memory can cope to come out of haunting trauma. The novel basically deals with the historical narrative of massacre of Jews by Nazis in shtetl of Trachimbrod and Kolki of Ukraine. In the novel Foer's own narrative sharply contrast with the official history of the Ukraine. This non-linear juxtaposed novel becomes typical with postmodern writing art which includes poetry, "Brod, you are a dirty river girl! Wouldn't you like to hold my hand, Brod? Your father is shameful man, Brod" (96). Letters, Alex usually writes to Jonathan which can be seen in following paragraph:

Dear Jonathan,

I hanker for this letter to be good. Like you know, I am not first rate with English. In Russian my ideas are asserted abnormally well, but my second tone is not so premium. I undertaked to input the things you counseled me to,

and fatigued the thesaurus you presented me. (23)

Alex wishes his letters to be good. He admits that his English is not so fluent but he tried to narrate by using dictionary.

Likewise, open-endedness of the novel leads readers to misconception and leaves them unsatisfied. This open endedness is one of the prominent features of postmodern fiction which becomes crucial for the readers to think about factual and fiction truth. One single phrase “we are writing” (212-213) is repeated more than 200 times in a whole page. Similarly, dotted lines are filled in more than one page can be seen in the novel:

She threw them into the
 Air.....

 they stayed
there.....

they hung as if on
 Strings.....
 (270-271)

Along with this it co-operates different art of writhing i.e. pages writing only with capital letters, pages filled with dots, italicized sentences and repetition of single phages. For Foer this repetition is the symbol of memorization.

Furthermore, *Everything Is Illuminated* can be regarded as an example of a self-reflexive novel which also is a prominent feature of postmodern fiction which can be relate with the features of historiographic metafiction. The narrative of Alex’s letters to Jonathan clarifies this self-reflexivity very prominently, the letters thereby

-serving as a metafictional layer of the novel. Through these letters, it becomes clear that Alex receives parts of the story of Trachimbrod from Jonathan while sending his own chapters on the quest to Jonathan as well. In his letters, Alex responds to the questions and remarks he has received from Jonathan – the reader, however, never gets to see any of the latter’s letters – and provides feedback on Jonathan’s writing too. This metafictional layer has different distinctive effects.

Firstly, the self-reflexivity provoked by the commentary on the other two storylines draws attention to the constructed nature of those storylines in a very obvious and unconcealed manner. For example, Alex writes: “I have made efforts to make you appear as a person with less anxiety, as you have commanded me to do on so many occasions. This is difficult to achieve, because in truth you are a person with very much anxiety” (142). Alex admits to altering his writing, thereby deviating from what he personally considers to be the truth. It is also made clear that the history of Trachimbrod is completely imagined by Jonathan, who does not seem to pay attention to it being all too credible. For example, Alex points out that the name of the towns people are no typical Ukrainian names: “Yankel is a name I have heard of, and so is Hannah, but the rest are very strange. Did you invent them? There were many mishaps like this, I will inform you. Are you being a humorous writer here, or an uninformed one?” (25). By means of such metafictional commentary, the novel reveals the process of representation to be based on human selection, interpretation and in many cases even conscious manipulation. Through this it helps to question the truthfulness of representation in general, showing that the relationship between language and reality is not straightforward because it is inevitably mediated. As the story deals with the traumatic memory of the Holocaust as well, that awareness raised by the self-reflexive layer stretches out to the questioning of the possibility of

faithfully representing history. This concern is also illustrated by means of the following passage in the narration of their quest:

The Ukrainians, back then, were terrible to the Jews. They were almost as bad as the Nazis. ... At the beginning of the war, a lot of Jews wanted to go to the Nazis to be protected from the Ukrainians.” “This is not true.” “It is.” “I cannot believe what you are saying.” “Look it up in the history books.” “It does not say this in the history books.” “Well, that’s the way it was. Ukrainians were known for being terrible to the Jews.”(47). “I think you are mistaken,” I told the hero. “I don’t know what to say.” “Say that you are mistaken.” “I can’t.” “You must.” (62)

