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Representations of Trauma in the Fiction of American Third Generation Holocaust Descendants

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Representations of Trauma in the Fiction of American Third Generation Holocaust Descendants

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Declaration

I declare that I am the sole author of this thesis presented for the degree of Ph.D and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a degree. The work contained herein is my own except where explicitly stated otherwise by reference or acknowledgment. I have consulted all sources cited.

SARAH COAKLEY

21/10/22

Summary

As time places more distance between ourselves and the Holocaust, and unfortunately more survivors pass away, the locus of Holocaust memory has shifted, to an extent, from its survivors to their descendants. Integral to this is the concept of trauma, which is not only central to studies of the Holocaust, but, as recent research suggests, has a sustained effect on subsequent generations, thus problematising strict categorisations of who can be considered ‘traumatised’ or what constitutes a trauma. Consequently, this thesis develops and utilises a theoretical spectrum of trauma that encompasses individual, transgenerational, and cultural traumatisation. In accordance with the long historical relationship between trauma and writing, it focuses on and explores this theory through the literary fiction of three American grandchildren of Holocaust survivors, known as the third generation—Jonathan Safran Foer, Nicole Krauss, and Rachel Kadish—and the ways in which they represent these traumas and the complexities in how they intersect, imbricate, and interact in a context where, due to death or traumatic silence, full knowledge of the traumatic past can be difficult or even impossible. By considering each author’s work as an oeuvre, comparisons are made between each author’s approach and within their own body of work, thus facilitating a multifaceted appraisal of issues pertinent to the third generation and its associated negotiation of the concepts of history, memory, and trauma, including the effects of traumatic silence on an individual’s sense of familial history and identity; the tensions between individual experience and familial/cultural narratives; the role of documentary and objectified evidence in stimulating historical enquiry; the interplay between absence and creative invention required by historical lacunae; and, finally, the ethical implications and obligations highlighted by this experience.

A note on the language used in this thesis:

Because trauma is not a literary device, but rather a lived experience for many people across the globe, it is important to make some linguistic provisions in discussing the condition as represented in literature. These are especially pertinent to the introduction, in which I explore an interdisciplinary definition of trauma.

Firstly, in line with the work of Judith Lewis Herman and Dan Bar-On, I have attempted to balance the dispassionate voice of the academic necessary to discuss many of the concerns regarding trauma with a sense of empathy and compassion for those affected, in order to best represent their experience: in other words, to maintain a critical distance whilst taking care not to diminish, negate, or alienate any individual experiences.

Secondly, despite a detailed overview of interdisciplinary perspectives on traumatic conditions such as PTSD, I will continue to use the word ‘trauma’ throughout this thesis. There are two interrelated reasons for this. First, it is not appropriate to attempt a proper psychiatric diagnosis in a literary context; and second, it avoids technicalities surrounding exclusionary, overly prescriptive, and medically-sanctioned thresholds for diagnoses of traumatic stress. In this sense, the authority of the individual claiming a trauma remains with them, rather than imposed from without. Furthermore, as Maria P. P. Root has noted, psychiatric diagnoses of trauma tend to be based on a male model, and as such do not adequately account for the myriad ways in which traumatic stress intersects with social issues such as racism, homophobia, and sexism, in addition to the complicated politics of diagnosis, which can function to pathologise what is a normal response to an extremely distressing environment.

Finally, the terms used to describe individuals affected by trauma is of paramount importance. With regard to the survivors of a direct trauma, and in response to issues highlighted at the ‘Memory, Identity and Trust’ conference (Dundee, April 2018), I will continuously refer to persons themselves affected by trauma using neutral terms such as ‘individual’ or ‘subject’ rather than ‘sufferer’ or ‘victim’. As per the central aims of my thesis, to narrate one’s trauma in one’s own words—or indeed, through the absence of such words—is absolutely crucial. To define one’s own position in relation to the trauma, as denoted by these terms, is no exception. An assessment of victimhood is the right of the affected on an individualised basis, rather than that of the clinician, analyst, or critic; especially considering its potentially distressing and stultifying effects.

However, a slightly different framework is appropriate in reference to those experiencing indirect trauma. In line with work by Diane L. Wolf, I have chosen to refer to the descendants of the traumatised as the second and third generations. As Wolf notes, the term ‘survivor’ is inappropriate in this context, creating a false conflation between the experiences of the traumatised individual and those of their offspring.

The language of this thesis, therefore, is designed to respond to both academic and ethical imperatives, an endeavour which I hope is realised in part through these provisions.

Introduction

History and Memory

Stepping out of the Spanish heat and into the Centro de Exposiciones Arte Canal is unsettling. In the cool depths of the main exhibition space, cut off from the street bustle outside, people leaving their workplaces for drinks and tapas, shouldering gym bags or clutching metro tickets, the exhibit winds a path through brick archways, reminiscent of a railway station, or, uncannily, of the presence of hidden mirrors that distort the space. The visitor is ineluctably drawn along a preset pathway, past display cabinets of objects—single shoes, battered suitcases, a stained striped uniform—and numerous photographs, poems, and fragments of history, until the space opens out. In the centre of this clearing looms the frame of a reconstructed gas chamber. Partial. Skeletal. *Ghostly*.

Years ago, I remember reading an article in which Charles Barber declared that we live in an ‘Age of Trauma’.¹ In the years following visiting the exhibition in Madrid in 2018, this will certainly seem the case; there will be a global pandemic, the outbreak of war, and increased anxiety surrounding impending climate catastrophe, in addition to school shootings, police brutality, wildfires, displacement, and the threat of conflict. But here, beneath the wooden beams used, 75 years ago, in a gas chamber, the past also feels imminent. The exhibition of which it is part, the world’s first travelling Auschwitz collection, is subtitled ‘Not long ago. Not far away.’ It is apt.

It is true that, in contemporary western culture, and especially Jewish American culture, the Holocaust does not feel distant either temporally or spatially. In fact, as Luis Lugo et al report, 73% of Jewish Americans consider the Holocaust ‘essential’ to their Jewish identity—the highest rated of all responses.² Yet, with the passage of time and the inevitable deaths of survivors, focus has shifted, to an extent, from the survivors to their descendants, who consider the legacy of the Holocaust not only a historical fact, but a lived reality as a spectral presence in family history and discourse. This experience, termed ‘postmemory’ by Marianne Hirsch, describes the ‘relationship of the second generation to powerful, often

¹ Charles Barber, ‘We live in the Age of Trauma’, *Salon*, 1 May 2013
<https://www.salon.com/2013/05/01/we_live_in_the_age_of_trauma/> [Accessed 15 June 2022], n.p.

² Luis Lugo et al, ‘A Portrait of Jewish Americans: Findings from a Pew Research Center Survey of U.S. Jews’, *Pew Research Center*, 1 October 2013
<<https://www.pewforum.org/2013/10/01/jewish-american-beliefs-attitudes-culture-survey/>> [Accessed 12 March 2021], p. 14.

traumatic, experiences that preceded their births but that were nevertheless transmitted to them so deeply as to seem to constitute memories in their own right.’³ The past, in this way, is neither ‘long ago’ nor ‘far away.’

This relationship to the past, and especially the traumatic past, is brought to its limits in the twenty-first century by the emergence of the Holocaust’s third generation—that is, the grandchildren of Holocaust survivors—who in many cases constitute the last living link to the Holocaust. The third generation’s literary outputs, as I shall explore throughout this thesis via the works of Jonathan Safran Foer, Nicole Krauss, and Rachel Kadish, consider the complexities of this relationship. These writings sit at the juncture between history, with its rigorous epistemology; living, emotional memory; and, finally, *imagination*: where history and memory fail, or are silenced, the missing information must be approached creatively. And, of course, at the heart of this absence, and indeed these works, is *trauma*.

This project has two interrelated aims. The first is to develop, via synthesis, a nuanced theory of trauma that both reflects knowledge across multiple disciplines, from the psychiatric and psychological to the literary and sociological. Importantly, it will also consider trauma and its mechanisms across a spectrum encompassing individual, transgenerational, and cultural levels, and thereby add the necessary complexity to current theories of trauma used in literary criticism. At a time where the value of interdisciplinary studies is increasing recognised, it is crucial to develop a theory that is functional across different disciplines in order to facilitate such interaction. Combining scientific findings and rigour with the flexibility and sensitivities of the humanities, this theory is therefore significant in its reference and applicability to the multiple fields in which trauma is relevant, including the medical sciences, neuroscience, psychology, sociology, and literature. As this theory has, at its heart, an appreciation of nuance and individual complexity, it is therefore also inextricable from my second aim: to contribute to ongoing research on the third generation and their literary endeavours, through the inclusion of such complexity in my analysis and close attention paid to individual representations and manifestations of trauma in each text. The traumas depicted, as I will demonstrate over the course of this thesis, cannot be understood singularly and in isolation as either individual, transgenerational, or cultural traumas, but rather as a complex of the interactions between all three. This is not only distinct from other analyses of trauma in literature, but generates important insights into the cultural and generational contexts in which the texts are produced. Therefore, while this project most

³ Marianne Hirsch, ‘The Generation of Postmemory’, *Poetics Today*, 29:1 (2008), 103-128 (p. 103).

clearly makes interventions in the field of Literary Trauma Studies, it also contributes to American Studies and Jewish American Literature, and, via the following interdisciplinary analysis of trauma, Trauma Theory.

Trauma: Multidisciplinary Perspectives

It is well known that the word ‘trauma’ is derived from the Greek *τραῦμα*, literally meaning wound. However, especially over the last century, this definition has been significantly expanded and transformed in order to primarily concern a new category of wound: the psychological. Even the diagnosis of posttraumatic stress disorder, first included in the third edition of American Psychiatric Association’s *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-III) in 1980 as a subcategory of anxiety disorders, has been extended markedly in the most recent edition (DSM-V, 2013) to entail an entire section dedicated to posttraumatic stress.⁴ Yet, despite a wealth of literature on the subject, spanning a remarkable number of disciplines, the concept of trauma remains complicated, elusive, and at times even controversial. Although significant progress has been made since diagnoses of hysteria and shell-shock, the invocation of the word ‘trauma’ seems to raise more questions than it answers. Hence, while a common public understanding of trauma exists—an overwhelming or horrifying event or series of events are experienced by an individual, who responds with immutable fear and depression, often accompanied by classic symptoms such as flashbacks or nightmares—many details are placed under scrutiny and have become the centre of heated debates, with questions ranging from whether the event was powerful enough to be considered a trauma to whether the individual suffers enough to be classed as traumatised. Interdisciplinary discrepancies are especially obvious, as each entails a different theoretical understanding of trauma which results in a different framework for diagnosis and different thresholds that this diagnosis must meet; a range which has as its poles a clinical checklist of psychopathology in psychiatry and a rhetorically-employed declaration of outrage or tragedy in politics. Yet, no single framework can accurately and solely encapsulate the experience of trauma: clinical checklists do little to take into account the very valid perspectives that one’s cultural group has been traumatised (a cry often heard from Native American, African American, and Jewish voices, to name but a few examples) and nor can

⁴ American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 3rd edn. (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association, 1980), pp. 236-239; American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 5th edn. (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association, 2013), pp. 265-290.

the offhand use of the word describe both historically-induced social stigmas and the first-hand experience of combat, torture, terrorism, or rape, simultaneously. It is therefore prudent to establish an appropriately nuanced definition of trauma and the mechanisms by which it may be transmitted transgenerationally and culturally. This will be developed over the following pages with the aim of integrating perspectives from multiple disciplines throughout history, including psychoanalysis, psychiatry, and sociology, towards a more multifaceted understanding of the what trauma is and how it functions.

Until the publication of the DSM-III, studies in trauma were predominantly associated with psychoanalysis, and especially Sigmund Freud's studies of hysteria, accident neuroses, and the so-called war neuroses, which described the phenomenon of 'shell shock' in the returning soldiers of the First World War. Together designated traumatic neuroses, these manifestations of psychological distress challenged much of Freud's analytic work, and hence became a source of fascination for him. In particular, his 1920 paper 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' inaugurated the concept of the death drive (the compulsion towards self-destructive quiescence), in order to address the limitations of the pleasure principle (a kind of economic framework in which an individual and their actions seek to produce pleasure and avoid unpleasure) in describing the experiences of those suffering from a traumatic neurosis. These patients, after exposure to an overwhelming or terrible event, were observed to become anxious, withdrawn, and occasionally psychotic, acting in a manner that was markedly incongruous with their previous behaviour or the behaviour of those around them. Freud emphasises specifically the problematic nature of trauma-related nightmares reported to him, suggesting that according to the pleasure principle, these dreams should contain more pleasurable content, since the patient has no desire to re-experience the traumatic event depicted.⁵ It was thus clear to Freud that traumas effect significant changes in an individual's perceptions and actions: the 'grave psychical and motor symptoms' exhibited following a trauma operate on multiple levels, including what Freud saw as the most basic, unconscious instincts and behaviours.⁶

For Freud, one of the most important factors in traumatising is the suddenness or unexpectedness of the traumatic event. He notes that '[i]n the case of the ordinary traumatic

⁵ Sigmund Freud, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 18, ed. by James Strachey, trans. by James Strachey and Anna Freud (London: Hogarth Press, 1955), pp. 7-64 (pp. 32-33).

⁶ Sigmund Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, trans. by Katherine Jones (London: Hogarth Press, 1939), p. 109.

neuroses [...] the chief weight in their causation seems to rest upon the factor of surprise, of fright', going on to explain that

'Fright', 'fear' and 'anxiety' are improperly used as synonymous expressions; they are in fact capable of clear distinction in their relation to danger. 'Anxiety' describes a particular state of expecting the danger or preparing for it, even though it may be an unknown one. 'Fear' requires a definitive object of which to be afraid. 'Fright', however, is the name we give to the state a person gets into when he has run into danger without being prepared for it; it emphasizes the factor of surprise. I do not believe anxiety can produce a traumatic neurosis. There is something about anxiety that protects its subject against fright and so against fright-neuroses.⁷

This differentiation lies at the heart of psychoanalytic trauma theory. In the words of Cathy Caruth, the trauma is an event that 'is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor.'⁸ To psychoanalysis, trauma is liminal, situated at the intersection of the comprehensible and incomprehensible; apprehensible and non-apprehensible; past and present; life, survival and death. In fact, it has been suggested that it is this very ambivalence that provides trauma with its potency. Caruth writes that

trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature—the way it was precisely *not known* in the first instance—returns to haunt the survivor later on.⁹

Indeed, as I will discuss later on in this chapter, a great deal of the difficulties surrounding trauma stem from the fact of its incomprehensibility, both at the point of exposure and during its aftermath. It is also this issue that psychoanalysis seeks to resolve, through uncovering the

⁷ Freud, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', pp. 12-13.

⁸ Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), p. 4.

⁹ Ibid.

(often forgotten or repressed) trauma and integrating it into the patient's consciousness, thus alleviating their symptoms.¹⁰

It is also through this framework of the unassimilated encounter that Freud understood the function of traumatic nightmares: the anxiety created by the reexperiencing of the traumatic event in the dream context seeks to retroactively prevent traumatising. The preparedness for danger inherent in anxiety, in theory, would disallow the fright that was perceived to have caused the trauma.¹¹ Such constant reorientation to the past traumatic encounter, with an aim to assimilate it, is known in psychoanalysis as repetition. With regard to traumatic nightmares, Freud observes in 'Fixation to Traumas—The Unconscious' that

These patients regularly repeat the traumatic situation in their dreams; where hysteriform attacks occur that admit of an analysis, we find that the attack corresponds to a complete transplanting of the patient into the traumatic situation. It is as though these patients had not finished with the traumatic situation, as though they were still faced by it as an immediate task which has not been dealt with[.]¹²

The issue of temporality in relation to trauma is made clear here: not only does an individual find that the trauma constitutes a central feature in their life (in Freud's words, a 'fixation'), but the intrusion of traumatic memories implodes the awareness of past, present, and future, creating a context in which, in a sense, the (past) trauma appears to exist contemporaneously within the present. As a result, Freud observed that, even if the trauma itself was in some way unknown, it manifests itself through the very behaviours of an individual, not as a past event, but as a present action. He termed this specific form of repetition 'acting out'. Although Freud primarily considers acting out in terms of transference with the analyst in a clinical setting, these behaviours are also observable in a patient's daily activities. For example, Dori Laub describes the habits of a female Holocaust survivor, who, in his words

¹⁰ This is, of course, not without its problems. In the words of Henry Krystal, this goal involves 'the acceptance of the inevitability and necessity of every event which was part of one's life as having been *justified by its causes*.' Such a notion, he admits, has proven controversial especially to Holocaust survivors, who often feel that such an acceptance can also imply acceptance of Hitler and Naziism generally. It therefore remains an area of ethical ambiguity.

Henry Krystal, 'Trauma and Aging: A Thirty-Year Follow-Up', in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. by Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), pp. 76-99 (p. 83).

¹¹ Freud, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', p. 32.

¹² Sigmund Freud, 'Fixation to Traumas—The Unconscious', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 16, ed. by James Strachey, trans. by James Strachey and Anna Freud (London: Hogarth Press, 1963), pp. 273-285 (pp. 274-275).

relentlessly holds on to, and searches for, what is familiar to her from her past, with only a dim awareness of what she is doing. Her own children she experiences with deep disappointment as unempathic strangers because of the ‘otherness’ she senses in them, because of their refusal to substitute for, and completely fit into, the world of parents, brothers, and children that was so abruptly destroyed.¹³

Her unconscious transplantation of her traumatic past onto her present life hence not only illuminates a central feature of the trauma (the loss of her family at the hands of the Nazis), but the ways in which she has been unable to fully move past—or, in psychoanalytic terms, ‘work through’—the trauma. As a result, it is perpetually and ubiquitously repeated in her everyday reality.

An additional site of repetition, as further investigated by later psychoanalysts such as Jacques Lacan, is language. In ‘The agency of the letter in the unconscious or reason since Freud’, Lacan outlines in detail the relationship between the signifier and the signified, arguing that language precedes a subject, and its structures form and inform their subjective reality. Consequently, he considers symptoms as a form of metaphor and desires as metonymy.¹⁴ Acting out, therefore, can be treated as a metaphorical approach to the trauma that cannot be adequately signified directly. A sense of inadequacy as opposed to inaccuracy is, furthermore, fundamental to this idea: it is indisputable that language cannot fully contain the experience of trauma, but neither does trauma sit entirely outwith language. As Linda Belau notes, without language, there cannot be said to be an unspeakable.¹⁵ In fact, she goes on to suggest that ‘[i]t is only because the symbolic cannot address the logic of trauma adequately that trauma is registered at all’, thus once again situating trauma in a borderzone.¹⁶ Although Belau cautions against absolutist notions of an idealised trauma beyond signification, the strong breach between the trauma and its signifier is in part constitutive of its perceived discordant character. The trauma is understood as something exceptional, or other, because it is incongruous with an individual’s preceding subjective history and network of symbol and meaning. As Robert Jay Lifton elucidates:

¹³ Dori Laub, ‘Truth and Testimony: The Process and the Struggle’, in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, pp. 61-75 (p. 63).

¹⁴ Jacques Lacan, ‘The agency of the letter in the unconscious or reason since Freud’, in *Écrits: A Selection*, ed. by Jacques Lacan, trans. by Alan Sheridan (London: Tavistock, 1977), pp. 146-178 (p. 175).

¹⁵ Linda Belau, ‘Trauma and the Material Signifier’, *Postmodern Culture*, 11:2 (2001) <<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/27729>> [Accessed 11 June 2018] n.p.

¹⁶ Ibid.

What in one's life would enable one to connect with [the bombing of] Hiroshima? Here the assumption is that, and this is the radical insight of symbolizing theory, we never receive anything nakedly, we must recreate it in our own minds, and that's what the cortex is for. In creating, in recreating experience, we need some prior imagery in order to do that work, in order to carry through that process.¹⁷

This goes some way to explain both the inexpressibility and incomprehensibility of trauma, in that the subject's own understanding of the events in their life—which is bound up in their bank of language—cannot analogise, fathom, or approximate the radically dissonant experience of trauma. In this sense, understanding and linguistic expression are connected, a contention which lies at the epicentre of trauma studies and debate.

In recent years, research surrounding trauma has built upon these psychoanalytic foundations, synthesising the findings therein with contemporary research in neuroscience, psychology, and psychiatry. A clear step in this direction is the formation of the discipline known as neuropsychanalysis, which seeks to integrate psychoanalytic theory with neurological data. As Mark Solms and Oliver Turnbull explain, both disciplines have much to offer each other: whilst psychoanalysis may be highly interpretative and at risk of confirmation biases, its personal and interpersonal character provides a much-needed complement to the highly accurate, but potentially reductive, study of the physical present in neuroscience.¹⁸ This comprises of a variety of methods. Solms and Turnbull state that neuropsychanalysis encompasses

*all work that lies along the psychoanalysis/neuroscience boundary; it may at times involve psychoanalytically inspired neuroscience (which uses purely neuroscientific methods to test psychoanalytically informed hypotheses) and at other times the direct psychoanalytical investigation of neurological variables (brain injury, pharmacological probes, deep-brain stimulation, etc.).*¹⁹

¹⁷ Cathy Caruth, 'An Interview with Robert Jay Lifton', in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, pp. 128-147 (p. 135).

¹⁸ Mark Solms and Oliver H. Turnbull, 'What Is Neuropsychanalysis?', in *A Neuro-Psychoanalytical Dialogue for Bridging Freud and the Neurosciences*, ed. by Sigrid Weigel and Gerhard Scharbert (Cham: Springer, 2016), pp. 13-28.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 25.