When Jonathan mentions that the Ukrainians supposedly treated the Jews in a terrible manner, Alex refuses to believe this as this information does not stroke with what he has learned from his history books. Alex’s refusal to accept this alternate narrative shows how much he strikes to history as a source of truth, unwilling to reject this traditional master narrative. Because the very prominent metafictional self-reflexivity of the novel gives way to a problematizing of faithful representation, one could claim that *Everything Is Illuminated* is a typical postmodern novel. However, I would like to argue that the metafictional layer does not mainly serve that postmodern scepticism, but rather allows an emphasis on ethics, morality and sincerity in an outspoken communicative context which is possible through historiographic metafiction. This becomes clear when having a closer look at the self-reflexive comments in the letters and more specifically at the messages conveyed in them. For example, Alex writes to Jonathan: “[i]t is very difficult for me to write about Grandfather, just as you said it is very difficult for you to write about your grandmother” (101-102).

Foer is examining his fictional aspect in the realm of holocaust consequences.

Foer plays with art of writing. As it with, art for the art's sake, Foer is trying to give a reason or the meaning of his suffering even though he is aware that art might not be assimilated to the real world. This, we can see from his own words in the novel:

Art is that thing having to do only with itself- the product of a successful attempt to make a work of art. Unfortunately, there are no examples of art, nor good reasons to think that it will ever exist. (Everything that has been made with a purpose, everything with an end exists outside that thing, i.e., I want to sell this, or I want this to make famous and loved, or I want this to make other whole.) And yet we continue to write, paint, sculpt, and compose, Is this foolish of us? (202)

Foer's attempt might be creating an art work that would free from the chains of holocaust that he was carrying with himself. Presentation of the words in the novel is astonishingly different. Every title of the chapter written by Jonathan is typed in spiral shape. Most of the pages in the book are composed in the italicized form. This visual technique of word operates as a bridge to understand the fictional journey of author.

In this regard, postmodern historiographic strategies are dominant in the novel that operates to make this fictional account historiographic metafiction. In referring to the past the novel has way of treating metanarrative differentiating it from traditional to postmodern. Foer's narrative seeds light on to the crisis of knowledge. History as a metanarrative is challenged by the story that the narrator tells about the contemporary of Jonathan recounts the life and times of his ancestors through documented knowledge where their story is constituted by factual events. Foer presents this book about the journey not destination. And Foer as a writer travels everywhere for whom everything is inevitable. As Foer writes "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). Everything is illuminated seems a lot more like everything is intimidating when it already fixed with the consequences of holocaust. So, whatever has happened is fixed and cannot be changed with, any attempts that the author makes with Jonathan the fictional protagonist.

Novel consists two different narrative voices, one from Ukraine and one from America. Both of them narrate story from different point of view. Point of view of the novel changes usually from chapter to chapter. This unusual viewpoint is highlighted into three parts. First one is letters of Alex to Jonathan in which he describes about his birth and his love towards America. First part of letter is shaped in first person point of view. As he writes, “As for me, I was sired in 1977, the same year as the hero of the story. In truth, my life has been very ordinary. As mentioned before; I do many things with myself and others, but they are ordinary things. I dig American movies. I dig Negros, particularly Michael Jackson”(1). Similarly, Alex narrates their journey of searching of Augustine in first person point of view where he makes comment and queries to Jonathan. To light upon this Alex writes:

And mentioning your writing, “The beginning of the world often comes,” was a very exalted beginning. There were parts I did not understand, but I conjecture that this is because they were very Jewish, and only a Jewish people could understand something so Jewish. Is this way you think you are chosen by God because only you can understand the funnies that you make about yourself? (54)

This extract from letter of Alex to Jonathan defines their journey together one as an explorer and the other as a translator. Likewise, in the third section Jonathan himself takes into accounts of the history of Trachimbrod in regard to his own past family.

These sections are written in third person point of view, “there we go, he said, not, missing a bit as he riffles through a stack of papers on his pulpit, which was a really a chicken coop”(36). “You shouldn’t use that word” “which word? The word before homosexual, you really shouldn’t say that” (70). We can see here Jonathan uses third person pronoun. Though narrated on third person perspective, the author uses authorial power to direct judgments as being the first person narrator.

Likewise, whimsy, wit and humor come through the novel. Alex’s English itself creates humor most of the time. He narrates “WE PRAY BY NOT PRAYING, WE FULFILL THE LAW BY TRANSPASSING IT” (18). This means they pray by no praying and keep laws by defiling. Similarly, sometime characters’ names itself become so funnier while listening name like ‘Chana’, ‘Hanna’. Generally humor in holocaust representation is considered to be disrespectful. Freud argues that “such response tend to take a narrow view of the functions of humor, suggested humor as an important mechanism by which suffering as a response to a stimulus can be prevented instead producing pleasure”(3). For this reason he argues that it comprises an integral part of Jewish culture, allowing them to cope with the oppression and persecution inflicted upon the group throughout the history. It can be said that humor can be used as a tool towards the positive change because it destabilishes and defamiliarizes our prior conception of social reality. *Everything Is Illuminated* concerns and interrogates numerous tone of humor. Humorous tone of the novel is presented as the product of Jonathan’s urging that “humor is the only truthful way to tell the sad story” (53). As Alex and Jonathan narrate the historical events of the holocaust the two men completely diverge in their approaches; whilst Jonathan’s narrative ultimately disintegrate into pages of ellipsis as Nazi bombs fall on Trachimbrod whereby Alex is characterized by an overabundance of language, as

words and phrase goes together in one long, complex sentences. However comedy often is associated unknowingly inserted into love songs:

Weep not, my love

Weep not, my love

Your heart is close to me.

You fucking Bitch

Your heart is close to me. (137)

So, in such a comic tradition, much of the humor in the novel is irony and parody. This humor contributes to illuminate the reader. The line “the only thing worse than to be late to your own wedding is to be late to the wedding of the girl who should have been your wife” (9) makes readers burst into laughter. The use of humor similarly works as a tool to recall the pain, identity, past and history at the same time.

Historiographic metafiction revisits the textual past and communicates an awareness of its inevitable differences of the past. The same thing is done by Foer by devices of irony and humor. We can say that humor or parody is contradictory mood of writing. It can be seen as both conservative and revolutionary as it revisits the previous established code and represent it in the present. This dual nature of parody is suitable in both for postmodern and historiographic metafiction. Parody puts question on the authority of act of writing by locating the discourses of both fiction and history as Hutcheon says historiographic metafiction revisits the textual past but communicates as an awareness of its inevitable differences from the past.

In this regard, historiographic metafiction can be viewed as technique of postmodernism and as a genre that has a similar characteristic of postmodernism. It was one of well-known technique of postmodernism and later contained two main words ‘history’ and ‘fiction’. It is considered as a combination of historical events

with the device of metafiction. For Hutcheon works of historiographic metafiction are “those well-known and popular novels which are both intensely self-reflective and yet paradoxically” (introduction). *Everything Is Illuminated* contains many characteristics that make it historiographic metafiction such as, intertextuality, parody, black humor, use of poems, letters and dialogues. All these characteristics has used as an effective tool to achieve a specific, intellectual ideological purpose i.e. reconciliation.

Everything Is Illuminated presents three generations of Alex: Alex’s grandfather, his father, and himself. Guiding Jonathan Safran Foer, Alex discovers his own identity. His grandfather, who may in fact be at least part of Jewish- he is sometimes called Eli – feels overwhelming guilt for the death of his friend Herschel during a Nazi action in the town of Kolki. Augustine, by looking at the photographs from her collection, ‘Remains,’ recalls the traumatic past and the grandfather of Alex tries to stop her:

He (Herschel) lived in Kolki, which was a shtetl near to Trachimbrod.

Herschel and Eli were best friends, and Eli had to shoot Herschel, because if he didn’t, they would shoot him. “Shut up,” he (Grandfather) said again, and this time he also punched the table. But she didn’t shut up. Eli didn’t want to, but he did it. (152)

Augustine’s picture not only induces Jonathan’s journey, but ensures personal involvement of both Alex and Grandfather too given that each character is seriously involved in the journey’s development and highly determined to bring the journey to a successful ending. This is mostly due to Grandfather’s traumatic past that prevents him from living in an easy condition and which keeps his entire family in a state of immobility. It is clear that the trauma of war and bloodshed within the Perchov family needs to be overcome by the Grandfather and it should be known to the entire family

in order for Grandfather to be liberated and to be able to construct a hopeful future.