Indeed, as an example of the former, brain imaging studies cited by Bessel A. van der Kolk support the psychoanalytic idea that traumatic memories are inherently nonverbal, in which areas of the brain associated with linguistic interpretation (Broca's area) are seen to be relatively inactive whilst areas such as the amygdala (responsible for emotional responses) and the right visual cortex were seen to be much more active under trauma. This is consistent with the suggestion of speechless terror during a flashback.²⁰ Similarly, the 'surprising *literality*' that Caruth observes of traumatic memory is, to an extent, corroborated by the Grant Study (which found that of two hundred Harvard undergraduates who participated in the Second World War, the memories of those that had developed posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) had been little altered in forty-five years).²¹ It should be noted, nevertheless, that the literality of traumatic memory remains disputed, and a significant proportion of studies and personal testimonies suggest an opposite conclusion.²²

More concrete, however, are studies regarding the biological components of traumatic memory formation and retrieval more generally; as Laub and Judith Lewis Herman note, traumatic memory appears to be encoded differently from normal memory.²³ Hans-Peter Kapfhammer, for example, confirms that

Short and minor traumatic episodes trigger an upsurge of cortisol that strengthens initial memory consolidation in accordance with norepinephrine. However, prolonged high levels of cortisol seem to counteract this synergism. On the other hand, cortisol impairs both memory retrieval and working memory. If only insufficient levels of cortisol are available in states of acute or chronic stress that characterizes a major subgroup of traumatized persons, then

²⁰ Bessel A. van der Kolk, 'Trauma and Memory', in *Traumatic Stress: The Effects of Overwhelming Experience on Mind, Body, and Society*, ed. by Bessel A. van der Kolk, Alexander C. McFarlane, and Lars Weisaeth (New York: Guilford Press, 2007), pp. 279-302 (p. 294).

A similar situation is reported by other neuroscientific research, including Kristen L. Zaleski, Daniel K. Johnson and Jessica T. Klein, 'Grounding Judith Herman's Trauma Theory within Interpersonal Neuroscience and Evidence-Based Practice Modalities for Trauma Treatment', *Smith College Studies in Social Work*, 86:4 (2016), 377-393 (p. 386).

²¹ Cathy Caruth, 'Trauma and Experience: Introduction', in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, pp. 3-12 (p. 5); Bessel A. van der Kolk and Alexander C. McFarlane, 'The Black Hole of Trauma', in *Traumatic Stress*, pp. 3-23 (pp. 8-9).

²² See, for example, Hans Stoffels, 'False Memories', in *Hurting Memories and Beneficial Forgetting*, pp. 105-114. In addition, van der Kolk notes that over time, traumatic memories can become more easily narrativized and therefore more akin to normal memories, and thus become subject to distortion.

van der Kolk, 'Trauma and Memory', pp. 288-289, 296.

²³ Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (London: Pandora, 1994), p. 34; Dori Laub, 'Traumatic Shutdown of Narrative Symbolization', *Contemporary Psychoanalysis*, 41:2 (2005), 307-326 (p. 312).

a predominantly noradrenergic mode of remembrance prevails, which is paradigmatically indicated by intrusive sensation-based memories, such as flashbacks.²⁴

It is for these reasons—both the intrusive, unassimilated nature of traumatic memory and its unique form of manifestation—that psychiatrists such as Michael Linden consider traumatic stress disorders such as PTSD memory disorders; or, in the words of Laura Ramo-Fernández, Anna Schneider, Sarah Wilker and Iris-Tatjana Kolassa, ‘a disorder of pathological memory formation’.²⁵ Indeed, memory and traumatic stress are inextricably linked, with the former essentially forming the latter. In fact, trauma can be distinguished from other mental illnesses because of the necessity for a clear environmental trigger: the experience of the traumatic encounter is fundamental to the development of the condition, and is the first criterion for the diagnosis of PTSD.²⁶ The memory of the trauma, then, can be said to both cause and shape the later symptomatology.

This symptomatology, as accepted through a dialogue between the various aforementioned disciplines, can be summarised through Herman’s categorisation of the three ‘cardinal symptoms’ of trauma: hyperarousal, intrusion, and constriction.²⁷ The first, hyperarousal, refers to a state of anxiety and high alert following the traumatic encounter. Biologically, this is related to low levels of the stress hormone cortisol in persons with PTSD, which, as Rachel Yehuda has noted, allows the catecholamine system to function unregulated, resulting in consistently high levels of other stress hormones such as adrenaline.²⁸ Outwardly,

²⁴ Hans-Peter Kapfhammer, ‘Pharmacological Approaches to Understand, Prevent, and Mitigate Hurting Memories. Lessons from Posttraumatic Stress Disorders’, in *Hurting Memories and Beneficial Forgetting: Posttraumatic Stress Disorders, Biographical Developments, and Social Conflicts*, ed. by Michael Linden and Krzysztof Rutkowski (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2013), pp. 37-48 (p. 40).

²⁵ Michael Linden, ‘Spectrum of Persisting Memories and Pseudomemories, Distortions, and Psychopathology’, in *Hurting Memories and Beneficial Forgetting*, pp. 3-20 (p. 4); Laura Ramo-Fernández, Anna Schneider, Sarah Wilker and Iris-Tatjana Kolassa, ‘Epigenetic Alterations Associated with War Trauma and Childhood Maltreatment’, *Behavioral Sciences and the Law*, 33 (2015), 701-721 (p. 707). See also Ian Hacking, *Rewriting the Soul: Multiple Personality and the Sciences of Memory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995) for a fascinating philosophical analysis of multiple personality (now understood in medical terms as dissociative identity disorder, and itself a result of trauma) in terms of the sciences of memory.

²⁶ American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 5th edn., p. 271.

²⁷ Herman, p. 42.

²⁸ Shaili Jain, ‘Cortisol and PTSD, Part 1: An interview with Dr. Rachel Yehuda’, *Psychology Today*, 15 June 2016

<<https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb/blog/the-aftermath-trauma/201606/cortisol-and-ptsd-part-1>>

[Accessed 14 January 2019], n.p.; Rachel Yehuda and Linda M. Bierer, ‘The Relevance of Epigenetics to PTSD: Implications for the DSM-V’, *Journal of Traumatic Studies*, 22:5 (2009), 427-434 (p. 429).

this manifests as the inability to discriminate between harmful and harmless sounds and other stimuli, decreased ability to habituate to them, and often aggression.²⁹ A clear link can also be made to Freud's theories regarding the retroactive mastery of the traumatic event, and certainly this hypervigilant response appears to be a maladaptive mechanism for preventing *future* trauma. In this sense, the concept of mastery is integral to hyperarousal. In part, this can be attributed to its absence during the traumatic event: many clinicians and researchers such as Henry Greenspan have reported on the significance of feelings of helplessness to trauma.³⁰ By remaining hypervigilant after the trauma, theoretically such feelings of helplessness might be avoided. Furthermore, as van der Kolk and Alexander C. McFarlane claim, individuals who identify with a better sense of mastery over the traumatic event tend to have a better prognosis.³¹ This is not unproblematic, however, and especially within the context of survivor guilt. This functions simultaneously as a coping mechanism and as a source of symptom aggravation. Herman, for example, notes that PTSD tends to be more severe in people who failed to save the life of a loved one during the traumatic encounter, even if such an action was impossible.³² Samuel Juni further defines survivor guilt as 'guilt without culpability', treating the phenomenon as a defensive strategy based on a false sense of mastery. He writes that '[t]he belief that one somehow could have prevented the suffering (and that it was preventable) is preferable to the frightening notion that the horrors were completely random and senseless', additionally suggesting that the guilt implies for the individual that a similar future event is avoidable with appropriate action.³³ Hence, hyperarousal and its associated issues of mastery can be considered in terms of the memories of the trauma shaping future behaviours and traumatic potential with an aim of prevention.

Traumatic memory becomes a more explicit concern in the second symptom group, intrusion. Here, memories of the trauma involuntarily infiltrate the consciousness, most notably in the forms of flashbacks and nightmares, but also in unconscious processes such as acting out. As discussed previously, this entails a transplantation of the individual's consciousness into a past event, disrupting their sense of temporality. Like with the memories themselves, their daily life is not organised into a clear linear trajectory, but is rather disorganised by the imposition of the unassimilated trauma. Moreover, intrusion symptoms

²⁹ Herman, pp. 36, 56; van der Kolk and McFarlane, 'The Black Hole of Trauma', p. 9.

³⁰ Henry Greenspan et al, 'Engaging Survivors: Assessing "Testimony" and "Trauma" as Foundational Concepts', *Dapim: Studies on the Holocaust*, 28:3 (2014), 190-226 (p. 215).

³¹ van der Kolk and McFarlane, 'The Black Hole of Trauma', p. 15.

³² Herman, p. 54.

³³ Samuel Juni, 'Survivor guilt: A critical review from the lens of the Holocaust', *International Review of Victimology*, 22:3 (2016), 321-337 (pp. 324, 326).

are further exacerbated by hyperarousal, according to a mechanism which van der Kolk, Onno van der Hart, and Charles R. Marmar term 'state-dependent memory retrieval'.³⁴ Van der Kolk elucidates that '[i]nformation acquired in an aroused or otherwise altered state of mind is retrieved more readily when people are brought back to that particular state of mind.'³⁵ To contextualise this, traumatic memories formed under conditions of severe psychological stress are recalled easily under the conditions of strong anxiety generated by the individual's subsequent hyperaroused state. The distress caused by the intrusive memories, then, serves to increase the hyperarousal, thus creating a vicious cycle. In this sense, trauma is to an extent self-proliferating. The retrieval of traumatic memories, and the temporal disruption this entails, are also significant because of the abnormal form of traumatic memories. As previously noted, such memories tend to be nonverbal and somatosensory in nature, and thus do not amalgamate effectively with normal memory. This is constitutive of the distinction between declarative and nondeclarative memories. As van der Kolk writes, the former

is an active and constructive process. What a person remembers depends on existing mental schemata; once an event or a particular bit of information is integrated into existing mental schemes, it will no longer be available as a separate, immutable entity, but will be distorted both by associated experiences and by the person's emotional state at the time of recall.³⁶

Nondeclarative memory, by contrast, is an implicit process characterised by learned behaviours and habits. It is not subject to narrativization, and therefore does not undergo the same process of integration, rather remaining a more discrete entity. This in part explains its timeless quality. As traumatic memories can be considered nondeclarative memory (often manifesting implicitly through hyperarousal and its associated behaviours, or, as Herman notes, through what is missing; its 'negative symptoms') it is interesting that their recurrence itself becomes part of a narrative process, whilst the content remains separate.³⁷ It is also of import that over time, as the memories are slowly narrativized and converted into declarative memory, intrusion symptoms appear to abate.³⁸

³⁴ Bessel van der Kolk, Onno van der Hart, and Charles R. Marmar, 'Dissociation and Information Processing in Posttraumatic Stress Disorder', in *Traumatic Stress*, pp. 303-327 (p. 305); van der Kolk, 'Trauma and Memory', p. 292.

³⁵ van der Kolk, 'Trauma and Memory', p. 292.

³⁶ Ibid, p. 282.

³⁷ Herman, p. 49.

³⁸ van der Kolk, 'Trauma and Memory', pp. 288-289; Herman, pp. 47-48.

Intrusion also, somewhat paradoxically, coincides with the final symptom group of constriction. Unlike intrusion, constriction entails a narrowing of an individual's lifeworld around the trauma, and is characterised by the avoidance of reminders of the trauma; a process that may actually increase the frequency of intrusion symptoms through what Michael Schöenberg calls a 'rebound effect' following the suppression of trauma-related thoughts.³⁹ Constriction occurs both externally and internally, and most strikingly through dissociation, which describes a form of maladaptive emotion-based coping. According to van der Kolk, van der Hart, and Marmar, dissociation is characteristic of PTSD both as a precursor and as a symptom.⁴⁰ They further observe that dissociation operates over three levels: primary, secondary, and tertiary. Primary dissociation refers to the unassimilable quality of traumatic memory; the fragmentary and incomplete personal narrative that is distinct of posttraumatic identity. Secondary, or peritraumatic, dissociation describes a protective mechanism at the point of trauma that prevents the subject from fully experiencing it. This can include an out-of-body experience, depersonalisation, or an altered sense of time during the encounter. Lastly, tertiary dissociation entails a near or total disconnect between the individual and the experience. It is of no surprise, therefore, that tertiary dissociation is related to the development of dissociative identity disorder (DID) and traumatic amnesia. In especially severe cases, an individual may not even be cognisant of the traumatic event.⁴¹ Undoubtedly, this has a significant impact on the subject's self-identity and sense of life history, and can have a markedly detrimental impact on their quality of life.⁴² Yet, as Herman notes, dissociation can be a conscious process, either through learned behaviour, or, more problematically, induced through substance abuse.⁴³

Perhaps the most disadvantageous aspect of constriction, however, is that it often engenders depression, isolation and withdrawal from meaningful social relationships. In fact, clinicians and researchers such as Herman, Ronnie Janoff-Bulman, Susan W. Coates, Christine E. Agaibi and John P. Wilson have remarked upon the indispensability of such

³⁹ Michael Schöenberg, 'Pathological Modes of Remembering: The PTSD Experience', in *Hurting Memories and Beneficial Forgetting*, pp. 71-82 (p. 78).

⁴⁰ van der Kolk, van der Hart, and Marmar, p. 314.

⁴¹ Ibid, pp. 307-308; 313.

⁴² Interestingly, although these symptoms are broadly considered a negative experience, Ronnie Janoff-Bulman suggests that the processes of intrusion and constriction comprise automatic adaptive responses to the traumatic event, in that intrusive symptoms allow the individual more time to cognitively process the trauma—to find meaning in it—and constrictive responses of denial or numbing allow them to break the trauma down into more manageable doses so as to process it emotionally without becoming overwhelmed.

Ronnie Janoff-Bulman, *Shattered Assumptions: Toward a New Psychology of Trauma* (New York: Free Press, 1992), pp. 95-114.

⁴³ Herman, pp. 44, 46.

relationships to resilience and recovery, and therefore their absence is extremely problematic.⁴⁴ This is one reason, Herman argues, for example, that the symptoms of returning combat veterans remain severe following their departure from the theatre of war: they struggle to maintain close relationships with members of their pre-war community (including family members and romantic partners), perceiving that they cannot comprehend the totality of the horror of the war experience. In this sense, these veterans often feel alienated from civilian communities.⁴⁵ The process of estrangement is, unfortunately, also often an active one. Herman writes that ‘when the traumatic events are of human design, those who bear witness are caught in the conflict between victim and perpetrator. It is morally impossible to remain neutral in this conflict. The bystander is forced to take sides’, going on to explain that ‘[i]t is very tempting to take the side of the perpetrator. All the perpetrator asks is that the bystander do nothing. [...] The victim, on the contrary, asks the bystander to share the burden of pain. The victim demands action, engagement, and remembering.’⁴⁶ To distance oneself from the traumatised, therefore, places the fewest demands on the bystander psychologically, behaviourally, and existentially; to assume that the individual somehow brought their fate upon themselves consolidates a worldview in which the self has agency, disavowing the terrifying randomness with which disaster strikes. In its most pathological form, this manifests as victim-blaming; a maladaptive means of protecting oneself from the above burdens symbolised by the traumatised.

The impact of social withdrawal on PTSD, furthermore, also has important ramifications on our conception of trauma, transforming it from a psychobiological reaction into a complex network of physical and psychological, personal and interpersonal pathways

⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 3; Janoff-Bulman, p. 143; Susan W. Coates, ‘Introduction: Trauma and Human Bonds’, in *September 11: Trauma and Human Bonds*, ed. by Susan W. Coates, Jane L. Rosenthal, and Daniel S. Schechter (Hillsdale, NJ: Analytic Press, 2003), pp. 1-14; Christine E. Agaibi and John P. Wilson, ‘Trauma, PTSD, and Resilience: A Review of the Literature’, *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 6:3 (2005), 195-216 (p. 203).

Notably, interpersonal bonds are also important at the point of trauma, and thus have implications in the process of traumatising. Laub, for example, observes that a perpetrator, ‘by his very act of committing the atrocity, has irreversibly crossed a threshold; he has abolished the libidinal empathic tie to the other, who thereby ceased to exist in the aggressor’s own internal world representation. It is that objectless, hermetically closed, and closed-off “deathly deserted universe” that the victim internalizes, and *not* the aggressor’s murderousness and destructiveness of the “other.”’ The effect of broken empathic connections thus plays a role in the trauma of the subject in question. Consequently, as Kai Erikson records, there is a marked difference in the post-tragedy responses of communities affected by technological (man-made) disasters and those that can be considered ‘acts of God’: the latter is treated with resignation, the latter with outrage. In this way, the loss of social or interpersonal bonds and empathic identification can be considered, itself, an aspect of traumatising.

Laub, ‘Traumatic shutdown of narrative and symbolization’, p. 319; Kai Erikson, ‘Notes on Trauma and Community’, in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, pp. 183-199 (pp. 190-194).

⁴⁵ Herman, pp. 63-71.

⁴⁶ Ibid, pp. 7-8.

and meanings. In the words of van der Kolk and McFarlane, ‘although the reality of extraordinary events is at the core of PTSD, the meaning that victims attach to these events is as fundamental as the trauma itself.’⁴⁷ Similarly, Janoff-Bulman’s work on trauma centres around the theory of ‘shattered assumptions’; that trauma entails a forceful disillusionment from the fundamental assumptions held by most people that the world is benevolent, the world is meaningful, and the self is worthy, due to the apparent randomness and indiscriminating malevolence of its occurrence.⁴⁸ In fact, as researchers such as Paul Valent, Agaibi and Wilson note, being able to create a sense of meaning from the trauma is integral to resilience and recovery.⁴⁹ Hence, trauma can be considered a crisis of meaning as much as it can a biomedical issue. Its apparent senselessness, and disparity with prior networks of symbolisation, effectuate a kind of mission to locate the missing sense of purpose in the trauma amidst the new semantic reality it invokes. It is ultimately through this process that reintegration may occur. It is also primarily via this method, however, that trauma may be transmitted.

Bleeding History: The Transmission of Trauma

One of the most striking aspects of trauma is that it does not appear to be constrained to the affected individual. In addition to the fact that, according to the diagnostic guidelines in the DSM-V, PTSD can arise as the result of learning of the threatened or actual death of a close family member or friend, the effects of trauma have a marked impact on the person’s social environs.⁵⁰ Charles R. Figley writes that ‘chiasmal or secondary trauma strikes when the traumatic stress appears to “infect” the entire system after first appearing in only one member’, thus analogising the trauma with a contagious disease.⁵¹ Referring to these transmitted effects as secondary traumatic stress disorder (STSD) or secondary traumatic stress (STS), Figley observes that the symptomatology is actually nearly identical to PTSD itself, with the only significant difference being the directness of the exposure to harm.⁵² This

⁴⁷ van der Kolk and McFarlane, ‘The Black Hole of Trauma’, p. 6.

⁴⁸ Janoff-Bulman, pp. 3-90.

⁴⁹ Paul Valent, ‘Survival Strategies: A Framework for Understanding Secondary Traumatic Stress and Coping in Helpers’, in *Compassion Fatigue: Coping With Secondary Traumatic Stress Disorder In Those Who Treat The Traumatized*, ed. by Charles R. Figley (Levittown, PA: Brunner/Mazel, 1995), pp. 21-50 (pp. 30-31); Agaibi and Wilson, pp. 203, 208.

⁵⁰ American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 5th edn., p. 271.

⁵¹ Charles R. Figley, ‘Compassion Fatigue as Secondary Traumatic Stress Disorder: An Overview’, in *Compassion Fatigue*, pp. 1-20 (p. 5).

⁵² *Ibid*, p. 8.

has numerous implications not only for the reach of trauma, but also the definition of trauma itself, including associated designations such as ‘survivor.’ Berel Lang, for example, highlights the problems with the classification of Holocaust survivorship, asking whether those who never entered the camps (hidden children, partisans, refugees) could be considered survivors. Instead, she suggests, the concept of testimony might be a more appropriate locus for study, because its inclusive rather than discriminative nature allows for a broader reach of ethical and empathic consideration.⁵³ Similarly, Howard F. Stein recounts the experience of a distressed healthcare practitioner working in the aftermath of the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing:

The nurse said that two and a half years earlier, no one had ‘debriefed’ her and asked what *she* had gone through. After volunteering some time at the site of the bombing, she returned to her work at the clinic, which everyone treated as ‘business as usual’. Because she had not been in or around the buildings *immediately* after the bombing, she did not occupy the mental and linguistic categories of ‘victim’ or ‘survivor’ or ‘hero’. Only certain kinds or categories of people were regarded as having been as ‘traumatized’.⁵⁴

Just like the construction workers who were contracted to work at a site near the bombing—an area where many of their coworkers had been killed—the nurse’s trauma has been disregarded as illegitimate, or even nonexistent.⁵⁵ Where, then, lies the threshold for the consideration of traumatic experience? If one can be indirectly traumatised by an event or as a result of the experiences of a loved one, does this constitute survivorship, or a different category entirely? How close to the trauma must an individual be in order to be considered traumatised? Such questions surround the controversial issue of trauma transmission, which will be defined and outlined throughout this section.

Although secondary trauma has been underrepresented in scholarship, therapy, and the public sphere, there is still a body of work that suggests that indirect trauma effects numerous social, psychological, and physiological changes on the individual. Studies on the wives of war veterans such as that conducted by Miro Klarić et al, Tanja Frančičković et al, and Rachel

⁵³ Greenspan et al, p. 223.

⁵⁴ Howard F. Stein, ‘A mosaic of transmissions after trauma’, in *Lost in Transmission: Studies of Trauma Across Generations*, ed. by M. Gerard Fromm (London: Routledge, 2012), pp. 173-201 (p. 179).

⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 180.