Remarkably, from the very beginning of the novel, Grandfather knows precisely what journey he embarks on when he repeats after his son, "Trachimbrod". The announcement upsets him – "I do not want to drive ten hours to an ugly city to attend to a very spoiled Jew" (62). However he accompanies them. Besides, when Grandfather discovers they are heading for Kolki, he asks, "Kolki?" (62). This message however, reveals his determination to accomplish the journey. Moreover, while looking at the photograph of Augustine, he assures the group: "we will find her" (62). The above mentioned expressions depict Grandfather's willpower to repeat unpleasurable experiences from the past as he clearly knows what he will be facing in the near future. Thus, Grandfather exposes a need to repeat the repressed material from the past, as probably he is ready to reproduce and work through his trauma.

The road towards the reversal consists of Grandfather's confession which is supported by the overwhelming power of love that Augustine reinserts in his life. Love brings him back to life giving contact with others. Grandfather's willingness to be confronted with his trauma portrays his determination to master the past. His attitude, ultimately, shows that he wants to fit the traumatic flashes of the past into a coherent and meaningful narrative. Meeting with Augustine results in the return of what grandfather had repressed for so many years, which accounts for his melancholy behavior. Alex reports that he has seen his grandfather weeping three times in a week:

The first night I witnessed him crying he was investigating an aged leather bag, brimmed with many photographs and pieces of paper, like one of Augustine's boxes. The photographs were yellow, and so were the papers. I am certain that he was having memories for when he was only a boy, not an old man. The second night he was crying, he had the photograph of Augustine

in his hands . . . “Augustine,” I could hear him say. “Augustine.” The third night he was crying he had a photograph of you (Jonathan) in his hands. It is only possible that he 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)

Alex’s grandfather after the episode in which he faces Augustine, and is finally able to release his tears and admits to his grandson the nature of his forced crime. Shortly after their meeting with Augustine, Grandfather approaches Alex in a different manner, “I [Alex] found it very moving to feel his [grandfather’s] touch and to remember that hands can also show love” (182). The Grandfather narrates the wound of fifty years back. Obviously, the Grandfather was pushed to the edge of confessing something that turns the entire novel around. In fact Alex writes in brackets that this part is too hard for him to write as it disrupts his vision, “Here it is almost forbidding to continue . . . My hand shakes so that I can no longer hold my pen. Do it for me. Please. It is now yours” (226).

Grandfather's confession solves Alex'(self –accepted) identity that gives him the ability to make important future decisions. Grandfather's acceptance of the past and Alex's personal maturation are the result of the life giving power of love that reinserts in their lives and which unites them with their inner self. Ultimately, the acceptance and illumination of past atrocities allows the Perchov family to render themselves free from the isolated and imprisoning grip of the traumatic past on their present life.

Grandfather is a compelling character because at first he seems to be with little consequence but he grows in complexity during the quest for Augustine. His real or imagined blindness is a metaphor for his refusal to see the truth about himself and the

world left in the rubble of Nazi and Soviet domination. The search makes Alex wonder early on what Grandfather did during the war, because he has never mentioned it. Grandfather has never returned to his native town since the war because he wanted to build a life for his family without difficult choices and shame and death. When he learns about Herschel, Alex concludes that all people are responsible for one another. Alex's inherited guilt resembles Augustine's survivor's guilt.

And yet, Grandfather's suicide note has an optimistic tone of imminent action at the end. Instead of brooding over the past, the letter looks to the future speaking of Alex's successful rebellion against his abusive father and voicing the old man's wish for his grandson to begin again. Moreover, through Alex's letters, this novel playfully charts the process of its own making and yet moves beyond it, hinting at the unlimited potential of possible revisions and opening its pages to the working of textual play. It comes into effect as the text begins to compellingly re-enact meaningful intersubjectivities, mediating their textual emergence through the powerful discourses of subject formation that gradually infuse Alex's letters. Talking about the novel, Michael Adams writes:

The novel is about guilt and responsibility, love and forgiveness, truth and illusion. It is also a commentary on the nature of art to transform or illuminate reality. Foer is not writing self-reflective fiction to be clever but to show how art and life converge into a hall of mirrors. Everything is not only illuminated, but also connected. (4)

The third generation is far limited than its predecessors. They seek for memory even while given free rein to artistic imagination that informs a variety of innovative narrative techniques. Collectively, the third generation reveals the truth that memory and trauma, even in the face of silence, form an ineluctable part of the human

experience, and that the attempt to transform the legacy of holocaust trauma into history will, no matter the format, continue in the future. The third generation illuminate the fact that history is not only the passing on of crisis but it is also the passing on of a survival that can be possessed within a history larger than any single individual or any single generation. Therefore, it is good to clarify with the words of the protagonist of the novel who focuses on the necessity of reconciling with the traumatic past. Jonathan, the protagonist asserts, “*AND IF WE ARE TO STRIVE FOR A BETTER FUTURE, MUSTN’T WE BE FAMILIAR AND RECONCILED WITH OUR PAST?*” (210).

Augustine has stood as a redeeming figure that has moved Grandfather back to life. She has assured Trachimbrod’s past existence and embodies its remnants and memories. Grandfather’s willingness to be confronted with his trauma portrays his determination to master the past. His attitude, ultimately, shows that he wants to fit the traumatic flashes of the past into a coherent and meaningful narrative.

Thus it is best to say that *Everything Is Illuminated* transcends the particulars of the event defined by death to affirm a movement of return to life. Foer clarifies that story writing is a soul making process and a way of leading from darkness to light and thus relieving from traumatic experience into a healing stage. This novel clarifies that the survivors do not always live in the darkness of trauma but make the movement towards the illumination.

Similarly *Everything Is Illuminated* helps to bring reconciliation between two different characters who think they belong to different community. This novel employs inversion resulting disrupting of boundaries to explore ways of connecting people divided by atrocities. At the beginning Alex’s grandfather resists helping Jonathan in his search for Trachimbrod. He insists saying that “I don’t want to drive

ten hours to an ugly city to attend a very spoiled Jew” (7). His resistance reflects a legacy of resentment between non-Jewish Ukrainians and Jews. *Everything Is Illuminated* reveals the power of historical narrative to shape the relationship between descendent of those who lived through the holocaust. Similarly, it fuses Jewish and non-Jewish experiences blurring the boundaries between violence done by Jews and Ukrainians. In the beginning Alex’s grandfather’s perspective towards Jonathan was different so do was Alex. Alex narrates “before the voyage I had the opinion that Jewish people were having shit between their brains this is because all I know of Jewish people was that “they paid father very much currency in order to make vacation from America to Ukraine”(3). But when they together took part in the journey Alex’s perspective toward Jonathan was completely changed. Further he writes “But then I met Jonathan, and I will tell you, he is not having shit between brain he is an ingenious Jew” (3). So, the reconciliation envisions in the novel entails the development of what John Boreman calls “sense of beginning” (282). It’s an interaction where one person comes to know the needs and experiences of other.

In the novel the sense of reconciliation comes from the shared legacy of violence and mutual understanding about identity. Fore’s shared history involves a concomitant willingness to respect conflicting narrative. This acceptance of disparate voices belongs to a long Jewish identity. In his exploration of reconciliation Foer situates himself in a tradition of Jewish thought that brings him back to the earliest writings. Lisa Propst argues that by raising the question of how to effect post-atrocity reconciliation he challenges the view that Bjorn Krondorfer posits in Jewish American writing on the holocaust that reconciliation is “if not outright impossible, at least a highly suspicious under taking” (21). Jonathan opposes the notion of Jewishness that drives unity from a “unity of victimization” (5) and constructs

relationship between Jews and non-Jews people.

After meeting Jonathan Alex further clarifies that “It is how evident to me that he will become a very potent and generative man and that his brain will have many muscles, we do not speak in volumes, because he is such a silent person but I am certain that we are paramount friends” Where we can see mutual bond between Jew and non-Jew boys. Though Alex and his grandfather used to believe that themselves and Jonathan perceive different feelings towards the holocaust but throughout their journey they realized that they carry similar history of trauma created by holocaust. As the journey progresses the uncomfortable relation between characters changes into mutual understanding and respect. Alex and Jonathan both share their account of history and both of them remember that their history is intertwined which raises the question of shared identity. There by, it is vivid that Alex and Jonathan forge their connection through very different ways of writing. Their narrative style opens the door for different interpretation which carries historiographic metafiction as an element for the purpose of reconciliation.