Dekel and Zahava Solomon, for example, have found that the levels of distress, poor mental health, and psychiatric morbidity are higher in the wives of veterans with PTSD than those without.⁵⁶ Klarić et al, furthermore, found that 40.3% of the 154 wives of Bosnian war veterans with PTSD studied qualified for a PTSD diagnosis themselves, compared to only 6.5% of the wives of veterans without PTSD. Wives of veterans with PTSD who showed no symptoms of PTSD at all themselves only accounted for 1.3%.⁵⁷ Dekel and Solomon, similarly, find that

the wives of [Israeli] POWs [prisoners of war] with PTSD have significantly higher levels of general distress than both the controls [wives of combat veterans without PTSD] and the wives of POWs without PTSD. They also had more obsessive compulsive symptoms, interpersonal sensitivity, depression, hostility, and paranoia than the women in the other two groups. Moreover, they had significantly more symptoms of anxiety, phobia, somatization, and psychoticism than the wives of the controls, although not of the wives of the non-PTSD POWs.⁵⁸

These symptoms are clearly congruous with the symptomatology associated with traumatic stress, suggesting a notable degree of slippage. Furthermore, it is important to note that the nature of these symptoms varies depending on the experience of the veteran and his mental health, suggesting that the wife's symptoms are either a response to his symptoms (for example, anxiety as a response to aggression) or, crucially, that they *mirror* his.⁵⁹ Indeed, as Klarić et al claim, 'secondary traumatization is defined as transfer of nightmares, intrusive thoughts, flashbacks and other PTSD symptoms typically experienced by PTSD-diagnosed

⁵⁶ Miro Klarić et al, 'Psychiatric and Health Impact of Primary and Secondary Traumatization in Wives of Veterans with Posttraumatic Stress Disorder', *Psychiatria Danubina*, 24:3 (2012), 280-286; Tanja Frančišković et al, 'Secondary Traumatization of Wives of War Veterans with Posttraumatic Stress Disorder', *Croatian Medical Journal*, 48 (2007), 177-184; Rachel Dekel and Zahava Solomon, 'Secondary traumatization among wives of Israeli POWs: the role of POWs' distress', *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology*, 41 (2006), 27-33.

⁵⁷ Klarić et al, p. 284.

⁵⁸ Dekel and Solomon, p. 30.

⁵⁹ It is also interesting to note that the wives of POW veterans tended to display more and greater symptoms than wives of combat veterans. There are multiple possible explanations for this, but two in particular emerge prominently. Firstly, it is entirely possible that their ordeal as prisoners of war involved different, and potentially more psychologically damaging, experiences, thus exacerbating their symptoms of traumatic stress and therefore the impact on the wives. Secondly, and importantly for my discussion of trauma transmission in terms of meaning-making, it is likely that the POW veterans felt a higher degree of helplessness during their captivity, which could impact the potentially therapeutic pool of meanings available to attach to their experience. One such lost meaning might be a narrative of heroism.

traumatized individuals to the persons in close contact.’⁶⁰ The transfer described here is curiously literal, to the point that the individual appears to be traumatised by an event that *they never actually experienced*. Rachel Lev-Wiesel, for example, reports that the children and grandchildren of Holocaust survivors often report having nightmares of being pursued by Nazis, a scenario which has of course no direct relevance to their own life histories.⁶¹ Juni, likewise, has noted the incidence of the posttraumatic symptom of survivor guilt in the children of Holocaust survivors.⁶² Research suggests that they also tend to suffer disproportionately from psychiatric disorders.⁶³ The combination of psychiatric symptoms and traumatic specificity, hence, suggest that there is a distinct traumatic element to the experiences of those indirectly exposed to the trauma, rather than simply being a case of sympathetic distress.

This situation is especially complex in the context of the transgenerational transmission of trauma. A burgeoning field primarily associated with Holocaust studies, researchers in the discipline contend that the effects of severe trauma (such as that of the Holocaust) are sustained over two or more generations. The mechanisms for this transmission are several, interlinking epigenetic, socio-environmental, and semantic factors. With regards to the first, current research has yielded new insights into the biological transfer of traumatic affect. For example, observational and animal studies such as those employed by Amy Lehrner and Yehuda, and Dora L. Costa, Noelle Yetter and Heather DeSomer, suggest that traumatically induced epigenetic markers can be transferred via meiosis into sperm.⁶⁴ Similarly, Sarah O. Gray et al find that infants born to mothers with adverse childhood experiences have altered parasympathetic stress responses; exhibiting a clear impact of stressful encounters prior to conception that is transmitted biologically to offspring.⁶⁵ However, whilst these results seem to lend some credence to the concept of transgenerational trauma, it is crucial to note that in this context it is a slight misnomer: it is not *trauma* or the associated experience that is

⁶⁰ Klarić et al, p. 280.

⁶¹ Rachel Lev-Wiesel, ‘Intergenerational Transmission of Trauma across Three Generations: A Preliminary Study’, *Qualitative Social Work*, 6:1 (2007), 75-94 (p. 90).

⁶² Juni, p. 329.

⁶³ See for example Yehuda and Bierer, p. 430 (Figure 1) for a comparison of the relationship between parental PTSD and offspring PTSD, depression, and anxiety in the offspring of Holocaust survivors and comparison subjects.

⁶⁴ Amy Lehrner and Rachel Yehuda, ‘Cultural trauma and epigenetic inheritance’, *Development and Psychopathology*, 30 (2018), 1763-1777 (pp. 1770-1771); Dora L. Costa, Noelle Yetter and Heather DeSomer, ‘Intergenerational transmission of paternal trauma among US Civil War ex-POWs’, *PNAS*, 115:44 (2018), 11215-11220 (p. 11215).

⁶⁵ Sarah A. O. Gray et al, ‘Thinking Across Generations: Unique Contributions of Maternal Early Life and Prenatal Stress to Infant Physiology’, *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, 56:11 (2017), 922-929 (pp. 926-927).

transmitted, but rather an effect of it; a transmitted modification that arises in response to the individual's environment. In the words of Yehuda and Linda M. Bierer, '[a]n epigenetic modification refers to a change in the DNA produced by an environmental perturbation that alters the function, but not the structure, of a gene' that 'can, in some cases, be transmitted intergenerationally', even to the third generation.⁶⁶ One such alteration is the transmission of the low cortisol levels observed in persons with PTSD, as related to glucocorticoid receptor function, conferring its associated disadvantages.⁶⁷ Whilst these epigenetic adaptations can prove beneficial for the traumatised individual in certain circumstances (for example, the mobilisation of fight-or-flight survival responses or adaptive resource usage under conditions of adversity), it creates a more complicated situation for their offspring should it be transmitted. Yehuda explains that

if a mother was in Auschwitz and was starving and transmitted the biology to the offspring—it's a biology that allows your liver to hang on to free cortisol and not have it converted to inactive cortisol, so that you can effectively get by with less fuel—that would be a fantastic thing for an offspring to have under periods of starvation. But if the offspring lives in a country where [food is plentiful], there is a mismatch between that biology and what has been given.⁶⁸

In a sense, the descendants of traumatised individuals find themselves with certain posttraumatic adaptations but lack the associated environment. Moreover, the transmitted epigenetic modifications also transfer a more insidious concern: a predisposition towards PTSD and other psychiatric conditions. Yehuda cites that the children of a parent with PTSD are three times more likely to develop PTSD after a traumatic encounter than those without

⁶⁶ Yehuda and Bierer, pp. 427-428, 429.

Usually, this involves a methylation (the addition of a methyl group) or demethylation of the cytosine base in DNA, which affects the ability to code for certain enzymes, such as the enzyme responsible for converting active cortisol into inactive cortisol. A fuller list of recorded epigenetic modifications in response to trauma is provided by Sarah Wilker and Iris-Tatjana Kolassa, 'Genetic Influences on Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD): Inspirations from a Memory-Centered Approach', *Psychiatria Danubina*, 24:3 (2012), 278-279.

⁶⁷ Rachel Yehuda, Amanda Bell, Linda M. Bierer and James Schmeidler, 'Maternal, not paternal, PTSD is related to increased risk for PTSD in offspring of Holocaust survivors', *Journal of Psychiatric Research*, 42 (2008), 1104-1111 (p. 1105); Rachel Yehuda, Sarah L. Halligan and Linda M. Bierer, 'Cortisol levels in adult offspring of Holocaust survivors: relation to PTSD symptom severity in the parent and child', *Psychoneuroendocrinology*, 27 (2002), 171-180.

⁶⁸ David Samuels, 'Do Jews Carry Trauma in Our Genes? A Conversation With Rachel Yehuda.', *Tablet*, 11 December 2014
<<https://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-arts-and-culture/books/187555/trauma-genes-q-a-rachel-yehuda>>
[Accessed 5 December 2018], n.p.

this family history, and, as Nicole R. Nugent, Ananda B. Amstadter and Karestan C. Koenen note, most genes that affect PTSD predisposition are risk factors for other mental illnesses.⁶⁹ This, of course, engenders a very problematic situation, in which the transmitted genetic predisposition towards psychiatric illness can be compounded by the socio-environmental context within which the child lives. Thus, although it would be incorrect to state that trauma is transmitted genetically—in this sense, the word ‘trauma’ to an extent must lose its psychiatric specificity, but is, as I will argue, nonetheless appropriate to describe the experiences of descendants—genetics certainly act as one element in a complex network of transgenerational traumatisations, serving to exacerbate other distressing factors that constitute transmissible trauma.⁷⁰

The second, and main, form of transgenerational trauma involves the offspring’s environment, which is often heavily shaped by the parent’s trauma. The resultant distressing environment is twofold: the parent’s unconscious posttraumatic symptoms may be alarming, or their attitudes towards their children, as consciously influenced by the trauma, may be inappropriate. Miri Scharf and Ofra Mayseless summarise the factors commonly affecting the children of Holocaust survivors (often known as the second generation) as follows:

emotional distance; emotional abuse and neglect; role reversal between parents and children; mutual parent–child overprotectiveness; family conflict; fear of separation, obsession with food, a preoccupation with death and approaching disaster; a strong need to please and protect parents; sadness; and an absence of legitimacy to feel happy.⁷¹

Whilst the first (emotional unavailability) is likely attributable to constriction symptoms, the remaining idiosyncrasies appear to result from the specificity of Holocaust trauma. Fear of

⁶⁹ Ibid, n.p.; Nicole R. Nugent, Ananda B. Amstadter and Karestan C. Koenen, ‘Genetics of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder: Informing Clinical Conceptualizations and Promoting Future Research’, *American Journal of Medical Genetics Part C (Seminars in Medical Genetics)*, 148:C (2008), 127-132 (p. 128).

⁷⁰ It is also of consequence to note the impact of developmental stage on the transmission of such epigenetic modifications. As Gray et al highlight, it is during stages of rapid development that the environment has the greatest impact on physiology. Indeed, Yehuda’s World Trade Center studies found that the low cortisol effect of PTSD was transmitted to the children of women who were in their second or third trimesters when the attack occurred, but not if they were in their first trimester. Gray et al, pp. 926-927; Samuels, n.p.; Rachel Yehuda, *How Trauma and Resilience Cross Generations*, online audio recording transcript, On Being, 9 November 2017 <<https://onbeing.org/programs/rachel-yehuda-how-trauma-and-resilience-cross-generations-nov2017/>> [Accessed 5 December 2018], n.p.

⁷¹ Miri Scharf and Ofra Mayseless, ‘Disorganizing Experiences in Second- and Third-Generation Holocaust Survivors’, *Qualitative Health Research*, 21:11 (2011), 1539-1553 (p. 1540).

separation and obsession with food, for example, correlate strongly to sustained fears of the capture/execution of family members and the shortage of food that marked the concentration camps, ghettos, and the journeys of refugees. Peter Lowenberg, additionally, observes that members of the second and third generations exhibit learned behaviours such as generalised distrust, an internalised need to stay close to the family in order to remain safe, and paranoia surrounding (especially Nazi) persecution.⁷² These beliefs and behaviours undoubtedly increase negative affects such as anxiety in the individual's daily life, in addition to once more constituting a posttraumatic response that lacks its context. They also, as Lowenberg argues, generate a sense of ambivalence towards the parent or grandparent. 'The feelings toward parental Holocaust survivors,' he writes, 'is a mixture of pity and the fantasy of repairing damage vs. contempt and the wish to dissociate and separate.'⁷³ This pressure, in addition to restrictive parenting styles, increases the risk for developing poor mental health or psychiatric disorders, as well as perpetuating the effects of the original trauma over multiple generations.

The parent-child relationship can also provide more directly traumatising elements to the second generation experience. The aforementioned emotional neglect imparted by some traumatised parents has strong traumatic potential, both when it manifests as unavailability and, as Yehuda et al note, as an explicit dismissal of the child's thoughts and feelings in contrast to the parent's own experiences of trauma, which they consider more grave and attention-worthy.⁷⁴ Such family relationships are considered in depth by Hannah Starman, who reads them in terms of the narcissistic family system. She observes in particular that it is the very mechanisms by which the parent was able to survive the Holocaust—including the creation of a sense of mastery, a sense of purpose in survival, and/or psychological numbing—are those mechanisms by which the trauma is perpetuated onto their children, such as through constrictive parenting; high, all-encompassing expectations for the child; and emotional unavailability.⁷⁵ Physical abuse has also been documented. Ramo-Fernández, Schneider, Wilker, and Kolassa write that 'parental early adversity is believed to be a risk factor for maltreatment of their own offspring', citing a notable increase in abusive behaviours exhibited by those that had experienced maltreatment themselves, and clinicians and researchers such as Barri Belnap, E. Virginia Demos, and Françoise Davoine all supply

⁷² Peter Lowenberg, 'Clinical and historical perspectives on the intergenerational transmission of trauma', in *Lost in Transmission*, pp. 55-68 (pp. 57-58).

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

⁷⁴ Rachel Yehuda et al, 'Vulnerability to Posttraumatic Stress Disorder in Adult Offspring of Holocaust Survivors', *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 155:9 (1998), 1163-1171 (p. 1168).

⁷⁵ Hannah Starman, 'Generations of Trauma: Victimhood and the Perpetuation of Abuse in Holocaust Survivors', *History and Anthropology*, 17:4 (2006), 327-338.

clinical vignettes that strongly contend with abuse.⁷⁶ Belnap further suggests that this form of acting out is all the more confusing for the absence of the referent. She describes a mother who would press a heated spoon against her son's back, then laugh and disagree when he told her it hurt. It appeared to be a repetition of her own abuse that occurred in the kitchen. 'The location of his mother's traumatic experience became the location for his own life lesson', Belnap writes. 'The mother's survival lesson instructed her son not to feel, but instead to laugh at and deaden a horrifically painful life she saw as his inevitable future.'⁷⁷ The patient's ignorance of the intention behind his mother's actions served only to augment his confusion and emotional pain, and thus they became all the more traumatising: the mother's actions could not be integrated into a sensible and meaningful narrative. The same, of course, is true also for non-abusive, but equally inscrutable, behaviours, such as those outlined above.

However, as Janet Jacobs highlights, the communication of the traumatic referent is often also psychologically damaging. She writes that some Holocaust survivors would 'speak continually and graphically about their experiences of Nazi persecution. Parents shared, even with young children, the horrors to which they and their relatives had been subjected', experiences which appeared to later inform nightmares in the listeners.⁷⁸ Similarly, second generation Holocaust descendant Melvin Jules Bukiet describes how parents would 'talk about massacres as easily as baseball.'⁷⁹ The horrors of these stories—both in content and affect—are substantial, eliciting strong vicarious reactions, and even the potential for personal traumatisation. In fact, a study conducted by Yehuda et al found that, when asked about the traumatic event that they considered the 'worst' in their lives, '12/23 of the offspring spontaneously indicated that hearing about their parents' experiences in the Holocaust constituted their trauma (even though almost all of them had undergone extremely stressful events such as being mugged or assaulted, being in motor vehicle accidents, etc.)' These respondents also exhibited the most numerous of PTSD symptoms, as compared to offspring who did not rate their parents' Holocaust trauma as their worst event and control samples.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Ramo-Fernández, Schneider, Wilker, and Kolassa, p. 710; Barri Belnap, 'Turns of a phrase: traumatic learning through the generations', in *Lost in Transmission*, pp. 115-130; E. Virginia Demos, 'Intergenerational violence and the family myth', in *Lost in Transmission*, pp. 131-147; Françoise Davoine, 'A quixotic approach to trauma and psychosis', in *Lost in Transmission*, pp. 149-165.

⁷⁷ Belnap, p. 118.

⁷⁸ Janet Jacobs, 'The Cross-Generational Transmission of Trauma: Ritual and Emotion among Survivors of the Holocaust', *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 40:3 (2011), 342-361 (pp. 343, 353).

⁷⁹ Melvin Jules Bukiet, 'Introduction', in *Nothing Makes You Free: Writings by Descendants of Jewish Holocaust Survivors*, ed. by Melvin Jules Bukiet (New York: Norton, 2002), pp. 11-23 (p. 14).

⁸⁰ Rachel Yehuda et al, 'Phenomenology and Psychobiology of the Intergenerational Response to Trauma', in *International Handbook of Multigenerational Legacies of Trauma*, ed. by Yael Danieli (New York: Plenum Press, 1998), pp. 639-655 (pp. 648, 651-652).

The situation is slightly different within the context of the third generation. Although it is ambiguous as to whether the third generation can be considered to experience secondary traumatisation, there is often nonetheless a discernible sustained impact of the first generation's trauma, and one that is distinct from the experiences of the second generation.⁸¹ This is in part attributable to the third generation's relative distance to this trauma, both in terms of time and symptomatology. However, there are also many similarities. As Scharf and Mayseless note, many of the aforementioned trauma-related parenting styles experienced by the second generation are perpetuated upon their own children, despite the second generations' efforts to the contrary, constituting a continuation of social traumatic transmission.⁸² This is also evident in the third generation's knowledge of, and the importance they attribute to, the original trauma. As Yuval Pagli, Amit Shrira, and Menachem Ben-Ezra write, grandchildren of Holocaust survivors 'present with problems in differentiation of the self, poorer family communication, and higher perceived transmission of the Holocaust-related burden from their parents.'⁸³ This feeling of burden has several distinct characteristics, most notably regarding the traumatic referent. In contrast to the second generation, the third generation's remove from the survivor and their (potentially harmful) posttraumatic behaviour allows for a different relationship with them. Indeed, Julia Chaitin observes that '[w]hereas the first generation tended toward an idealistic view of the relationships within their family, the children tended to emphasise the conflicts, and the

⁸¹ The classification of traumatisation amongst the third generation is complex. While Yehuda and Bierer report that trauma-induced epigenetic modifications can be transmitted to the third generation, information on the actual development of psychopathology is inconsistent. Abraham Sagi-Schwartz, Marinus H. van IJzendoorn, and Marian J. Bakermans-Kranenburg, for example, find that traumatisation is not present in the third generation Holocaust through their meta-analysis, but Lev-Wiesel states that 'STSD was clearly exhibited' by the third generation. However, many of these inconsistencies arise from a lack of studies, rigorous controls, and clear definitions. Although in this thesis I have endeavoured to create a balanced overview of the processes of the transmission of trauma, the conclusions obtained in the cited studies should also be approached with caution, as inadequate available data entails a meta-analysis that does not sufficiently control for potential discrepancies between clinically and non-clinically recruited samples, human and animal studies, the location of participants, and nature of the first generation's experiences, to name but a few. Therefore, it is essential to remember that the results cited suggest certain trends, rather than provide conclusive evidence, and, of course, that individual experiences vary: as Yehuda et al suggest, the heated and polarised debates surrounding transgenerational traumatisation perhaps highlight a failure to 'acknowledg[e] the broad spectrum of responsivity to trauma', a concern which must remain central to any analysis of trauma.

Yehuda and Bierer, p. 429; Abraham Sagi-Schwartz, Marinus H. van IJzendoorn, and Marian J. Bakermans-Kranenburg, 'Does intergenerational transmission of trauma skip a generation? No meta-analytic evidence for tertiary traumatization with third generation of Holocaust survivors', *Attachment and Human Development*, 10:2 (2008), 105-121; Lev-Wiesel, p. 90; Yehuda et al, 'Phenomenology and Psychobiology of the Intergenerational Response to Trauma', p. 640.

⁸² Scharf and Mayseless, pp. 1547-1549.

⁸³ Yuval Pagli, Amit Shrira, and Menachem Ben-Ezra, 'Family Involvement and Holocaust Salience among Offspring and Grandchildren of Holocaust Survivors', *Journal of Intergenerational Relationships*, 13:1 (2015), 6-21 (p. 16).

grandchildren tended toward a more balanced view', a finding that is echoed in Tal Litvak-Hirsch and Dan Bar-On's case study of the Anisewich family.⁸⁴ The dissociation of the third generation from the immediate family environment of the first generation hence allows them to maintain a greater critical distance, contrasting the resentment of the traumatised parent often exhibited by the second generation. The first generation's idealised view of the family is furthermore directly related to the third generation: for them, as Chaitin notes, the third generation symbolises the success of the family despite the trauma, a victory.⁸⁵ Secondly and concomitantly, Pierre Fossion et al highlight that the first generation were more likely to talk about their experiences to their grandchildren than to their children, thus conveying the traumatic legacy more explicitly.⁸⁶

However, this is not possible in all cases, leading to the alternative—and final—dominant characteristic of the third generation experience: the consolidation of the traumatic silence. This is especially pertinent to Holocaust studies: with the passage of time, unfortunately many Holocaust survivors have passed away, and thus their personal testimony may not be available firsthand, explicitly, or at all if they remained silent about their past. Much of the information available about the family's Holocaust and pre-Holocaust history, therefore, is often either oblique, fragmented, or incomplete. It may be gleaned, for example, through overheard conversations with others, or indirectly through stories and moral lessons, such the abusive behaviour of the mother in Belnap's vignette (mentioned above), or in situations pertaining to issues such as food/eating and separation. Bar-On provides another example, in which a young woman, albeit the child rather than grandchild of two German National Socialists, begins to understand that her father's instructive stories of his comrade's actions during the war were actually personal memories of his own actions, including the horrific rape and murder of a girl in Russia. What was initially (and inappropriately) presented as a 'sexual education' provided at the extremely young age of six years old, she later understood as an oblique confession; a personal narrative advanced as another's in the third person.⁸⁷ As a consequence of such elusive testimonies, many members of the third generation

⁸⁴ Julia Chaitin, 'Issues and interpersonal values among three generations in families of Holocaust survivors', *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 19:3 (2002), 379-402 (p. 396); Tal Litvak-Hirsch and Dan Bar-On, 'To Rebuild Lives: A Longitudinal Study of the Influences of the Holocaust on Relationships Among Three Generations of Women in One Family', *Family Process*, 45:4 (2006), 465-483.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 381.

⁸⁶ Pierre Fossion et al, 'Family Approach with Grandchildren of Holocaust Survivors', *American Journal of Psychotherapy*, 57:4 (2003), 519-527 (p. 523).

⁸⁷ Dan Bar-On, *The Indescribable and the Undiscussable: Reconstructing Human Discourse After Trauma* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 1999), pp. 169-192; 177.

wishing to learn about their family history have an increased reliance on documentary evidence. However, this is in itself sparse and incomplete, with many documents destroyed by the Nazis at the end of the war. It is increasingly possible, therefore, that the third generation may receive the transmitted effects of trauma through their family line with the partial or complete absence of a referent through which it might be understood. This is what Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok call the phantom; a perceived, but undefined and inapprehensible presence within the psyche that is caused by the unspoken. It is, to put it briefly, the felt presence of an absence. In this way the experience runs counter to Dominick LaCapra's well known caution against confusing absence with historical loss: the loss is not experienced as a loss as the referent was never known in the first instance.⁸⁸ As Abraham writes, 'what haunts are not the dead, but the gaps left within us by the secrets of others.'⁸⁹

For both the second and third generations, however, perhaps the most fundamental element of the experience of trauma transmission is its relation to structures of meaning. Most obviously, in a manner correlating to Lifton's approach through symbolizing theory, the original spectral traumatic encounter becomes the symbolic basis through which many later generations understand their own experiences. Lowenberg, for example, observes that for many members of the second and third generations '[a]ll opponents instantly become Nazis, including among physician and psychoanalyst colleagues.'⁹⁰ Here, perceived or real oppression is signified and comprehended in terms of the oppression experienced by the individual's forebears during the Holocaust. Similarly, Ilany Kogan provides a clinical vignette in which a member of the second generation consistently uses metaphors of the Holocaust to describe her own fears about the danger and turmoil she faces in contemporary Israel.⁹¹ These symbolisations are additionally compounded by an over-identification with the traumatised individual. Many theorists such as Lev-Wiesel, Marilyn Doucet, and Martin Rovers have noted that subsequent generations identify themselves strongly with the parent or grandparent, and as a result feel an arresting sense of responsibility towards compensating them, or helping them recover.⁹² Kogan explains that this identification is twofold, arising from both the unconscious assimilation of the parent's self-image by the child and the conscious or unconscious deposition of this image by the parent upon the child. Both, she

⁸⁸ Dominick LaCapra, 'Trauma, Absence, Loss', *Critical Inquiry*, 25:4 (1999), 696-727.

⁸⁹ Nicolas Abraham, 'Notes on the Phantom: A Complement to Freud's Metapsychology', trans. by Nicholas Rand, *Critical Inquiry*, 13:2 (1987), 287-292 (p. 287).

⁹⁰ Lowenberg, p. 58.

⁹¹ Ilany Kogan, 'The second generation in the shadow of terror', in *Lost in Transmission*, pp. 5-20 (pp. 9-10).

⁹² Lev-Wiesel, p. 77; Marilyn Doucet and Martin Rovers, 'Generational Trauma, Attachment, and Spiritual/ Religious Interventions', *Journal of Loss and Trauma*, 15:2 (2010), 93-105 (pp. 95-96).

highlights, have a severe impact on the child's identity, including 'a loss of the child's separate sense of self and to an inability to differentiate between the self and the damaged parent.' Ultimately, 'the children become the reservoirs for deposited images connected to the trauma, which often initiate unconscious fantasies linked to it. The children are compelled to deal with the shame, rage, helplessness, and guilt that the parents have been unable to work through for themselves.'⁹³ In summary, what is described here is what M. Gerard Fromm calls the 'unconscious mission' of transmitted trauma; the quest to resolve the trauma on behalf of previous generations.⁹⁴

The result is seemingly a double paradox: not only might this mission manifest without a referent following the silence or death of the traumatised individual, divesting its associated tasks of meaning but leaving their urgency unaffected, but it also creates a crisis within the subject to whom the quest is bequeathed, where the identity of the survivor and descendant collide. In the words of Belnap, '[i]t is a perverted claim that says you are one of us in a way that disaffirms the child's experience. The child is placed in crisis: if he claims his own experience, he has to give up the link insisted upon by the family.'⁹⁵ Within the context of transgenerational trauma, then, the influence of history and the trauma on the identity of descendants is fraught. Rather than simply enriching the individual's sense of identity and position within the family network, this past either acts as a negation of historical context (because the silence of a survivor may mean their life before the traumatic encounter remains unspoken, in a sense an entire prior history is lost. In the words of Bukiet, '[i]n the beginning was Auschwitz'), or it permeates and overwhelms the present, to the exclusion of the possibility of a sufficiently individual and progressive identity; as Dina Wardi puts it, they become 'memorial candles' to the dead.⁹⁶ In other words, the past is either felt to be lost or to be omnipresent. Therefore, though philosopher Alain Finkielkraut exorciates the second generation 'Imaginary Jews' for 'historical self-deception' and 'liv[ing] in borrowed identities', it is clear that the suffering of an individual's antecedents is imparted in some form across generations, and that it does indeed play a significant part in the identities they receive and form.⁹⁷ It is an experience that should neither be confused with the direct experience of

⁹³ Kogan, pp. 6-7.

⁹⁴ M. Gerard Fromm, 'Introduction', in *Lost in Transmission*, pp. xv-xxi (p. xvi).

⁹⁵ Belnap, p. 128.

⁹⁶ Bukiet, p. 13; Dina Wardi, *Memorial Candles: Children of the Holocaust*, trans. by Naomi Goldblum (New York: Routledge, 1992).

⁹⁷ Alain Finkielkraut, *The Imaginary Jew*, trans. by Kevin O'Neill and David Suchoff (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), pp. 14-15.

the traumatic referent, nor dismissed as illegitimate.⁹⁸ However, the impact of trauma on an individual's identity is not constrained either to the immediate or to the transgenerational. It also includes the cultural.

The Mythology of the Disaster: Trauma in the Cultural Sphere

If the transgenerational transmission of trauma points to the centrality of interpersonal meaning in the propagation of trauma, the issue is reified in the concept of cultural trauma, where a trauma is not only transmitted vertically throughout a family system, but also laterally (and even transgenerationally) throughout an entire community or culture. It is not uncommon, for example, for members of the Jewish community to express grief, and even explicitly use the word trauma, to describe their relationship with the concentration camps of Europe, regardless of whether or not any relations suffered or perished there. A similar narrative has been constructed around other, more historical traumas, such as pogroms and even the plight of the Israelites depicted in the Torah. Other cultures have comparable claims to historical traumas, such as the brutal history of slavery that is omnipresent for African Americans, or that of manifold atrocities and the loss of the homelands of Native Americans. Many cultures worldwide are still embroiled in the appalling aftereffects of colonial oppression. These traumas are deeply embedded in, and are in many ways inextricable from, their respective cultural identities. This is not least because of persisting social problems, ranging from the transmission of bigotry and prejudice to active political and religious persecution, but also points to the ways in which personal and cultural affect respond to history, memory, and community ties.

It is, doubtlessly, at this juncture that the boundaries between transgenerational and cultural trauma become blurred: even if a distinct genealogy can be traced, it is in many cases impossible for younger generations to have personally met or known relatives that were directly affected, and the potency of the transmitted trauma and its specific symptomatology is therefore likely diluted significantly between generations, if not entirely lost. Furthermore, just as in transgenerational trauma, the case of cultural trauma also intersects with the question of immediate trauma. For example, it is perhaps unsurprising that the events of 11th

⁹⁸ It is partially for this reason that, amidst debate on the appropriateness of the term 'transgenerational trauma' within the discipline, I will continue to use it over alternatives such as Hirsch's term 'postmemory'—although often preferred, I feel that such designations do not appropriately capture the horrific and traumatic specificity of the transmitted memories, something which, over the course of this thesis, I hope to highlight as a key concern displayed by the third generation writers studied.

September, 2001 had a significant traumatic impact on people in or near the World Trade Center, but, less expectedly, they also had an impact on people throughout the United States. William E. Schlenger et al found in a study of 2273 American adults 1-2 months after the attacks that whilst those based in New York City experienced the highest propensity for probable PTSD (11.2%) and clinically significant distress (16.6%), probable PTSD occurred at a rate of 4.0% and clinically significant distress at 11.1% in the rest of the USA, a difference which is not statistically significant. They also found that although having a family member or friend injured or killed in the attacks increased the likelihood of probable PTSD, the difference was once again not statistically significant.⁹⁹ Roxane Cohen Silver et al have similarly investigated the relationship between proximity and distress in the context of 9/11, and conclude that their 'data suggest quite clearly that indirect and/or low dose exposure to a community disaster can be very traumatic,' and express concern that 'heretofore such levels of exposure have tended to be excluded from discussions of the traumatic impact of such events.'¹⁰⁰ Likewise, in his explorations of another disaster, the flood at Buffalo Creek, Kai Erikson notes that 'a number of residents who were clearly traumatized by what had happened proved to have been a long way from home when the disaster struck and thus never experienced the raging waters and all of the death and devastation at first-hand'.¹⁰¹ It is increasingly clear, therefore, not only that identification with the community is enough to engender some form of traumatisation following a disaster, but that the concept of cultural trauma tends towards certain psychological, rather than simply rhetorical, elements. It also operates both on the level of the individual, and that of a transhistorical collective whole.

That is not to suggest, however, that cultural trauma is applicable to individuals without the community context. I have already noted the importance of the social to trauma studies, both in the contexts of exacerbating/recovering from trauma and its transmission to intimates and offspring, but it is within the domain of cultural trauma that the relationship becomes the most explicit; the community acts as a reciprocal influence on trauma. It is for this reason that a cultural trauma is distinct from simply a collective of traumatized individuals. In the words of Erikson, 'traumatic wounds inflicted on individuals can combine to create a mood, and ethos—a group culture, almost—that is different from (and more than) the sum of the private

⁹⁹ William E. Schlenger et al, 'Psychological Reactions to Terrorist Attacks: Findings From the National Study of Americans' Reactions to September 11', *JAMA*, 288:5 (2002), 581-588 (pp. 581, 584-585).

¹⁰⁰ Roxane Cohen Silver et al, 'Exploring the Myths of Coping with a National Trauma: A Longitudinal Study of Responses to the September 11th Terrorist Attacks', *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma*, 9:1-2 (2004), 129-141 (p. 138).

¹⁰¹ Erikson, p. 188.

wounds that make it up.’¹⁰² The trauma becomes a part of the group’s collective identity. However, this often also entails a fracturing of the original group, with the traumatised community often an alienated subgroup of a once larger collective. In this sense, as Erikson writes, ‘trauma has both centripetal and centrifugal tendencies’, drawing the traumatised together into a community of mutual understanding whilst distancing them from those unaffected; between members of the original community, the ‘I’ is still felt to exist, although damaged, the ‘you’ is still present, although distant, but the ‘we’ no longer exists.¹⁰³ This pattern can be observed clearly, as before, in the context of Vietnam veterans returning from the war, who had formed tight bonds with their comrades and felt alienated from the American communities which they had once been a part of, finding that the latter could not comprehend the depth of the horror they had experienced. Such a breach is not repaired easily. Herman has noted the importance of medals, parades, and memorials to the veterans, which act as an acknowledgement of their trauma, but, simultaneously, reinforce the distance rather than close it: such commemorations tend to glorify the combat instead of highlighting its true (traumatic) character, and thus, in a way, the experiences of the veterans are still obfuscated and the original community remains fractured.¹⁰⁴

However, for those who do identify with the traumatised—those who consider themselves a member of the same community—the result can often be described as a cultural trauma. This is, as Niel J. Smelser outlines, distinct from what can be described as a social trauma, which he details as a major disruption to societal structures and institutions. A cultural trauma, by contrast, attacks the worldviews and values of a group.¹⁰⁵ In other words, it is more strongly related to the collective and transhistorical process of meaning-making. This goes some ways to explain the distress of persons across the United States in the wake of 9/11, which was perceived as an attack on the American people. For example, Christine Muller, in her study of post 9/11 popular culture, observes that

Rather than claims to exceptionally favored status and always hard-earned and well-deserved triumph against all odds, US cultural stories now pervasively involve no-win scenarios for even the purest of fictional characters and a fascination with anti-heroes who do the wrong things for the right reasons.

¹⁰² Ibid, p. 185.

¹⁰³ Ibid, pp. 186-187.

¹⁰⁴ Herman, pp. 70-71.

¹⁰⁵ Neil J. Smelser, ‘Psychological Trauma and Cultural Trauma’, in *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, ed. by Jeffrey C. Alexander et al (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), pp. 31-59 (pp. 37-38).

These stories are often characterized by existential crisis, vulnerability, and moral ambivalence, conditions that directly counter those notions of optimism, self-determination, and belief in a just world that underpin the American Dream narrative.¹⁰⁶

The suggestion here is that the terrorist attacks ruptured prevailing frameworks of meaning such as the American Dream, the ramifications of which rippled throughout the American community. The identification with the ideologies contained within the framework of the Dream were not, after all, exclusive to those affected in New York City, but rather part of a larger cultural system. The new meanings produced, centering on the indiscriminate and unjust nature of violence, are subsequently reflected in the culture's popular narrative outputs, which Muller describes as 'our most widely encountered and commonly accessible forms of meaning-making'.¹⁰⁷ In short, the cultural trauma of 9/11 has created a new collective meaning for American identity.¹⁰⁸

This process is quite clearly parallel to that of the reconstruction of an individual's identity and worldview in the wake of a direct trauma, manifesting both behaviourally and semantically. Indeed, as Smelser illustrates in his exploration of cultural trauma, the psychological model can be effectively adapted to represent the processes at work in cultural trauma. In addition to the impacts on identity underscored above, Smelser highlights the ways in which, following a trauma, the event overwhelms the individual/collective psyche, and is

¹⁰⁶ Christine Muller, *September 11, 2001 as a Cultural Trauma: A Case Study through Popular Culture* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p. 10.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, p. 2.

¹⁰⁸ Although such a radical disruption to values and cultural expectations is the primary narrative existent in cultural trauma studies, work by Laura S. Brown and Angela Onwuachi-Willig highlight that cultural trauma can arise also from a confirmation of negative cultural expectations. In her 1991 essay, Brown points out the patriarchal paradigms prevalent in the identification of traumata, wherein traumas often experienced by marginalised groups such as women are denied status as trauma, as they do not conform to the DSM-III criterium of falling 'outside the range of human experience': violence, especially sexual, enacted against women is so common as to fall into the category of 'normal' and therefore excludable from the category of trauma, thus obfuscating the symptoms of trauma shared within the group. More recently, drawing upon the murder of Emmett Till in 1955 as a case study, Onwuachi-Willig illustrates how the threat of lynching and a lack of retribution against perpetrators was the norm for African Americans living in the southern states during that time period, but that Till's death and the subsequent acquittal of his murderers still engendered a traumatic response. '[E]ach negative, routine harm to a subordinated group reminds its members of their marginal status and intensifies the group's pain', she explains. '[W]hen the routine in a society involves systemic oppression and discrimination against a group (as opposed to desired or improved maintenance and security), the promise of the continued norm does not reassure or soothe the people who are disadvantaged by that norm; instead, it disconcerts them.'

Laura S. Brown, 'Not Outside the Range: One Feminist Perspective on Psychic Trauma', *American Imago*, 48:1 (1991), 119-133; Angela Onwuachi-Willig, 'The Trauma of the Routine: Lessons on Cultural Trauma from the Emmett Till Verdict', *Sociological Theory*, 34:4 (2016), 335-357 (pp. 341, 347).

laden with strong negative affect. He also correlates the competing experiences of an individual reliving and avoiding the trauma with the communal processes at play following a tragedy:

When seeking an analogy at the sociocultural level, we discover such dual tendencies—mass forgetting and collective campaigns on the part of groups to downplay or ‘put behind us,’ if not actually to deny a cultural trauma on the one hand, and a compulsive preoccupation with the event, as well as group efforts to keep it in the public consciousness as a reminder that ‘we must remember,’ or ‘lest we forget,’ on the other.¹⁰⁹

In fact, aside from the obvious, there are only two significant differences between what is observable in trauma theory and cultural trauma theory: firstly, as Smelser argues, that the psychoanalytic concept of repression is not transferable onto the cultural level, as complete cultural denial is rarely achievable; and secondly, that posttraumatic responses in an individual can be described as at least somewhat automatic, whereas in a culture they are explicitly and consciously structured and deliberately maintained.¹¹⁰ Although this sociocultural process is generally precipitated by a group leader (whether political, religious, intellectual, or other), it is consensually maintained by the populace, through activities such as remembering and memorialisation. It is for this reason that Vamik D. Volkan calls cultural trauma a ‘chosen trauma’. Rather than implying that a community somehow chooses to be persecuted against or to experience a disaster, the term is used to explain the group’s “choice” to add a past generation’s mental representation of a shared event to its own large-group identity.’¹¹¹ Hence, although rooted in a pronounced collective pain, a cultural trauma can be understood as a communally constructed reappraisal of disrupted cultural meanings and identity.

The constructed nature of a cultural trauma thus also imbues it with a strong narrative element, lending itself well to storytelling. In fact, it is often through the oral tradition that historical cultural traumas are transmitted. This process of narrativization, however, is constantly ongoing, and cultural narratives both precede and follow the event, allowing it to be both framed and reframed within collective identity and cultural history. In his work on

¹⁰⁹ Smelser, p. 53.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, p. 51

¹¹¹ Vamik D. Volkan, ‘The intertwining of the internal and external wars’, in *Lost in Transmission*, pp. 75-97 (p. 83).

ghostly psychoanalysis, for example, Stephen Frosh highlights the importance of the Akedah—the troubling biblical story of Abraham’s offering of his son, Isaac, as a human sacrifice at God’s command—in Jewish cultural narratives, stressing how it has come to be considered ‘the paradigmatic example of how to face the final test of one’s existence, which at times of extreme duress has been the model for action by Jews whose lives were threatened.’ In this, he also particularly emphasises the incidence of the Holocaust, and the fact that it was considered by many an Akedah-like test, and thus was framed in terms of this earlier narrative structure.¹¹² More generally, Stein explains how the ‘storyline’ of the disaster, created before the fact,

is replete with characters, plot, sequence, structure, when things should unfold, and the ‘right’ kind of ending. A storyline or ‘narrative’ is a form we use to say how a story—and its event—*should* go. There are storylines for how a ‘good fire’ or a ‘good bombing’ goes, and for how heroes, healers, and the public respond. Often these storylines are obligatory, which is to say imposed, both from without and within.¹¹³

The disaster, therefore, derives some of its meaning from such preconceived narrative plotlines, which shape the later understanding of the trauma. Hence, the structuring can also have a protective effect on cultural identity: rather than causing widespread public crisis, the narrative allows members of the community to adopt a socially beneficial role in responding to the tragedy, in addition to reinforcing in the face of adversity the positive characteristics attributed to the affected community, such as qualities of selflessness and mutual caring. It also plays a role in resilience as a result.

Resilience is also a feature of posttraumatic narrativisation, in which the disruption is more carefully integrated into ongoing cultural narratives and identity, constituting a form of cultural survival. The reaffirmation of previous cultural stories, such as the Akedah, is one way in which this can be achieved. The creation of a narrative strand, such as that described by Muller in the 9/11 context, is another. Most often, however, the resultant narrative is a hybrid of both the old and the new. Consider, for example, the emphases on key words related to traditional American ideology, such as ‘freedom’, in political discourse following the 9/11

¹¹² Stephen Frosh, *Hauntings: Psychoanalysis and Ghostly Transmissions* (Cham: Springer, 2013), pp. 125-131; p. 126.

¹¹³ Stein, pp. 175-176.

terrorist attacks.¹¹⁴ The American identity is hence reinforced whilst simultaneously transformed from a sense of exceptional triumph to that of vulnerability. These narratives are moreover not, as this example suggests, fixed either historically or interpretatively. Jeffrey C. Alexander and Norman G. Finkelstein have both charted the evolution of such changes in public opinion surrounding the Holocaust between the end of the war and the present day, noting that initially there was little consideration of the Holocaust in terms of trauma in the US. Holocaust survivors were presented, in the words of Alexander, ‘as a mass, and often as a mess, a petrified, degrading, and smelly one, not only by newspaper reporters but by some of the most powerful general officers in the Allied high command’; as ‘the starving, depleted, often weird-looking and sometimes weird-acting Jewish camp survivors seemed like a foreign race. They could just as well have been from Mars, or from Hell.’¹¹⁵ Similarly, Natasha Goldman’s work on memorialisation strategies at Yad Vashem over the last few decades highlights that, immediately after the war,

shame and silence defined the commonly held Israeli attitude toward survivors. Instead of embodying the fighting, heroic, brave ‘new Jews,’ [‘the fighters, heroes, and martyrs of the Holocaust’] the survivors represented the European intellectual or overly religious ‘old Jew,’ unfit for the new country and its Zionist ideals[.]¹¹⁶

It was only after the 1980s that victims and survivors were centralised in the post-Holocaust Israeli narrative.¹¹⁷ Hence, it is clear that although the Holocaust most certainly constituted a significant rupture in collective history, its cultural meanings have never been static. The initial lack of identification with the persecuted European Jewry occurring in international Jewish populations is much more consistent with cultural fragmentation (the ‘centrifugal’ tendencies of trauma discussed earlier) than that of a shared cultural trauma. Holocaust survivors were considered the Other, a symbolic representation of Nazi evil and a byproduct of the Second

¹¹⁴ See for example George W. Bush’s speech following 9/11, in which the word ‘freedom’ appears thirteen times: George W. Bush, ‘Text of George Bush’s speech’, *Guardian*, 21 September 2001 <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2001/sep/21/september11.usa13>> [Accessed 14 August 2018].

¹¹⁵ Jeffrey C. Alexander, ‘On the Social Construction of Moral Universals: The “Holocaust” from War Crime to Trauma Drama’, in *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, pp. 196-263 (p. 199); Norman G. Finkelstein, *The Holocaust Industry: Reflections on the Exploitation of Jewish Suffering* (London: Verso, 2000).