Grandfather’s suicide note ends on an optimistic note of imminent action. Instead of brooding over the past, the letter looks to the future speaking of Alex’s successful rebellion against his abusive father and voicing the old man’s wish for his grandson to begin again. Moreover, through Alex’s letters, this novel playfully charts the process of its own making and yet moves beyond it, hinting at the unlimited potential of possible revisions and opening its pages to the working of textual play. It comes into effect as the text begins to compellingly re-enact meaningful inter subjectivities, mediating their textual emergence through the powerful discourses of subject formation that gradually infuse Alex’s letters. Talking about the novel, Michael Adams writes:

The novel is about guilt and responsibility, love and forgiveness, truth and illusion. It is also a commentary on the nature of art to transform or illuminate reality. Foer is not writing self-reflective fiction to be clever but to show how art and life converge into a hall of mirrors. Everything is not only illuminated, but also connected. (4)

Everything Is Illuminated brings into light many key psychological points which clarify that the legacy of trauma effects not only the third generation but also the non-Jewish generation. With the maturity of Alex's own identity, he develops respects both for himself and for the Jewish tradition. Before the beginning of the journey, Alex thought that "the Jewish people were having shit between their brains" (3). But at last his attitude is completely changed for he identifies himself with Jonathan, "I am Kolker and you are Brod, and then I am your grandfather and you are Grandfather and I am Alex and you are you, and that I am you and you are me" (214). This is how historiographic metafiction has worked to bring reconciliation.

To sum up, historiographic metafiction was introduced as a new genre in literature at the beginning of the twentieth century, which appear as a reaction against what was before. However; postmodernism is a vague to be defined, also we can notice that historiographic metafiction is one of the postmodern characteristics, in the same time it is continuity under postmodernism since it has the same features. Historiographic metafiction is the combination between history and fiction; this is one of the postmodern characteristics. Many writers wrote about historiographic metafiction like Johathan Safran Foer. The main motive behind his writing was to show reconciliation between two generations and two characters who resemble different community.

Work Cited

- Alexander, Jeffrey. "Cultural Trauma: A social Theory." *Trauma: A Social Theory*. Polity, 2012.
- Berger, Alan L. "Unclaimed Experience: Trauma and Identity in Third Generation Writing about the Holocaust." *Shofar*, vol. 28, no. 3, 2010, pp. 149–158. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/10.5703/shofar.28.3.149.
- Collado-Rodriguez, Francisco. "Ethics in the Second Degree: Trauma and Dual Narratives in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Everything Is Illuminated*." *Journal of Modern Literature*, vol.32, no. 1, 2008, pp. 54–68.
- Feuer, Menachem. "Almost Friends: Post-Holocaust Comedy, Tragedy, and Friendship in Jonathan Safran Foer's 'Everything Is Illuminated.'" *Shofar*, vol. 25, no. 2, 2007, pp.24- 48.
- Foer, Safran Jonathan. *Everything is Illuminated*. Houghton Mifflin Company, 2002.
- Hutcheon, Linda. *The Politics of Postmodernism*. Routledge, 1989.
- Hutchen, Linda. *A Poetics of Postmodern: History, Theory, Fiction*. Routledge, 1988.
- Lyotard, Jean- Francois. *The Postmodern condition: A Report of Knowledge*. Translated by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, Vol. 10, University of Minneapolis Press, 1984.
- Waugh, Patrica. *Metafiction: The Theory of Practice of Self- Conscious Fiction*. Routledge, 1984.
- Propst, Lisa. "'Making One Story'? Forms of Reconciliation in Jonathan Safran Foer's 'Everything Is Illuminated' and Nathan Englander's 'The Ministry of Special Cases.'" *MELUS*, vol. 36, no. 1, 2011, pp. 37–60. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/23035242. Accessed 10 Mar. 2020.