¹¹⁶ Natasha Goldman, ‘Israeli Holocaust Memorial Strategies at Yad Vashem: From Silence to Recognition’, *Art Journal*, 65:2 (2006), 102-123 (pp. 103, 105).

¹¹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 103.

World War rather than witnesses to the Jewish genocide. In this sense, the Holocaust was not assimilated as a Jewish cultural trauma for several decades following the end of the war.

Such flexibility is neither unproblematic nor straightforward, however. Although, for example, the integration of the Holocaust as a trauma into the collective consciousness has facilitated the legitimization of survivor testimony and eroded their stigmatisation and silencing, the process by which this has come about cannot be described as purely altruistic, due to the complexity of politics. Competing identifications, such as a shared ethnic and religious heritage with the survivors existing alongside the American alliance with West Germany at the onset of the Cold War, often cannot be simultaneously represented. Notoriously, Finkelstein takes this notion further in his contentious work *The Holocaust Industry*. Here, he suggests that both Jewish- and non-Jewish- American interest in the Holocaust is purely cynical, and features no genuine concern for the realities of the Holocaust or the survivors themselves, whom he argues are treated as an ideological tool in Zionist politics. Himself the child of Holocaust survivors and clearly impassioned about their treatment in the United States ('I honestly do not recall a single friend (or parent of a friend) asking a single question about what my mother and father endured. This was not a respectful silence. It was simply indifference. In this light, one cannot help but be skeptical of the outpourings of anguish in later decades') Finkelstein asserts that

The Holocaust has proven to be an indispensable ideological weapon. Through its deployment, one of the world's most formidable military powers, with a horrendous human rights record, has cast itself as a 'victim' state, and the most successful ethnic group in the United States has likewise acquired victim status. Considerable dividends accrue from this specious victimhood—in particular, immunity to criticism, however justified. ¹¹⁸

Although inflammatory (and alarmingly adaptable to antisemitic and extreme right-wing views; as Enzo Traverso points out, Finkelstein was welcomed in Berlin 'by an enthusiastic public of nationalists, who interpreted his book as confirmation that Auschwitz was merely a pretext for exploiting Germans'), it is undeniable that Israel's adoption of the Holocaust trauma into its national narrative, presenting the state as a source of redemption and refuge for Europe's persecuted and dispossessed Jewish population, has also been used to conceal

¹¹⁸ Finkelstein, pp. 6, 3.

human rights violations and atrocities committed against Palestinians.¹¹⁹ The invocation of the Holocaust and its associated trauma creates complicated victim and perpetrator identities, which lack nuance from individual histories whilst being simultaneously entwined with them. The cultural narrative hence functions as a shield against criticism in a manner clearly detrimental to the individuals affected from both sides of the conflict; both the exploitation and excusal of suffering are implicated.¹²⁰

Indeed, whilst cultural trauma narratives have multiple positive and negative impacts on a sociohistorical level, so too do they have varied effects on individuals. For example, whilst the actions of members of the community may conform to the preconceived 'storyline' of the disaster, and thus receive a sense of meaning for the trauma, this does not, as mentioned earlier, prevent individual traumatisation, and nor does it prevent the strong negative affect inherent to cultural trauma. In fact, Erikson notes that although there is a widespread belief that a feeling of euphoria permeates a community following a disaster, its people having survived against the odds, he did not find such a response in any of the case studies he has used in his work.¹²¹ The overwhelming sentiment is one of injury or loss. Furthermore, the successful formation of a narrative surrounding the trauma includes, as Alexander stipulates, the clear designation of a victim and a responsible party.¹²² The latter in particular, however, is subject to harmful misinterpretation, exacerbating the centrifugal aspects of trauma. As an illustration, in the wake of 9/11 in the US, Muslims and those with Middle Eastern ancestry or origins were generally regarded with suspicion, and treated as a potential threat. Similarly, all those belonging to the nation of Germany—regardless of political affiliation during the

¹¹⁹ Enzo Traverso, 'Uses and Misuses of Memory: Notes on Peter Novick and Norman Finkelstein', *Historical Materialism*, 11:2 (2003), 215-225 (p. 221).

¹²⁰ A similar process of erasure can be observed in the case of 9/11, which becomes particularly evident through an analysis, yet again, of the terminology used in political discourse following the tragedy. To name but two examples, Donald E. Pease draws attention to the use of 'Virgin Land', employed to create and emphasise the sense of the US's status as an innocent victim in the attack, and a term which erases the history of the dispossession and massacre of indigenous populations; whilst Amy Kaplan has highlighted that the associations of Hiroshima and Nagasaki are rarely invoked in the use of the term 'Ground Zero' in the years following 2001. In both instances, American aggression is overwritten with American innocence. Hence, the cultural guilt associated with American perpetration (an especially prominent mood following the Vietnam War) is replaced with the more easily-managed tragic outrage of innocent victimhood, which, in turn, has been used as justification for further American aggression through the lens of posttraumatic retribution and the reclamation of a threatened American way of life.

Donald E. Pease, *The New American Exceptionalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), pp. 155-159; Amy Kaplan, 'Homeland Insecurities: Reflections on Language and Space', *Radical History Review*, 85 (2003), 82-93 (pp. 83-84).

¹²¹ Erikson, p. 189.

¹²² Jeffrey C. Alexander, 'Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma', in *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, pp. 1-30 (pp. 13, 15).

war—were often considered perpetrators of the Holocaust.¹²³ Less concretely but still relevantly, those opposed to the state of Israel are often rhetorically associated with Nazis; as Goldman highlights, during the Six-Day War, ‘many Israelis saw Arabs in the roles of Germans’, a conflation which was subject to a ‘confusing’ shift when, post-victory, Israeli soldiers adopted the role of oppressors in occupied territories.¹²⁴ Dan Diner likewise observes that

in order to obligate the Arabs at least to accept the legitimization of Israel as anchored in contemporary history, it has exaggeratedly stressed the collaboration of some personalities in the Arab national movement with the German Nazis—such collaboration was often peripheral, at least when assessed in terms of the relevant events at the time—and even elevated it into a kind of research subfield.¹²⁵

Such broad group categorisations not only create simplistic and inaccurate demarcations of a perpetrator bracket, causing interpersonal tension, but also signify a decidedly conservative turn: Marten W. deVries writes that, ‘[e]thnicity, nationalism, tribalism, and fundamentalism become means of survival; all of these are regressive moves to release individuals behaviorally and ideologically from an intolerable complexity that cannot be managed or used in a more productive way.’¹²⁶ Hence, although cultural narratives can help individuals experiencing a communal trauma to establish a resilient social identity and understand the place of the trauma within a wider narrative, they can also be maladaptively and selectively employed to further fragment the collective in their need to establish a protective insularity against threats, or even weaponised to produce enemies and justify national agendas.

¹²³ Interestingly, Bar-On, Tal Ostrovsky, and Dafna Fromer found that even in later generations who had no direct experience of the Holocaust such generalisations are still prevalent. When they facilitated an encounter between groups of Israeli and German students in the mid-1990s centering on the subject of the Holocaust, they noted that several times the interactions were awkward and the different groups regarded each other with suspicion. However, on the whole they were able to construct a productive dialogue about their respective cultural and familial histories.

Dan Bar-On, Tal Ostrovsky, and Dafna Fromer, “Who Am I in Relation to My Past, in Relation to the Other?” German and Israeli Students Confront the Holocaust and Each Other’, in *International Handbook of Multigenerational Legacies of Trauma*, pp. 97-116.

¹²⁴ Goldman, p. 108.

¹²⁵ Dan Diner, *Beyond the Conceivable: Studies on Germany, Nazism, and the Holocaust* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), p. 214.

¹²⁶ Marten W. deVries, ‘Trauma in Cultural Perspective’, in *Traumatic Stress*, pp. 398-413 (p. 407).

The cultural transmission of trauma, finally, is further complicated by the current epoch of globalisation and mass media, a topic considered by Alison Landsberg in her conception of 'prosthetic memory.' Mass culture, she explains,

has had the unexpected effect of making group-specific cultural memories available to a diverse and varied populace. In other words, this new form of memory does not, like many forms of memory that preceded it, simply reinforce a particular group's identity by sharing memories. Instead, it opens up those memories and identities to persons from radically different backgrounds.¹²⁷

She describes the result in terms of prosthesis, an artificial limb of memory; an apt description in that it implies trauma.¹²⁸ Centering her argument mainly on the role of cinema—filmic techniques such as close ups and point of view shots, she suggests, are especially amenable to the fostering of empathy and identification with the characters on screen—Landsberg highlights the ways in which the global sharing of media has blurred the boundaries normally associated with cultural identification.¹²⁹ Such a focus on empathy is what differentiates prosthetic memory from the simple sharing of knowledge or history:

In this process that I am describing, the person does not simply apprehend a historical narrative but takes on a more personal, deeply felt memory of a past event through which he or she did not live. The resulting prosthetic memory has the ability to shape that person's subjectivity and politics.¹³⁰

Thus, the relatively new phenomenon of prosthetic memory can be considered itself an extension of cultural trauma: it allows, and indeed encourages, people to identify with traumatised communities and to adopt the impact of such experiences into their worldview. This, then, might be considered both the furthest limits of trauma and also a unique point of convergence specific to the 21st century, with globalisation facilitating further intersections between the different strands of trauma outlined through the preceding sections. Personal

¹²⁷ Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), p. 11.

¹²⁸ Ibid, p. 20.

¹²⁹ Alison Landsberg, 'Memory, Empathy, and the Politics of Identification', *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, 22 (2009), 221-229 (p. 224).

¹³⁰ Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory*, p. 2.

testimony is available on a previously unseen scale, and can be transferred across generational and cultural barriers towards a global consciousness that is simultaneously more sensitive to diverse individual experiences and to a sense of a shared history and present. This international and intercultural propagation can also, as this thesis will explore, highlight the intersecting nature of experienced traumas.

Towards a Definition of Trauma

From the conflicting responses of reliving and avoidance to the competing desires of descendants to gain proximity to and distance from the traumatised, the contradictions of trauma are that which make the conceptualisation and representation of trauma so onerous; an issue which will be explored at greater length in the following section. This is further complicated by the fact that the three types of trauma considered in this work—the direct, the transgenerational, and the cultural—are, as I have shown, very fluid, and the boundaries between them intersect and imbricate, as do its different physiological, behavioural, and semantic aspects. As McFarlane and van der Kolk conclude, neither simply biological nor environmental explanations of trauma are sufficient; although the former has served to reduce stigma against individuals, it does not adequately address the social issues that contribute to the development and exacerbation of mental health issues and negative affect.¹³¹ The result is a very complex model of trauma, and one which varies significantly between individuals and circumstances. Therefore, before proceeding, I will briefly summarise the threads that tie together each of trauma's diverse and disparate elements, in order to create a clearer sense of the kinship between them in this interdisciplinary theory. Trauma, simply put, constitutes a fundamental and threatening rupture in an individual's (or group's) identity and worldview, or what can be considered a 'normal' way of life.¹³² What follows is a crisis of meaning, in which the trauma centres itself as the main point of symbolic reference (as Laub writes, '[Holocaust s]urvivors will experience tragic life events not as mere catastrophes, but rather

¹³¹ Alexander C. McFarlane and Bessel A. van der Kolk, 'Conclusions and Future Directions', in *Traumatic Stress*, pp. 559-575 (pp. 560-561).

¹³² The definition of 'normal' here must be understood as at once intra- and inter-subjective. While many instances of trauma arise as a singular, discordant event, many others are the result of prolonged abuse, the longevity of which would allow it in itself to be considered 'normal.' Such examples, existent both on individual and cultural levels (such as the prevalence of sexual violence against women and children and racially-motivated violence against BAME groups, to name but two examples), should absolutely not be excluded from the category on the basis of frequency of occurrence.

as a second Holocaust’).¹³³ As a result, the individual’s life is profoundly altered. Thus, PTSD is only one—albeit severe—form of traumatisation, with the actual spectrum of trauma encompassing a far greater area and the severity of its symptoms ranging from fairly mild to psychopathological. Consequently, prescriptive and evaluative practices towards trauma raise significant issues, and tend to obfuscate more than they illuminate. To adequately respond to this, the concept of testimony must be recentred.

Text and Testimony in the Postmodern World

Trauma and writing have a long established relationship, to the point that ‘trauma theory is inherently linked to the literary’, as Anne Whitehead writes in *Trauma Fiction*.¹³⁴ Personal writings, published literature, and even written national histories often have traumas at their core. Although this is true in many different western communities and cultures, it is especially true of the American literary tradition, which, historically, has been closely associated with trauma. In fact, one of the first American genres, the American slave narrative, can be considered traumatic testimony, outlining the horrors of physical and mental subordination, brutality, and alienation. The relationship is further facilitated by typically American literary genres, such as the confessional, which dovetail with traditionally American ideologies such as individualism and the primacy of personal experience. This context is also ideal for my investigation for two reasons: firstly, because the Holocaust provides a central trauma for many Jewish Americans, whose ancestors escaped persecution and death in Europe by fleeing to the USA; and secondly, because of the ways in which American literature, with its individualised focus and cultural inclination towards liberation from the past, interacts with Jewish tradition, both complementing and challenging its strong associations with memory and the importance of understanding and remembering the group’s historical heritage.

As well as providing a vehicle for sharing and integrating these experiences into public discourse, an action which carries significant sociopolitical weight, the narration of traumatic experiences has also been ascribed therapeutic effects within western societies.¹³⁵ In

¹³³ Dori Laub, ‘Bearing Witness or the Vicissitudes of Listening’, in *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, ed. by Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub (New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 57-74 (p. 65).

¹³⁴ Anne Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), p. 4.

¹³⁵ It is worth emphasising that the therapeutic benefits of trauma writing are not culturally universal. Eugenia Georges and Jane Wellenkamp in particular consider how traumatic disclosure is perceived in diverse cultures, including Balinese, Taiwanese, and Toraja societies, all of which treat the expression of negative emotions as detrimental to health. Therefore, as Wellenkamp incisively notes,

particular, social psychologist James W. Pennebaker has dedicated years of research to this relationship, observing that the process of disclosure—itsself the fundamental basis for many forms of psychotherapy—is associated with numerous physical, behavioural, and psychological benefits, including increased immune function and lowered heart rate, higher grade attainment in educational settings and lower absenteeism, and long term reductions in depression and distress.¹³⁶ Crucially, these benefits are not restricted to therapeutic settings. Pennebaker asserts that the disclosure process ‘may be as important as any feedback the client receives from the therapist’; and that ‘[m]ost studies comparing writing versus talking either into a tape recorder or to a therapist find comparable biological, mood, and cognitive effects.’¹³⁷ These findings can be principally connected to trauma theory through the concept of reintegration: because, as highlighted in the preceding sections of this introduction, traumatic memory is stored abnormally and therefore exists, in a sense, outwith the individual’s evolving life story, the process of verbal narrativization facilitates a recodification from nondeclarative to declarative memory. Writing about traumatic subjects, therefore, not only allow the author a platform from which their experiences may be shared, but also a method through which they can be, to an extent, worked through.

It is important to note, however, that the benefits of trauma writing are strongly reliant on one significant factor: the inclusion of the experience’s emotional effects. Studies such as those conducted by Pennebaker and Sandra Klihr Beall, Jenna L. Baddeley and Pennebaker, and Bernard Rimé have all found that writing about the experience’s emotional content was necessary for the long term health benefits cited above.¹³⁸ The simple facts of the event were not sufficient in themselves to occasion substantial reintegration. This is connected with the

‘cultural attitudes toward disclosure may have a bearing on whether or to what degree, disclosures have positive psychological and physical health consequences.’ However, as this thesis is centred primarily on disclosure-positive cultures, I will be proceeding on the premise that traumatic disclosure is associated with positive impacts in the discussed contexts.

Eugenia Georges, ‘A Cultural and Historical Perspective on Confession’, in *Emotion, Disclosure, & Health*, ed. by James W. Pennebaker (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 1995), pp. 11-22; Jane Wellenkamp, ‘Cultural Similarities and Differences Regarding Emotional Disclosure: Some Examples From Indonesia and the Pacific’, in *Emotion, Disclosure, & Health*, pp. 293-311 (p. 309).

¹³⁶ James W. Pennebaker, ‘Writing about Emotional Experiences as a Therapeutic Process’, *Psychological Science*, 8:3 (1997), 162-166 (p. 163).

¹³⁷ James W. Pennebaker, ‘Emotion, Disclosure, and Health: An Overview’, in *Emotion, Disclosure, & Health*, pp. 3-10 (p. 3); Pennebaker, ‘Writing about Emotional Experiences as a Therapeutic Process’, p. 163.

¹³⁸ James W. Pennebaker and Sandra Klihr Beall, ‘Confronting a Traumatic Event: Toward an Understanding of Inhibition and Disease’, *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 95:3 (1986), 274-281; Jenna L. Baddeley and James W. Pennebaker, ‘A Postdeployment Expressive Writing Intervention for Military Couples: A Randomized Controlled Trial’, *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, 24:5 (2011), 581-585; Bernard Rimé, ‘Mental Rumination, Social Sharing, and the Recovery From Emotional Exposure’ in *Emotion, Disclosure, & Health*, pp. 271-291.

fact that trauma results from the emotional and semantic reactions to an event rather than the content of the event itself, hence why not everyone exposed to the same event responds in the same way. What is painfully traumatic to one person can be merely mildly upsetting to another. Consequently, the idea of two different, yet interrelated, kinds of truth is inaugurated: historical/literal truth and emotional truth. As Bar-On questions, ‘are feelings “facts” at all, especially when not having any external, behavioral or mutually agreed upon criteria to confirm them? Alternatively, do external facts *have* meaning, apart from being subjectively evaluated, *through* our feelings?’¹³⁹ Such a duality is considered in the context of testimony by Laub, who writes of the treatment of the story of a Holocaust survivor that was recorded for the Yale Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies. The woman, otherwise reserved and timid, became passionate when describing the moment that four chimneys of Auschwitz blew up, sending flames into the sky. Historically, however, during the uprising she described, only one chimney exploded. This led several historians to call for the testimony to be discarded, as it was inaccurate. Laub, on the other hand, maintained that

The woman was testifying [...] not to the number of chimneys blown up, but to something else, more radical, more crucial: the reality of an unimaginable occurrence. One chimney blown up was as incredible as four. The number mattered less than the fact of occurrence. The event itself was almost inconceivable. The woman testified to an event that broke the compelling frame of Auschwitz, where Jewish armed revolts just did not happen, and had no place. She testified to the breakage of a framework. That was [the narrated] truth.¹⁴⁰

This fact is no less important—and, in fact, is arguably *more* important—than the literal, verifiable, facts of the event. To judge the narrative only on its historical accuracy is then to dismiss the woman’s testimony; to negate the truth of the radicality of the event, and thus the truth that imbues the event with its meaning. The receiver of testimony must therefore appreciate the complications in the relationship between empirical facts and emotional truths.

In fact, in his exploration of the ethics of testimony, Laub recommends the subordination of the listener’s empirical knowledge to the narrator’s narrative. He explains

¹³⁹ Bar-On, p. 98.

¹⁴⁰ Laub, ‘Bearing Witness or the Vicissitudes of Listening’, pp. 59-60.

that if he entered the conversation with an individual with too detailed a historical knowledge beforehand, he

might have had an agenda of my own that might have interfered with my ability to listen, and to hear. I might have felt driven to confirm my knowledge, by asking questions that could have derailed the testimony, and by proceeding to hear everything she had to say in light of what I knew already.¹⁴¹

This principle applies not only to historical knowledge, but to other knowledges too, including the medical and the psychological, a concern to which I will return later in this section. Therefore, although such understanding is undeniably important for apprehending that which one has being told, it must be decentred in order to ensure that the individual's own narrative is heard, rather than confirming one's own expectations. This is the defining feature of testimony: the ability of an individual to narrate their experience, in their own words (or lack thereof), unmediated by other voices or claims to authority. It also, Laub argues, must be heard and, crucially, *understood* from this standpoint.¹⁴² This emphasis on understanding, of an interpersonal process, furthermore reestablishes the lost social connection common in trauma. Both recognising the humanity of the other as an experiencing being whilst also respecting their otherness, the goal of bearing witness to a testimony is empathy. As Landsberg explains,

empathy starts from the position of difference. [...] Whereas sympathy relies on an essentialism of identification, empathy recognizes the alterity of identification. Empathy, then, pertains to the lack of identity between subjects, to negotiating distances. Empathy, especially as it is constructed out of mimesis, is not an emotional self-pitying identification with victims but a way of both feeling for and feeling different from the subject of inquiry.¹⁴³

In this way, a traumatised individual can theoretically reenter the community, without discrediting the alterity of their experience. This social imperative hence adds an important dimension to the act of trauma writing considered above.

¹⁴¹ Ibid, p. 61.

¹⁴² Ibid, pp. 57-59; 70-72.

¹⁴³ Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory*, p. 135.

Narrating one's traumatic experience is by no means unchallenging, however, and ironically many of these problems arise from the nature of trauma itself. Trauma, as I have explored, often defies verbalisation, with difficulties arising from many different aspects. Most obvious is the fact that it is often inherently nonverbal in nature, but other symptoms such as dissociation confer their own difficulties in accessing the memories in the first place. Lower tier levels of dissociation may also prevent the subject from adequately understanding their relationship with the trauma (derealisation and depersonalisation). The chronology of the event may also be disrupted (both peritraumatically and posttraumatically; the former through the perceived slowing or quickening of time, and the latter through the intrusion of traumatic memories into the present consciousness) which renders linear and logical narration problematic. Furthermore, assuming these difficulties can be worked through, there remains the issue of the relationship between emotions or sensations and language. Drawing upon contemporary cognitive science, Wilma Bucci has studied the referential process across verbal and nonverbal cognitive processing, noting that the connections are clearest when the reference is direct, such as in 'figs', and the least clear when it is more indirect, such as when the connections pertain to the sensory or the visceral.¹⁴⁴ In short, there is a significant breach between the signifier (for example, the word 'pain') and the signified (the experience of pain); the signifier is inadequate. Bar-On analogises this well through his wife's painting projects:

My wife is mixing black and white paints. She would like to let me know what kind of gray came out. Her mixtures are never the same; there are seemingly endless ways to mix black and white. We can define it as a continuum. Now, how is she going to put this continuum into words? [...] She will try to duplicate a unique mixture, or intentionally give it a unique name—call it, say, a 'sad mood.' These will never be the same, but they will anyway 'follow a rule.'¹⁴⁵

Just as the wife's chosen term 'sad mood' denotes a specific category of grey, so too can certain emotions be broadly considered under a single term, such as 'fear.' However, within the category of fear lies a cluster of specific emotions, each distinct although they exhibit

¹⁴⁴ Wilma Bucci, 'The Power of the Narrative: A Multiple Code Account', in *Emotion, Disclosure, & Health*, pp. 93-122 (p. 100).

¹⁴⁵ Bar-On, p. 102.

shared characteristics.¹⁴⁶ The issue of verbal signification is thus twofold: the signifier is indirect, and unable to capture the experience of trauma adequately within itself; and available signifiers are also inexact. Fundamentally, the problem of the verbalisation of trauma is the divergence of two different systems of processing, the sensory-emotional and the rational.

A potential solution to this representational problem has been propounded in the postmodern. Given that, according to Jean-François Lyotard, the postmodern is ‘that which, in the modern, puts forward the unrepresentable in presentation itself’, the appropriateness of the use of postmodern styles to narrate what is considered inexpressible is clear.¹⁴⁷ In the context of post-Holocaust literature, the relevance is redoubled, as the Holocaust itself is often associated with the naissance of postmodernism. Symbolising the failure of Enlightenment ideals and metanarratives of the liberating potential of human progress, the Holocaust also signifies a paradigmatic case of unrepresentability. Material pertaining to the Holocaust has therefore been subject to specific representational challenges, owing to the conflict between its potential unrepresentability and the ethical obligation to transmit the knowledge of what happened. Historically, these principles have been very polarised, and the topic has been subject to much debate. The first perspective, espoused by prominent figures such as Elie Wiesel, Claude Lanzmann, and Lyotard, contends that the Holocaust fundamentally cannot be understood by those who were not directly affected, and as a result deems attempts at imaginative presentation unethical and favours documentary, factual, or testimonial evidence only.¹⁴⁸ The second, which has become increasingly dominant in recent years, highlights the importance of the affective and imaginative accounts of the Holocaust that emphasise the

¹⁴⁶ Psychologist and neuroscientist Lisa Feldman Barrett takes this further, suggesting that emotions as we have classically understood them have so few shared biochemical and physiological qualities within categories that they cannot be said to have an identifying ‘fingerprint.’ Instead, she theorises that emotions are constructed based on predictions from past experiences combined with bodily cues, such as a racing heartbeat and sweating palms (from which one might construct fear, for example). Consequently, what she calls ‘emotion-concepts’ (such as anger, disgust, or fear) cannot be said to have any universality to them—something which is especially evident in an intercultural context; see especially pp. 47-54—and therefore the connection between the learned verbal signifier and the signified experience of an emotion is even further problematised.

Lisa Feldman Barrett, *How Emotions are Made: The Secret Life of the Brain* (London: Macmillan, 2017).

¹⁴⁷ Jean-François Lyotard, ‘Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?’, trans. by Régis Durand, in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, ed. by Jean-François Lyotard, trans. by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), pp. 71-82 (p. 81).

¹⁴⁸ Elie Wiesel, ‘Art and the Holocaust: Trivializing Memory’, *New York Times*, 11 June 1989 <<https://www.nytimes.com/1989/06/11/movies/art-and-the-holocaust-trivializing-memory.html>> [Accessed 10 July 2019]; Claude Lanzmann, ‘The Obscenity of Understanding: An Evening with Claude Lanzmann’, in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, pp. 200-220; Jean-François Lyotard, *Heidegger and “the jews”*, trans. by Andreas Michel and Mark Roberts (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997); Jean-François Lyotard, *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*, trans. by Georges Van Den Abbeele (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).

emotional—and indeed, *human*—aspects of the atrocity that constitute the very essence of its horror. In essence, this entails representing the Holocaust. This perspective suggests that the continued recycling of certain documentary images and phrases (for example, ‘Six million’, ‘Final Solution’, and even simply ‘Auschwitz’) can have the undesirable effect of rendering the horrors banal, and desensitising the viewer/reader to them. Finkelkraut asserts that such words are tantamount to ‘amnesia’; ‘[m]etaphors that gradually replace the event of which they are the reminder.’¹⁴⁹ Victoria Aarons and Alan L. Berger, likewise, express concern that ‘the vast and nameless scale of six million murdered, a referent routinely issued to articulate the annihilation of two-thirds of Eastern European Jews, [...] in its abstraction runs the risk of effacement or of becoming a placeholder for individual lives lost’.¹⁵⁰ For the descendants of Holocaust survivors, and especially the third generation, the dichotomy between these two perspectives is a false one. Neither generalising perspective is sufficient in and of itself, and most narrative outputs address this by centering the experience of either an individual or a few individuals, hence rejecting a totalised history of the Holocaust and its aftereffects.

Just as subsequent generations have made use of postmodernism’s detotalising and de-doxifying impulses in their approach to the Holocaust, so too do they challenge conventional representational ethics. The weight of the tragedy has wrought a set of implicit ethical guidelines for the representation of the Holocaust. Drawing upon the work of Terrence Des Pres, Steve Lipman summarises these as ‘insistence on the tragedy’s uniqueness, minimal deviation from the historical facts, and a *humorless presentation*’.¹⁵¹ Although these guidelines have been repeatedly breached since the first imaginative accounts of the Holocaust appeared, they are an especially prominent focus for the third generation. In an analysis of the evolutionary development of Israeli Holocaust skits, Eyal Zandberg summarises this tendency as follows:

The third generation looked at Holocaust memory differently, expressing a special awareness of the socially constructed nature of the process of shaping collective memory and of their own role in shaping it; this change in perception allowed humor to be used to explore new ways of representation and to criticize traditional ones. Hence, while the second generation broke the silence

¹⁴⁹ Alain Finkelkraut, *The Future of a Negation: Reflections on the Question of Genocide*, trans. by Mary Byrd Kelly (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), p. 59.

¹⁵⁰ Victoria Aarons and Alan L. Berger, *Third Generation Holocaust Representation: Trauma, History, and Memory* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2017), p. 18.

¹⁵¹ Steve Lipman, *Laughter in Hell: The Use of Humor during the Holocaust* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1991), p. 7.

of the first generation and put Holocaust memory in the forefront of public discourse, the third generation probed the limits of representation by using humor to challenge traditional commemoration.¹⁵²

From this, two interrelated tendencies emerge. Firstly, the use of humour appears more distinctly as an approach to Holocaust representation, which has important psychological and political ramifications. Whilst the use of humour in the context of the Holocaust has overwhelmingly been perceived as disrespectful, even reprehensible (of course, in essence, there is nothing funny about the Holocaust), not only was humour during the Nazi period present, but, in the words of Lipman, a ‘psychological necessity’: from as early as Freud, it has been recognised that humour performs an important function in coping with unfavourable environments, and its role in resilience to trauma has been substantiated in recent research.¹⁵³ The use of humour in the third generation can, in this way, rehumanise the prevalent metaphor of ‘lambs to the slaughter’ used to depict the passivity and innocence of the murdered European Jewry. Importantly, humorous representation does not mandate a detraction from the seriousness of its subject matter; on the contrary, it can augment it. Because, as philosopher Simon Critchley observes, humour relies on an incongruity between our knowledge of the subject and its presentation, it can also stimulate critical analysis of the subject by drawing attention to it.¹⁵⁴ Thus, the aforementioned issue of the desensitising effect of grave, documentary representation of the Holocaust can be circumvented.¹⁵⁵ Secondly, and more abstractly, by probing these limits contemporary (and especially third generation) representation of the Holocaust is concerned more generally not only with what is

¹⁵² Eyal Zandberg, “‘Ketchup Is the Auschwitz of Tomatoes’: Humor and the Collective Memory of Traumatic Event”, *Communication, Culture & Critique*, 8 (2015), 108-123 (p. 118).

¹⁵³ Lipman, p. 8; Sigmund Freud, ‘Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious’, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 8, ed. by James Strachey, trans. by James Strachey and Anna Freud (London: Hogarth Press, 1960), pp. 9-236; Sigmund Freud, ‘Humour’, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 21, ed. by James Strachey, trans. by James Strachey and Anna Freud (London: Hogarth Press, 1961), pp. 159-166.

For recent research on resilience and humour, see for example Agaibi and Wilson; Chaya Ostrower, ‘Humor as a Defense Mechanism during the Holocaust’, *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology*, 69:2 (2015), 183-195; and Michael Sliter, Aron Kale, and Zhenyu Yuan, ‘Is humor the best medicine? The buffering effect of coping humor on traumatic stressors in firefighters’, *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 35 (2014), 257–272.

¹⁵⁴ Simon Critchley, ‘Did you hear the One about the Philosopher Writing a Book on Humour?’, *Think*, 1:2 (2002), 103-112.

¹⁵⁵ I provide a fuller analysis of these representational guidelines in the context of the third generation, and especially the demand for a humourless presentation, in Sarah Coakley, “‘Humorous Is the Only Truthful Way to Tell a Sad Story’: Jonathan Safran Foer and Third Generation Holocaust Representation”, *Genealogy*, 3:55 (2019), 1-12.

represented, but also *representation itself*. This is very congruous with postmodern conventions. As Linda Hutcheon writes, in the postmodern '[i]t is not that representation now dominates or effaces the referent, but rather that it now self-consciously acknowledges its existence as representation—that is, interpreting (indeed as creating) its referent, not as offering direct and immediate access to it.'¹⁵⁶ If the trauma of the Holocaust is unrepresentable, then the third generation, somewhat in contrast to their forebears, are very much concerned with 'put[ting] forward the unrepresentable in presentation itself', as opposed to simply stating that it is inexpressible. In this sense, the very nature of its unrepresentability can also be interrogated.

In addition to the changes in focus with regards to totalisation and representation, third generation writers, alongside other writers on trauma, have also made use of contemporary postmodern literary aesthetics to present experiences of trauma across personal, transgenerational, and cultural levels. The disrupted chronology of trauma, for example, can be effectively represented using the fragmented style of postmodern narrative. As Antoon van Den Braembussche explains, in order to represent trauma, 'fragmented forms of narration should be used, adopting different and even contradictory time-shifts, even to the point of a downright simultaneity of past and present experiences', as the description of an 'essential nonchronological experience within a chronological and diachronic framework' constitutes a 'downright betrayal of what is at stake in the traumatic experience.'¹⁵⁷ Sue Vice likewise asserts that 'Holocaust fiction which is unaccommodating to the reader may be more successful in conveying the disruption and unease that the subject demands than more seamless, aesthetically pleasing work', which she actually regards as more 'suspect' than other tendentious elements of fictive representations of the Holocaust, including black humour, crude narration, and sensationalism.¹⁵⁸ Furthermore, attention to the visual aspects of text on the page (including elements such as typography, the use of blank space, and ellipses) can slow down or speed up the narrative, and visually express the verbal inexpressibility of an idea. Similarly, postmodern intertextual and multimedial styles allow the writer to experiment with different and self-conscious forms of narrative construction, as well as alternative forms of expression—the inclusion of an image, rather than simply a description of the same, for

¹⁵⁶ Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 34.

¹⁵⁷ Antoon van Den Braembussche, 'Presenting the Unrepresentable. On Trauma and Visual Art', in *Intercultural Aesthetics: A Worldview Perspective*, ed. by Antoon van Den Braembussche, Heinz Kimmerle, and Nicole Note (New York: Springer, 2009) pp. 119-136 (p. 127).

¹⁵⁸ Sue Vice, *Holocaust Fiction* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 160, 9.

example, is both more immediate and representative of a different form of epistemology. It is also more suited to the visual rather than verbal nature of traumatic memory.

Special attention must be given here to the photograph. Not only are photographs important in a third generation context (they are often, Aarons and Berger find, the object that provokes the third generation 'quest' into the family history), but also as part of the postmodern.¹⁵⁹ The photograph is both a seal of historical authenticity and stripped of its living context; movement and progression outwith the frame can only be inferred, or imagined. Photographs hence constitute an important tool in postmodernist constructions, which are concerned with highlighting the ways in which history and narratives are composed, not found.¹⁶⁰ 'Among the consequences of the postmodern desire to denaturalize history is a new self-consciousness about the distinction between the brute *events* of the past and the historical *facts* we construct out of them', Hutcheon explains. 'We only have access to the past today through its traces—its documents, the testimony of witnesses, and other archival materials. In other words, we only have representations of the past from which to construct our narratives or explanations.'¹⁶¹ The relationship between this idea and the third generation is clear: with a largely absent knowledge of their past, and only a few traces (including photographs) to direct their explorations, the reconstruction of their familial history and identity is overwhelmingly and self-consciously a process of invention.¹⁶² The photograph, and especially a familial photograph, furthermore, is a source of emotional identification. As Hirsch writes

¹⁵⁹ Aarons and Berger, p. 12.

¹⁶⁰ Jacques Derrida has recently argued that the concept of the photograph as a historical referent has been complicated by the introduction of digital camera technologies: 'If one can erase images, since the imprint is no longer supported by a "support," at least not the support of a stable paper substance, this means that we no longer have to do, one might say, with the recording of an image, even though one is recording something: recording an image would become inseparable from producing an image and would therefore lose the reference to an external and unique referent.' I include this principally as an aside, or tangential question of the philosophical relationship between photographic technologies and truth, as the family photographs that are generally pertinent to the third generation are usually, due to their age, recorded in the classic way using film. However, such questions will be returned to in Chapter One in the context of *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*, with a discussion of the ethics of image manipulation.

Jacques Derrida, *Copy, Archive, Signature: A Conversation on Photography*, ed. by Gerhard Richter, trans. by Jeff Fort (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010), pp. 4-7, 5.

¹⁶¹ Hutcheon, pp. 57, 58.

¹⁶² This, as Derrida argues, is also a process inherent to the consideration of someone's photograph itself: 'One produces the other there where he is not; therefore I can manipulate a photograph, intervene, transform the referent: I invent him, then, in the sense in which one invents what is not there.'

Derrida, *Copy, Archive, Signature*, p. 43.

family photos, and the familial aspects of postmemory, would tend to diminish distance, bridge separation, and facilitate identification and affiliation. When we look at photographic images from a lost past world, especially one that has been annihilated by force, we look not only for information or confirmation, but also for an intimate material and affective connection.¹⁶³

The effect of the lapsed time between the photograph's capture and the present acts as what Roland Barthes terms a '*punctum*'; the 'this element which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces' the viewer.¹⁶⁴ Aged photographs (and, in this context, I would draw especial attention to photographs of relatives who were killed during the Holocaust) allow the viewer to 'observe with horror an anterior future of which death is the stake', in the words of Barthes.¹⁶⁵ The immobility of such photographs, he suggests,

is somehow the result of a perverse confusion between two concepts: the Real and the Live: by attesting that the object has been real, the photograph surreptitiously induces belief that it is alive [...] but by shifting this reality to the past ('this-has-been'), the photograph suggests that it is already dead.¹⁶⁶

This conflict between living and death, past and present, is also the conflict that underlies the experience of many descendants of Holocaust survivors: the past exists within and haunts the present. The challenge, Hirsch suggests, is to 'try to reanimate [the past as represented within the photograph] by undoing the finality of the photographic "take."' ¹⁶⁷

Because postmodern works are concerned with the ways in which history and narratives are constructed, they often, Hutcheon points out, 'draw attention to the dubiousness of the positivist, empiricist hierarchy implied in the binary opposing of the real to the fictive'; something which Hayden White has also problematised in his work on the fundamental overlap between historical and narrative discourse.¹⁶⁸ The most obvious manifestation of this slippage is in historiographic metafiction, in which historical representation is paradoxically combined with self-consciously fictive elements, and the fact that nonfictional histories are

¹⁶³ Hirsch, p. 116.

¹⁶⁴ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. by Richard Howard (London: Vintage, 2000), pp. 96, 26.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 96.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid, p. 79.

¹⁶⁷ Hirsch, p. 115.

¹⁶⁸ Hutcheon, p. 76; Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), p. x.

subject to the same process of construction as fictional ones is underlined. To take this generic collapse even further, postmodern fiction often blends the real and the unreal, and its representation of its unrepresentable subject matter often relies on techniques such as metaphor, speculative fiction, and magical realism. Indeed, Bran Nicol asserts that in contemporary fiction (encompassing the postmodern and beyond) there ‘is the ethos that an author can be trusted to try to communicate authentically to a reader despite trading in fiction rather than in fact.’¹⁶⁹ Within the context of trauma literature, this move is best understood as a demonstration of the tensions between literal truth and emotional truth. For example, in describing a trauma that it is unlikely that the reader will understand, the use of metaphor can invite comparisons with a more universally relatable experience, so that its emotional content can be better grasped. It also avoids the problems of desensitisation associated with direct representations of well-known traumatic events. More specifically, metaphors are additionally frequently used to describe nonverbal experiences, such as emotions: as researchers such as Eugenia Georges, Parivash Esmaeili, Behnoush Akhavan, and Fazel Asadi Amjad note, for example, that in western cultures metaphors such as heat in the pressurised body-container are used to describe the emotion of anger, and thus the reference is made more direct according to Bucci’s formulations.¹⁷⁰ Hence, metaphors can be an effective form of presentation that explicitly and self-consciously allude to their unrepresentable content.

The final feature of postmodern metafictional writing that is of particular importance to this study is the use of autofiction; a form of narration which blends autobiography and fiction. Originally associated with French literature, Serge Doubrovsky’s term describes, in the words of Hywel Dix,

a project of self-exploration and self-experimentation on the part of the author. This in turn is partly because many works of autofiction have been written in the aftermath of some kind of traumatic experience—real or imagined—so that the process of writing in response to trauma can be seen as a means of situating the self in a new context when other relational constructs have been removed or jeopardized.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁹ Bran Nicol, ‘Eye to I: American Autofiction and Its Contexts from Jerzy Kosinski to Dave Eggers’, in *Autofiction in English*, ed. by Hywel Dix (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), pp. 255-274 (pp. 267-268).

¹⁷⁰ Georges, p. 15; Parivash Esmaeili, Behnoush Akhavan, and Fazel Asadi Amjad, ‘Metaphorically Speaking: Embodied Conceptualization and Emotion Language in Tim O’Brien’s *The Things They Carried*’, *International Journal of Applied Linguistics & English Literature*, 4:5 (2015), 137-146.

¹⁷¹ Hywel Dix, ‘Introduction: Autofiction in English: The Story so Far’ in *Autofiction in English*, pp. 1-23 (p. 4).

In the context of the third generation, the self must be situated in a social world where the Holocaust is omnipresent as an overwhelming absence; an oxymoron which entails a different relationship with historical fact and chronology. Autofiction allows the third generation writer to make their process of historical reconstruction overt and dynamic—focusing not just on what is created but the very act of creating—whilst also illuminating the tensions and slippage between the historical and the fictive, literal truth and emotional truth.¹⁷² The reader, likewise, is implicated in a similar process of epistemological interrogation, because, as Marjorie Worthington notes, ‘the louder the truth claims, the more explicit the invitation to compare the fictional truth claims to the extra-textual facts, which deviate sharply from those depicted in the text.’¹⁷³ In this, autofiction both subverts and expands Phillippe Lejeune’s concept of the autobiographical pact, in which the use of the authorial ‘I’ asserts the (literal) authenticity of the presented narrative.¹⁷⁴ By doing so, the very self can be subjected to the same interrogation. This is exemplary of the shift outlined by Brian McHale from the epistemological dominant of modernist writing to the ontological dominant of the postmodern; a move from questions of *knowing* to those of *being*.¹⁷⁵ Ultimately, the use of postmodern autofiction allows the writer to examine position of the self within the absent field created by different and overlapping loci of traumas; to chart an understanding of the ways in which history, heritage, and experience shape the self; to accordingly situate the self across different chronotopes. In this, it is not only a creative but a political act, giving voice to certain marginalised experiences, including trauma itself, as well as cultural histories and present-day realities of xenophobia, disempowerment, and stigma.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷² This concept is perhaps best (and most famously) illustrated by Tim O’Brien’s assertion that ‘story-truth is truer sometimes than happening-truth’, appearing in a story entitled ‘Good Form’ in his autofictional Vietnam War short story collection, *The Things They Carried*.

Tim O’Brien, *The Things They Carried* (London: Fourth Estate, 2015), p. 179.

¹⁷³ Marjorie Worthington, ‘Fiction in the “Post-Truth” Era: The Ironic Effects of Autofiction’, *Critique*, 58:5 (2017), 471-483 (p. 477).

¹⁷⁴ Dix, p. 5.

¹⁷⁵ Brian McHale, ‘Change of Dominant from Modernist to Postmodernist Writing’, in *Approaching Postmodernism*, ed. by Douwe W. Fokkema and Hans Bertens (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1986), pp. 53-80.

¹⁷⁶ This is an issue, however, that very much must be approached from a critical as well as authorial standpoint. At present, there are still persistent issues regarding who can claim their narrative using the authorial ‘I’, with prolific suspicion—if not downright dismissal—levied against narratives written by women, people of colour, and those with transgender/nonbinary or queer sexual identities, to name but a few. This issue is explored at length by Olivia Sudjic, focusing predominantly on the issue of gender. She illuminates in particular the ways in which a female ‘I’ is expected either to suffer from ‘emotional incontinence’ or automatically treated as nonfiction. ‘[I]t’s maddening’, she writes, ‘how it’s both presumptuous for a woman to write beyond her limits (invariably those of her own experience) and equally presumptuous to write about or from that experience.’ Olivia Sudjic, *Exposure* (London: Peninsula Press, 2018), pp. 69, 93.

The use of such postmodern techniques play a distinct role in third generation writings. The writings of the first generation (Holocaust survivors) have tended to be in the form of autobiography or memoir, such as Primo Levi's *If This Is a Man* (1947), Viktor Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning* (1946), Elie Wiesel's *Night* (1956), and Gerda Weissmann Klein's *All But My Life* (1957). They have a strong fidelity to historical truth, and the representation of events, where possible, is direct. The second generation, broadly writing amidst the dominant period of literary postmodernism, can be said to sit somewhat in between the first and third generation approaches. Although there are many works that follow a similarly (auto)biographical model (for example, Eva Hoffman's *After Such Knowledge* (2004) or Bukiet's nonfictional introduction to *Nothing Makes You Free* (2002)), second generation literature tends to incorporate more allegorical elements, such as the disturbing transformation of a broken elevator into a deportation train carriage in Thane Rosenbaum's short story 'Cattle Car Complex' (2002), highlighting second generation character Adam Posner's inherited anxieties about confined spaces. Art Spiegelman's *MAUS* comics (1980-1991) are a notable example of second generation literature that experiments with the limits of representation. Spiegelman's use of the graphic novel medium allows him to create and dissolve limits when representing his relationship with his father and his Holocaust experience: the lines that delimit each frame are often burst and broken by its content, allowing it to spill across the page. Similarly, the inclusion of photographs and a second comic that Spiegelman created in his younger years (held within a large illustration of *MAUS* character Art's hands) blur the boundaries between the graphic novel as an artistic work and as a document, as some of the evidence used to form the final narrative project is included.¹⁷⁷ This both highlights the process of construction and complicates the fiction/nonfiction binary. It also hence acts as a work of autofiction, an idea that is strengthened by Spiegelman's use of self-conscious allegory: the story of his father's escape from Nazi persecution is visualised as a very literal game of cat and mouse. This process of representation is then made explicit through his depiction of himself at work on the comic wearing a mouse mask, seated atop a pile of corpses.¹⁷⁸ Such strata of representation and allegory express the complicated sense of identity experienced by both artist and character, and the image itself represents an attempt to unravel it.

¹⁷⁷ A photograph of Spiegelman's brother Richieu, who died during the Holocaust, appears in the dedication to the second volume of *MAUS* (p. 165 in the cited edition), and a photograph of his father in camp uniform appears on page 294. The comic in question, 'Prisoner on the Hell Planet: A Case History' appears on pages 102-105.

Art Spiegelman, *The Complete MAUS* (London: Penguin, 2003).

¹⁷⁸ Ibid, p. 201.

However, such experimentation and self-interrogation acquires a new level of self-consciousness in third generation literature. There are two primary explanations for this. The first is that, generally speaking, third generation writings coincide with late postmodernism (or even, as Adam Kelly and Stephen J. Burn would argue, post-postmodernism.)¹⁷⁹ From this vantage point, third generation authors writing at the turn of the millennium can, in the words of Burn, ‘trace fuller arcs for the careers of the early postmodern writers, which makes it easier to distinguish their major works and to reconceive their artistic ambitions.’¹⁸⁰ The postmodern devices they employ, therefore, are self-consciously deployed as a development—rather than participation in the creation or rejection—of postmodernism. As Burn writes, they ‘had mastered postmodernism’s theoretical toolkit, but [...] sought to move beyond its premises’, a shift which has lent itself well to third generation aims: Burn attributes to this literary climate a stronger ‘belief in the shaping influence of temporal process—that the things that happen to you in the past make a difference to who you are in the present’, including, pertinently, a focus on genetic inheritance; while Kelly notes an

intense awareness of the limitations of language, its recursive self-consciousness and the possibility it offers for events of undecidable honesty or manipulation, meets with a renewed wish to return ethical intent to literature after the aestheticizing impulses of modernism and the intellectual abstractions of postmodernism. These writers seek to rehabilitate concepts such as love, communication, and responsibility by renewing the possibility of literature as an open and oscillating transaction between writer and reader[.]¹⁸¹

Therefore, while postmodern techniques such as metafiction and autofiction can be observed in the third generation’s literary predecessors—such as, notably, the influential Philip Roth—their use by the third generation implies a certain referentiality not only to this literary heritage, but also of an appropriation of the technique towards specific ethical rather than experimental imperatives. The second reason that third generation literature is so self-exploratory and self-critical can be attributed to the third generation’s unique position

¹⁷⁹ Adam Kelly, ‘Moments of Decision in Contemporary American Fiction: Roth, Auster, Eugenides’, *Critique*, 51:4 (2010), 313-332 (p. 328); Stephen J. Burn, *Jonathan Franzen at the End of Postmodernism* (London: Bloomsbury, 2008). ProQuest Ebook.

¹⁸⁰ Burn, p. 19 of 152.

¹⁸¹ Ibid, pp. 26, 34 of 152; Kelly, ‘Moments of Decision in Contemporary American Fiction’, p. 328.

with regard to the Holocaust. Often simultaneously the last living link to the atrocity whilst being more distant from the frequently claustrophobic traumatised family environment, the third generation are situated at the juncture between proximity and distance. Members express an awareness of the events of the twentieth century both as part of their familial and personal identities and as a historical event. Consequently, though third generation identity is influenced by the Holocaust, it is not overwhelmed by it; such critical distance allows the third generation writer to apply their knowledge and experience of the transmitted effects of Holocaust trauma to other contexts and traumas, both personal and historical. As Lee Behlman observes, '[w]hat stands out [...] 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.'¹⁸² This is the principle which will be explored in detail in this thesis, with the concept of testimony in mind.

Therefore, before proceeding, it is prudent to briefly make explicit some methodological considerations. Most importantly, a focus on testimony mandates the centering of the narrative considered: the intention is to explore the experiences and intersections of different traumas *as depicted*, as opposed to measuring them in terms of knowledge or convention, or assessing the extent of the author's authority to write on the subject. In other words, traditionally evaluative and prescriptive practices of literary criticism are eschewed in favour of the project of bearing witness to the testimony of different and overlapping experiences of trauma, rather than its adherence to strict guidelines on authentic trauma portrayal. This is especially important because, as highlighted in this introduction, the experience of trauma is as multifaceted as trauma itself, and there cannot be said to exist a singular framework for traumatisation and posttraumatic experience. In fact, this is one reason for the often contradictory scientific and psychological literature on the subject, which frequently fails to take into account the reality of diverse individual responses.¹⁸³ This method is in many ways parallel to that of field philosophy, as elucidated by Vinciane Despret, in its commitment to the centralisation of the interests of the subjects studied (in this case, their representations of trauma) rather than those of the researcher (a checklist of trauma symptoms or conventions of

¹⁸² Lee Behlman, 'The Escapist: Fantasy, Folklore, and the Pleasures of the Comic Book in Recent Jewish American Holocaust Fiction', in *Unfinalized Moments: Essays in the Development of a Contemporary Jewish Narrative*, ed. by Derek Parker Royal (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2011), pp. 97-111 (p. 100).

¹⁸³ See especially the debate on secondary traumatisation and psychobiology in the third generation.

literary representation, for example).¹⁸⁴ Similarly, in my preparatory work for this thesis I have endeavoured to reduce what Martin Savransky and Despret term the ‘ethics of estrangement’ by engaging with members of the third generation via a programme of events hosted by a New York-based third generation organisation, thus guiding the direction of my academic research according to third generation interests *from the perspective of the third generation*.¹⁸⁵ As a planned research trip to the United States was rendered infeasible due to COVID-19 restrictions, this research was carried out via the online programme. Thus, not only is a strict academic boundary dissolved, reducing the academic bias of my understanding of issues affecting the third generation, but, in line with Andrea Hepworth’s idea that ‘debates, discussions and also demonstrations can act as a verbal, living memorial, a virtual space in which memory is possible’, a first-hand source of information regarding the ways in which historical trauma is memorialised is also investigated and utilised.¹⁸⁶

This methodology is not uncontroversial, however, particularly in light of recent critical responses against what might be termed the rise of a ‘trauma genre’, and as such raises important questions regarding the role the critic plays in defining a trauma and the ethical boundaries of its representation, or the value of literary judgement in criticism. Alan Gibbs, in his book *Contemporary American Trauma Narratives*, makes a compelling case against the ways in which a ‘vicious circle develops whereby dominant theoretical models inspire works of fiction which are then taken to endorse and therefore somehow prove the theory’s validity’ within the field of trauma literature.¹⁸⁷ Although this is something I shall return to in the first chapter, it is worth noting here that Gibbs’s concerns, echoed by others such as Parul Sehgal, lie in the potential for easily-replicable, aestheticised trauma representation to efface the experience of trauma, and that appropriate bounds are necessary for preventing both the commodification of trauma and its deployment in lieu of narrative depth.¹⁸⁸ While it is undoubtable that my own methodology has limitations in this aspect of trauma discourse, I believe that my expanded account of trauma warrants a more open approach to textual analysis for two reasons further to those delineated above. The first is that, in its

¹⁸⁴ Vinciane Despret, ‘Out of The Books: Field Philosophy’, trans. by Brett Buchanan and Matthew Chrulew, *Parallax*, 24:4 (2018), 416-428.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid, p. 416.

¹⁸⁶ Andrea Hepworth, ‘From Survivor to Fourth-Generation Memory: Literal and Discursive Sites of Memory in Post-dictatorship Germany and Spain’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 54:1 (2019), 139-162 (p. 141).

¹⁸⁷ Alan Gibbs, *Contemporary American Trauma Narratives* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), p. 153.

¹⁸⁸ Parul Sehgal, ‘The Case Against the Trauma Plot’, *New Yorker*, 27 December 2021 <<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2022/01/03/the-case-against-the-trauma-plot>> [Accessed 7 October 2022], n.p.

interdisciplinary focus and appreciation of trauma's nature as a lived experience rather than a simple literary device, ethical considerations arising both within and outwith the text become blurred; as each author studied blends the real with the fictive within their texts, whether it be real historical events or an autobiographical focus, so too must the ethical considerations of the critic reflect this binate focus. Secondly, because my expanded account of trauma encompasses individual, transgenerational, and cultural levels of trauma, it moves beyond the 'therapeutic register' criticised by Sehgal for its narrow, 'easily diagrammed' narrative of the self, towards a more desirable 'generational, social, and political one.'¹⁸⁹ In this way, it is my hope that my nuanced theory of trauma will both mitigate these concerns, and that its strengths will act as a valuable complement to the work of critics such as Gibbs, contributing to an ongoing interdisciplinary dialogue occurring both within and outwith academia surrounding the ethics of trauma representation, and in which the critic is but one participant.

Moreover, I have made further attempts to ensure that my methodology does not impede the rigour of analysis. Firstly, I apply a soft form of triangulation to my examination, comparing the text itself to historical and psychological knowledges. In order to ensure the congruity of this concern with my focus on testimony, two further caveats must be applied. The first is that the purpose of this form of triangulation is not so much to assess the validity of any events or emotions depicted in the text, but rather to open up points of divergence to interrogation, to establish what such deviation may illuminate. Secondly, and relatedly, the historical and psychological information included in this introduction and throughout should serve to guide contextual understanding, rather than constitute a measure of authenticity. As Laub underscores in his exploration of testimony, some understanding of the subject matter at hand is necessary, but it should not efface the writer's own narrative.¹⁹⁰ In practical terms, this involves reference to the accepted knowledge of trauma as outlined here, but with sensitivity to the possibility of experiences that are partially or completely unaccounted for in the literature. In short, the methods of this thesis seek to foster a much-needed openness to experience and new perspectives, in addition to contributing to an burgeoning area of trauma and literary trauma research.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Laub, 'Bearing Witness or the Vicissitudes of Listening', p. 61.

Trauma, Transmission, and the Third Generation

Building on important work, such as that of Aarons and Berger in their book, *Third Generation Holocaust Representation: Trauma, History, and Memory*, this thesis focuses on the work of three contemporary American third-generation authors: Jonathan Safran Foer, Nicole Krauss, and Rachel Kadish. In doing so, it adds two key elements to Aarons and Berger's study. Firstly, in considering the intersections between individual, transgenerational, and cultural trauma, further nuance is applied to our understanding of the third generation and trauma. Secondly, because this thesis concerns the third generation as much as it does trauma representation, its analysis of the work of each of the three included authors as an oeuvre allows for a more multifaceted appraisal of the different issues and questions considered by third-generation authors as they progress over time, a comparative possibility which is unavailable in the analysis of a single piece of writing. This thesis, therefore, creates comparisons and contrasts both within each author's oeuvre, and between the oeuvres of the three. The writers were selected with this in mind, as all three, in addition to being American third generation Holocaust descendants who write on both the third generation experience and include certain autobiographical elements in their work, have bodies of work whose texts express a range of both genres and foci, creating an interesting environment for an investigation into the different contexts to which third generation concerns can be applied. Beginning with the most famous, Foer, whose novel *Everything is Illuminated* is widely considered to exemplify third generation writing and therefore acts as a useful reference point in my examination of the other texts, I progress via Krauss to the least well-known, Kadish, simultaneously negotiating the broadening themes that underpin their respective works: family, writing, and history. While each chapter begins with a short overview of the thematic concerns and influences of the author's entire oeuvre, I will discuss two or three key texts as the main body of each chapter.

In the first chapter, 'On Family: Jonathan Safran Foer', I provide extended analyses of the novels *Everything is Illuminated*, *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*, and *Here I Am*, all of which are heavily concerned with families and interactions within family systems. In my analysis of *Everything is Illuminated*, I consider both the subversive potential of the magical realist Trachimbrod narrative and the defamiliarised history embodied in Alex's perspective on Jonathan's third-generation roots trip, both of which point towards the ways in which the writing and understanding of history is a necessarily incomplete and creative process. The process of the narrativization of history is also implicated in my reading of *Extremely Loud &*

Incredibly Close, in which I examine both the role of Oskar's exceptionalist narrative of 9/11 and ways in which it is contextualised by his grandparents' experiences of the Allied firebombing of Dresden, noting Foer's insistence on the individuation and focus on tragedy's human victims with regard to cultural traumas. Finally, with *Here I Am* I look at the ways in which Foer extends his consideration of the legacy of the Holocaust to the fourth generation, alongside an examination of the process of narrativising a cultural trauma that goes beyond that involved in *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* in his imagining of the destruction of Israel.

In the second chapter, 'On Writing: Nicole Krauss', I turn from Foer to Krauss, whose works have similarities in terms of experimental elements and thematically open up from the theme of family to that of writing. The three works considered—*The History of Love*, *Great House*, and *Forest Dark*—highlight the importance of writing both as a craft and a product. With the first, *The History of Love*, I highlight the role of fact and fiction in representing traumatic history, and literature's potential to foster connections between nations and generations. This internationality is also present in *Great House*, wherein I consider the fragmented and multiplicitous histories evoked by the writing desk, which is suggestive both of the impossibility of a unified sense of history, and of the simultaneously familiarising and defamiliarising effects of analogous representation of tragedy. Finally, in the section on *Forest Dark*, I explore Krauss's use of autofiction to interrogate the concepts of accepted and constructed realities, and the tensions between the writer-self and the pressures exerted by cultural trauma narratives to depict history in accordance with particular socio-political agendas.

In the third and final chapter, 'On History: Rachel Kadish', I examine two novels by the least well-known writer, Kadish—*From a Sealed Room* and *The Weight of Ink*—which have at their heart a sense of the importance, and indeed perpetual presence of, history. My analysis of *From a Sealed Room* makes note of the ways in which Kadish depicts the reciprocal influences of multiple histories, including the Holocaust, on present-day Israel. Also of importance is the relationship between American Maya and Holocaust survivor Shifra, wherein the reciprocal demands of history upon the present, and vice versa, are highlighted. Such a transhistorical interaction is taken to a new level in *The Weight of Ink*, in the context of which I consider the importance of interpersonal empathic connection across history, the role of subjectivity and invention in the creation of a historical narrative, and the nature of the historical record as something inherently partial. Both novels also, as with the

work of all the writers in this thesis, I will demonstrate in due course, underline that the importance of history is fundamentally associated with the future as much as with the past.

Chapter One: On Family

Jonathan Safran Foer

Simply and impossibly: FOR MY FAMILY

- Jonathan Safran Foer, dedication to *Everything is Illuminated*¹⁹¹

Introduction

Jonathan Safran Foer, since the publication of his first novel at the age of 25, has been a prominent, and polarising, literary figure, developing a kind of celebrity status with all its associated exaltation and vitriol. Although holding many awards to his name, including a National Jewish Book Award and a Guardian First Book Award, and earning media praise for being a ‘literary wunderkind’ and comparison to acclaimed writers such as Philip Roth, he has also drawn the ire of numerous critics, including a notoriously insulting review by Harry Siegel, and has appeared on *NY Weekly*’s list of ‘50 Loathsome New Yorkers’.¹⁹² The ‘Marmite’ author, as Alan Bett puts it, has received reviews ranging from the glowing, praising his ‘virtuosic, visionary, ingenious, hilarious, heartbreaking’ writing, including from notable names such as Joyce Carol Oates and Susan Sontag, to the incendiary, with accusations of kitch, pretentiousness, and the exploitation of tragedy.¹⁹³ One recurring theme in the slew of negative reviews—part of what Sarah Weinman terms ‘Shadenfoer’, a word coined for the specificity of the hatred of the author—is the ambitious scope of his novels: the Holocaust too huge a tragedy for *Everything is Illuminated*, 9/11 too recent to be grappled with in *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*, the impact destruction of Israel a scenario too broad to be hypothesised within the pages of *Here I Am*.¹⁹⁴ Yet, in Foer’s own words,

¹⁹¹ Jonathan Safran Foer, *Everything is Illuminated* (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 0. All further references are to this edition, and are given after quotations in the text. Unless otherwise specified, all italics occur in the original.

¹⁹² Elizabeth Landau, ‘The Foer questions: Literary wunderkind turns 35’, *CNN*, 5 March 2012 <<https://edition.cnn.com/2012/03/04/living/jonathan-safran-foer-profile/index.html>> [Accessed 10 May 2021]; Robert Birnbaum, ‘Jonathan Safran Foer’, *Identity Theory*, 26 May 2003 <<http://www.identitytheory.com/jonathan-safran-foer/>> [Accessed 4 April 2020], n.p.

¹⁹³ Alan Bett, ‘Jonathan Safran Foer on Here I Am’, *Skinny*, 5 September 2016 <<https://www.theskinny.co.uk/books/features/jonathan-safran-foer>> [Accessed 8 April 2021], n.p.; Gabe Hudson, ‘Everything is Interrogated’, *Village Voice*, 22 March 2005 <<https://www.villagevoice.com/2005/03/22/everything-is-interrogated/>> [Accessed 16 June 2021], n.p.

¹⁹⁴ Sarah Weinman, ‘What’s with all the Jonathan Safran Foer-phobia?’, *Guardian*, 11 December 2008 <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2008/dec/11/safran-foer-hatred>> [Accessed 16 June 2021], n.p.

I just wouldn't be interested in a book that didn't bite off more than it could chew. I'm not interested in successful books. I'm interested in really terrific failures. If a book is a success, it's closed; it's done. The experience is complete. It wasn't reaching for anything that it couldn't touch.¹⁹⁵

Indeed, all three of the novels explored in this chapter present a kind of incompleteness, a sense of questioning that must occur beyond their pages, that is characteristic of Foer's interest and participation in the creative processes inherent in the writing of history. As with many third generation authors, Foer is keen not to present history as a finalised, inevitable product, or indeed wholly anterior to the present day.

In addition to their ambition, Foer's works are also heavily concerned with the opportunities and limitations associated with language. From Alex's translated English in *Everything is Illuminated* to Oskar's multimedia scrapbook in *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*, the silence of Holocaust survivor grandparents to the charged rhetoric of political leaders in *Here I Am*, Foer is interested in the tensions between what is said and what is not, what is represented and the devices for doing so. In a piece of short fiction published in *The New Yorker*, entitled 'A Primer for the Punctuation of Heart Disease', he even explores the possibilities of new forms of punctuation to better capture the nuances of meaning and expression, such as the addition of a 'willed silence mark', which denotes 'an intentional silence, the conversational equivalent of building a wall over which you can't climb, through which you can't see, against which you break the bones of your hands and wrists', or a 'reversible colon' which indicates 'when what appears on either side elaborates, summates, implicates, etc., what's on the other side. In other words, the two halves of the sentence explain each other'.¹⁹⁶ In another short story, 'About the Typefaces Not Used in This Edition', Foer develops a magical realist set of typefaces that attempt to encapsulate the pain of one man's loss of his wife, Elena, which move and fade and change over time to create different emphases and symbolic meaning.¹⁹⁷ Foer's interest in the capacity of language as a mode of

¹⁹⁵ Dave, 'Unlocking Jonathan Safran Foer', *Powell's*, 18 April 2006
<<https://www.powells.com/post/interviews/unlocking-jonathan-safran-foer>> [Accessed 6 November 2020], n.p.

¹⁹⁶ Jonathan Safran Foer, 'A Primer for the Punctuation of Heart Disease', *New Yorker*, 10 June 2002, pp. 82-85 (pp. 82, 84).

¹⁹⁷ Jonathan Safran Foer, 'About the Typefaces Not Used in This Edition', *Guardian*, 7 December 2002
<<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2002/dec/07/guardianfirstbookaward2002.gurardianfirstbookaward>> [Accessed 10 May 2021].

expression, moreover, also intersects with the visual, and he even goes as far as to suggest that visual arts inspire his work more than literature.¹⁹⁸ This is clear throughout his oeuvre, including the visual content of *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*, as well as an edited anthology of writings inspired by Joseph Cornell's art and collaborative work with photographer Hiroshi Sugimoto on a book named *Joe*.

Another major influence is, of course, trauma, to which Foer is no stranger. Having gleaned information and experience from a variety of contexts, from a course on abnormal psychology during university, to the harrowing experience of an explosion in a science lab as a child which left him badly injured, Foer directs most of his learnings towards the context of the Holocaust.¹⁹⁹ A member of the third generation—both of Foer's maternal grandparents survived the Holocaust—Foer's investigations into his grandparents' stories have featured in his literary endeavours, especially *Everything is Illuminated*. Appointed a member of the United States Holocaust Memorial Council in 2013, Foer is clearly concerned with the transhistorical and transgenerational effects of the Holocaust, and its implications past and future.²⁰⁰ In following on from the experimental writings of his literary predecessors—such as David Grossman, whose novel *See Under: Love* similarly grapples with the effects of the Holocaust and employs an encyclopaedic structure that resembles certain parts of 'The Book of Antecedents' in *Everything is Illuminated* and the 'Bible' in *Here I Am*; and the magical realist *The Street of Crocodiles* by Bruno Schulz, a book which Foer also reimagined into a kind of literary collage called *Tree of Codes*, whose die-cut pages innovatively create a new story by erasure, by absence—Foer applies his interests in linguistic experimentation in order to present the non-verbalised and non-verbalisable aspects of the trauma and its legacy.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Foer's work is strongly concerned with family and family systems, including the relationships between spouses, siblings, parents and children, and, most frequently, grandparents and grandchildren. The author himself has stated that family is of the utmost importance to his work, explaining during the Edinburgh International Book Festival in 2016 that

¹⁹⁸ Jonathan Safran Foer, 'Jeffrey Eugenides by Jonathan Safran Foer', *BOMB*, 1 October 2002 <<https://bombmagazine.org/articles/jeffrey-eugenides/>> [Accessed 6 November 2020], n.p.

¹⁹⁹ Lev Grossman, 'Jonathan Safran Foer's Family Drama', *TIME*, 23 August 2016 <<https://time.com/4458055/jonathan-safran-foer-here-i-am/>> [Accessed 15 February 2021], n.p; Jonathan Safran Foer, 'Once Upon a Life: Jonathan Safran Foer', *Guardian*, 28 February 2010 <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2010/feb/28/jonathan-safran-foer-the-explosion>> [Accessed 10 May 2021].

²⁰⁰ Ron Kampeas, 'Jonathan Safran Foer named to Holocaust Memorial Council', *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, 3 February 2013 <<https://www.jta.org/2013/02/03/united-states/jonathan-safran-foer-named-to-holocaust-memorial-council>> [Accessed 11 May 2021].

I've never met a person who doesn't wrestle with family, even [...] or perhaps especially if family is absent, or if it's a fraught relationship, so I just can't imagine that there's anyone [...] who doesn't make some kind of strong connection between personal identity and familial relationships, and for whom those aren't central themes[.] ²⁰¹

Indeed, in addition to the references and inspiration from his own family that pervade his writing, each of the novels studied in this chapter focus on, and have at their heart, a family. It is within this context that Foer provides the main vehicle for the interrogation of issues such as the transgenerational transmission of trauma, (mis)communication, history and memory, and, therefore, will underlie my analysis throughout this chapter. Focusing on each of Foer's three novels in turn—*Everything is Illuminated*, *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*, and *Here I Am*—this chapter will consider the intersections between individual, transgenerational, and cultural trauma as represented by Foer. To do this, I make use of aspects of the trauma theory outlined in the introduction such as the mechanisms by which trauma can be transmitted transgenerationally, PTSD symptomatology, and the processes by which a cultural trauma is narrated by cultural leaders, in tandem with formal literary aspects such as autofiction, magical realism, and visual and typographical experimentation. The result is a clearer picture of third-generation negotiation and representation of such issues via its most well-known writer, thereby contributing both to literary scholarship on the third generation and adding complexity to the existing body of scholarship on Foer, through my more nuanced definition of trauma and consideration of these works as an oeuvre.

Everything is Illuminated

Foer's debut novel, *Everything is Illuminated* (2002), is in many ways the third generation roots quest novel par excellence. Based on a real trip Foer took to Ukraine as a student, the autofictional narrative follows a young Jewish American named Jonathan Safran Foer, who, alongside his Ukrainian translator Alex, searches for Augustine, the woman he believes helped his grandfather escape the Nazis. However, while they find the empty site

²⁰¹ Stuart Kelly, *Jonathan Safran Foer (2016 event)*, online recording, Edinburgh International Book Festival, 23 September 2016
<<https://www.edbookfest.co.uk/media-gallery/item/jonathan-safran-foer-at-the-edinburgh-international-book-festival>> [Accessed 19 August 2021].

where his shtetl, Trachimbrod, once stood, Jonathan learns nothing more of what happened to his grandfather; it is in fact Alex who learns more about his own family's history, including his grandfather Eli's involvement, and indeed culpability, in the Holocaust. Hence, Foer's exploration of the Holocaust and its transmitted legacy is staged as a dialogue between two different family systems, encompassing the traumas of both victims and perpetrators. To this end, the novel also assumes an epistolary structure, consisting of chapters of the novels Jonathan and Alex write in response to their experiences searching for Trachimbrod and send to each other; the former an invented and playful history of Trachimbrod and the latter an account of the two characters' shared trip through Ukraine. These chapters are interspersed with letters from Alex, who comments on Jonathan's writing, and refers to comments Jonathan appears to have made on his own, a dialogue that can be seen to shape the narrative trajectory. For example, Alex writes in one of his letters that in the enclosed chapter he '*invented things that I thought would appease you, funny things and sad things*' (54), in response to a comment by Jonathan that '*humorous is the only truthful way to tell a sad story*' (53). Indeed, the following chapter is filled with both poignant and very funny moments, but in the chapter in which Eli's connection to the Holocaust is revealed, Alex asserts that 'I do not want to be funny [anymore]' (219), and it is at this point that the humour and invention in Alex's chapters disintegrate. In this way, Foer presents an explicit and creative questioning of different concerns, from the ethics of Holocaust representation to the roles of history and trauma in the formation of one's identity. In his own words, 'is the Holocaust exactly that which cannot be imagined? What are one's responsibilities to "the truth" of a story, and what is "the truth"? Can historical accuracy be replaced with imaginative accuracy? The eye with the mind's eye?'²⁰²

Such questions, characteristic of third generation enquiry, are furthermore presented and explored across multiple layers of authorial presence with regard to Jonathan (Safran Foer) alone. As Sonja Longolius writes, 'right from the start, we are confronted with three "Jonathan Safran Foers:" Foer, the author of *Everything Is Illuminated* [sic]; Jonathan, the narrator of the "historical" part of *Everything is Illuminated*; and "the hero," the character of Alex's part of *Everything is Illuminated*.'²⁰³ The result is a complex metafictional form of

²⁰² Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 'Press Release: Everything is Illuminated by Jonathan Safran Foer' (2003) <http://www.houghtonmifflinbooks.com/booksellers/press_release/pdf/everything_foer.pdf> [Accessed 4 April 2020], p. 4 of 6.

²⁰³ Sonja Longolius, *Performing Authorship: Strategies of »Becoming an Author« in the Works of Paul Auster, Candice Breitz, Sophie Calle, and Jonathan Safran Foer* (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2016), p. 157.

autofiction.²⁰⁴ Because, as discussed in the introduction, autofiction allows the writer to situate the self in new and ontologically alien contexts, Foer's metafictional autofiction acts as a prism through which this self refracts, exposing at least three different accents on the third generation experience.²⁰⁵ Foer himself has described his relationship to the Jonathans of *Everything is Illuminated* as 'profoundly different people who happen to share a profound amount', suggesting different ways of understanding and responding to the challenges presented by the silences and absences of the Holocaust.²⁰⁶ Through the character of Alex, Foer additionally examines the differences between the traumas transmitted through absence and knowledge, and concurrent representational decisions regarding realistic portrayal or imaginative invention, culminating in the breakdown of language in Jonathan's novel—leaving pages of ellipses in place of the shtetl's destruction—and the excess in Alex's. These two positions are neither reconciled nor ranked; as Foer writes, *Everything is Illuminated*

proposes the possibility of a responsible duality, of 'did and didn't,' of things being one way and also the opposite way. Rather than aligning itself with either 'how things were' or 'how things could have been,' the novel measures the difference between the two, and by so doing, attempts to reflect the way things *feel*.²⁰⁷

It is this duality that will constitute the main thrust of this section, through the lens of trauma and its transgenerational transmission.

The two narrative strands have at their heart the Holocaust destruction of Trachimbrod, the point to which both are drawn spatially and temporally: as Jonathan, Alex, and Eli move closer physically to the site of Trachimbrod in Alex's chapters, Jonathan's history of Trachimbrod progresses towards the moment of its annihilation. This emphasis on movement, rather than the plot being rooted in a fixed place or time, is enhanced by the dynamism of the narrative and the dialogue between its author characters, which encompasses representational concerns regarding aspects such as the role of historical fact, the use of humour, and the

²⁰⁴ This is especially complicated given that Alex may actually be a creation of Jonathan in addition to Foer: Jonathan's diary contains a detailed account of Alex's expulsion of his father before it has actually occurred (160). It is ambiguous as to whether this is a prophecy or that Alex's reading of it inspires his later rebellion.

²⁰⁵ See pp. 56-57.

²⁰⁶ Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 'Press Release', p. 5 of 6.

²⁰⁷ Ibid, pp. 4-5 of 6.

morality of presenting the unrepresentable. Although the others are considered throughout, it is the latter concern which hinges on and is defined by the climactic moment of the novel: the revelation of Lista's testimony. Initially thought by the group to be Augustine, Lista is a traumatised survivor of the massacre at Trachimbrod and is able to shed light on the murder of its inhabitants, as well as providing material artifacts such as the recovered personal items of murdered Trachimbroders from her collection. The themes of time and space are also heavily implicated in Foer's depictions of Lista, her house, and her trauma. In particular, the disrupted temporality associated with trauma is taken to an extreme degree in Lista's characterisation; she seems to be trapped in her Holocaust past, as exhibited in her poignant final question '[i]s the war over?' and assertion that 'I must go in and care for my baby [...] It is missing me' (193). This latter statement, which is striking due to her advanced age and the clear absence of an infant in her small living space, is especially disturbing when placed in the context of her account of the massacre. Aside from instances such as the burning of the synagogue, members of the shtetl being forced to spit on the Torah by Nazi soldiers, and the murder of her four-year-old sister, Lista describes in harrowing detail the moment when a soldier shot her heavily pregnant sister in the vagina and left her for dead. During this account, she also avoids answering questions about her own survival, instead pointedly returning to the story of her sister. This, combined with her later reference to her baby, suggests that she may have been relating her own experience in the dissociated third person. In this sense, her memory is dislocated from the space of her own body, and her experience not subject to an ordinary temporal awareness; this past is experienced to a great extent in the present tense.

The issues of temporality and spatiality are even more clear with regards to her house and its collection of Trachimbrod artifacts. One room is described as comprising entirely of boxes, with miscellaneous labeled contents ranging from the concrete to the abstract, for example 'SILVER/PERFUME/PINWHEELS'; 'WATCHES/WINTER'; and 'DARKNESS' (147). While, as Jenni Adams writes, this 'suggest[s] the availability of all aspects of the past (and specifically, Holocaust) experience to recovery and present day knowledge', Katrin Amian argues that such an availability is a 'fantasy', and that '[w]hat is lacking is "meaning" or "context," something that would "explain" the massive collection of boxes, photographs, and ordinary objects and would—to [...] play on Alex's diction—"illuminate" the strange categories under which they are filed.'²⁰⁸ Such meaning and context is lost in the absence of

²⁰⁸ Jenni Adams, *Magic Realism in Holocaust Literature: Troping the Traumatic Real* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 32; Katrin Amian, *Rethinking Postmodernism(s): Charles S. Peirce and the Pragmatist Negotiations of Thomas Pynchon, Toni Morrison, and Jonathan Safran Foer* (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi, 2008), pp. 163, 164.

the human element to the traces of history contained in the boxes, a separation fabricated by the historical death of the items' owners and their resultant removal from their emotional and functional contexts. Consequently, the collection adopts the aspect of an archive or museum, and is unsettlingly reminiscent of the piles of decontextualised objects such as shoes and spectacles that were gathered by the Nazis, the likes of which are on display in the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum.

This museum-like quality of these decontextualised and detemporalised items furthermore indicates the heterotopic nature of the house (and even Foer's depiction of Ukraine itself in *Everything is Illuminated*) per Michel Foucault's concept. Explaining that the heterotopia is a place in which a real site within a culture is 'simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted', Foucault remarks on the interlinking of heterotopia and heterochrony:

heterotopias and heterochronies are structured and distributed in a relatively complex fashion. First of all, there are heterotopias of indefinitely accumulating time, for example museums and libraries. Museums and libraries have become heterotopias in which time never stops building up and topping its own summit[.]²⁰⁹

This effect is only compounded by the spectre of death that surrounds the collection, created both through the knowledge of the Holocaust context and the ostentatious absence of life attached to these everyday items; for example, the missing wearer implied by a pair of spectacles or item of clothing. Foer emphasises this idea through Alex's first impressions of the grounds of Lista's house, wherein

Many clothes were lying [...] in abnormal arrangements, and they appeared like the clothes of invisible [*sic*] dead bodies. I reasoned that there were many people in the white house, because there were men's clothes and women's clothes and clothes for children and even babies. (116)

Of course, the house is home only to Lista, who *is*, by her own assertion, 'Trachimbrod' (118), but the clothes contain the eerie, ghost-like impressions of their murdered wearers.

²⁰⁹ Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', trans. by Jay Miskowiec, *Diacritics*, 16:1 (1986), 22-27 (pp. 24, 26).

Thus, in addition to the absence of bodies, Lista's house full of personal effects acts in some ways as a kind of cemetery, which Foucault also attributes the status of heterotopia: 'the cemetery begins with this strange heterochrony, the loss of life, and with this quasi-eternity in which her permanent lot is dissolution and disappearance.'²¹⁰ These complexities of translocated space and time are hence not only used by Foer to represent trauma, but to indicate the ways in which this trauma and its traces are received by later generations in terms of a palpable spatio-temporal distance and as a site reflective of, and yet other to, our own world.

Yet, despite Lista's account of the massacre at Trachimbrod, Jonathan's knowledge of his familial Holocaust history is not significantly expanded, and remains unknown. Like Foer and many other members of the third generation, Jonathan primarily receives the trauma of the Holocaust as an absence or lacuna. His history is one pieced together from fragments of knowledge, such as his grandmother's discreet weighing of him, an example drawn from Foer's own life which describes his grandmother's compulsive anxiety stemming from her traumatic experience of near-starvation escaping Nazi Europe. Foer's/Jonathan's knowledge of his grandfather's personal history is even more limited. In fact, his journey to Ukraine (itself an attempt to learn more about his grandfather's wartime past) is facilitated only by some maps and a photograph of his grandfather with Augustine and her family. The photograph provides both connection to and alienation from Jonathan's family history: as Hirsch writes, '[h]istorical photographs from a traumatic past authenticate the past's existence, what Roland Barthes calls its "ça a été" or "having-been-there," and, in their flat two-dimensionality, they also signal its insurmountable distance and "derealization".'²¹¹ In other words, the photograph provides a small window into his life at the time of the war, across physical and temporal distances, and attests to his presence there, both in its physical and social landscape. However, the image also emphasises distance, both because of the palpable presence of those same physical and temporal distances and because the family and the scene are alien. Even their names are unknown; that the woman is named 'Augustine' is itself conjecture, based on the writing on the back of the photograph. 'For all I know the writing doesn't have anything to do with the picture', Jonathan remarks. 'It could be that he used this for scrap paper' (61). From the outset, therefore, Jonathan's reconstruction of his family's traumatic past is based to an extent on interpretation and invention, and one that is subject to further abstractions. As Doro Wiese notes, later in the novel 'Augustine transforms

²¹⁰ Ibid, p. 26.

²¹¹ Hirsch, p. 116.

from a person with boxes of photos into a photograph and a generalizable name, one which might be used to refer to others, regardless of their gender, nationality, religion or age. Augustine thus becomes the most generalizable name imaginable'.²¹² The Augustine of the photograph becomes something of a metaphor or ideal stripped of her original personhood, reconstructed as a symbol. Jonathan, Alex, and Eli often contemplate her image in times of distress or indecision, to the extent that when he brings the photograph with him to the beach, Alex states that he '*is not in [his] normal solitude*' (53), and both Jonathan and Alex describe '*falling in love with her*' (24). Augustine becomes a concept charged with different meanings for each character, and especially Eli, which will be discussed in more detail later in this section.

The heterotopic landscape of Ukraine becomes another important site of invention. The Eastern European physical and conceptual locus of Foer's meditation on transgenerational trauma arises primarily because, as Aliko Varvogli elucidates, Jonathan 'conceives of his family's wartime past in terms of actual geographical space, rather than imagining it in terms of psychological trauma, or memories handed down through generations.'²¹³ She explains that he looks to the landscape to fill the absences felt in his identity by the silence surrounding his family history (which, Foer suggests, are often deliberate: 'I don't know [...] We couldn't ask her anything about it' (61) Jonathan asserts emphatically to Alex, when he asks whether his grandmother could shed any light on the photograph of Augustine), as 'part of the meaning of that identity is linked with a past that happened elsewhere.'²¹⁴ The Ukraine imagined by Jonathan thus becomes a virtual site in its inscription of memories: the actual landscape may not appear to bear any traces of his grandparents' trauma, but such memories and Jonathan's relation to them are nonetheless real. Hence, the novel is distinct, as Mita Banerjee observes, 'in virtualizing Jewishness, and in virtualizing sites of memory.'²¹⁵ This is compounded by the fact that when the group reaches the site of Trachimbrod, they encounter a very literal absence in the grassy field that remains. In the words of Amian, they 'find "nothing" on their journey into the past, nothing that would exist beyond or outside of the imaginative realm of lost

²¹² Doro Wiese, 'Evoking a Memory of the Future in Foer's *Everything is Illuminated*', *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture*, 14:4 (2012) <<https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1865>> p. 5 of 8.

²¹³ Aliko Varvogli, *Travel and Dislocation in Contemporary American Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 2012), p. 86.

For more analyses of the relationship between the landscape and (Holocaust) memory, see Whitehead, pp. 48-78; Simon Schama, *Landscape & Memory* (London: HarperCollins, 1995).

²¹⁴ Varvogli, p. 86.

²¹⁵ Mita Banerjee, 'Roots Trips and Virtual Ethnicity: Jonathan Safran Foer's *Everything is Illuminated*', in *Transnational American Memories*, ed. by Udo J. Hebel (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009), pp. 145-169 (p. 149).

memories and proliferating stories, no referent to history that might move beyond the trivial non-sense of a grassy field.’²¹⁶ This ultimate absence, signifying the failure of Jonathan’s quest for information and material reference points regarding his familial history, is that which induces him to reinvent history through the magical realist Trachimbrod narrative.

Although magical realism is most often associated with postcolonial studies, particularly within the Latin American context, critics such as Caroline Rody and Adams argue that it proves a very useful medium for the portrayal of some aspects of Holocaust memory.²¹⁷ In fact, Rody suggests that the two contexts are, to an extent, comparable: the forced designation of European Jews during the Holocaust as non-European places them on the margins of the Western dominant.²¹⁸ Certainly, in a manner parallel to postcolonial magical realism, the post-Holocaust magical realism of *Everything is Illuminated* undermines the predominant historical narrative (in which the Jewish populace are rendered the passive victims of Nazi atrocity) and recentres certain pre-Holocaust storytelling traditions, if not so much Jewish cultural mythology. In this manner, the historical parts of the novel also approach Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of the carnivalesque—‘a shift of authorities and truths, a shift of world orders’—in its lively and irreverent portrayal of the shtetl inhabitants.²¹⁹ This is amplified by the ‘perspective of negation’ described by Bakhtin, in which ‘[b]irth is fraught with death, and death with new birth’, especially considering that Trachimbrod’s identity is both born from the same river in which many of its inhabitants perish during the Holocaust within the diegesis of the text, and the text itself is in fact created as a result of the factual destruction of the shtetl.²²⁰ In short, the site associated with the death of the villagers is reinscribed with birth. Similarly, the playful humour present in these parts of the narrative seems designed as a response to the trauma of absence and the ever-present spectre of the shtetl’s twentieth century fate; an example of absurdity in the face of nihilism, and an opportunity, as noted in the introduction, to rehumanise the Holocaust’s victims and survivors.²²¹ Thus, the ubiquity of Nazi power over Jewish suffering is destabilised, and the

²¹⁶ Amian, p. 155.

²¹⁷ Caroline Rody, ‘Jewish Post-Holocaust Fiction and the Magical Realist Turn’, in *Moments of Magical Realism in US Ethnic Literatures*, ed. by Lyn Di Iorio Sandín and Richard Perez (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 39-63; Adams.

The transferability of magical realism across these contexts is explored further in Chapter Two with regard to *The History of Love*.

²¹⁸ Rody, p. 42.

²¹⁹ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, ed. and trans. by Caryl Emerson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), p. 127.

²²⁰ Ibid, p. 125.

²²¹ See pp. 51-52.

enobling of suffering refused. In the words of Tracy Floreani, Foer ‘triumphs in refusing to let the entire narrative of his family be reduced to just a Holocaust story.’²²²

Though aspects such as the prophetic visions of Brod and other members of the community recorded in ‘The Book of Antecedents’, the presence of ‘the deceased philosopher Pinchas T’ and his continued participation in the community’s life and politics, and the bursts of light emitted during sexual intercourse amidst an otherwise phenomenologically plausible world point towards magical realism according to the definitions outlined by Wendy B. Faris and William Spindler, other critics have suggested additional generic interpretations for this part of the narrative.²²³ Anna Hunter and Menachem Feuer read *Everything is Illuminated* as a fairytale or fable respectively, while Philippe Codde proposes that it is best understood as mythology.²²⁴ Drawing especial attention to Brod’s fluvial origins, he argues that ‘Foer inventively reiterates the myth of Aphrodite, the goddess born from the ocean, and used by the ancient Greeks equally to explain the genesis of an entirely new lineage. So, in the absence of historical “facts”, myth becomes a valid alternative to illuminate one’s origins.’²²⁵ This absence of historical realism is, fundamentally, the common factor underlying each of these perspectives, and the novel instead highlights the necessity of the indirect, allegorical, and fictive in its insistent focus on the *life*, rather than Nazi death, of Foer’s forebears. This focus is further emphasised through Foer’s constant juxtaposition of sex and personal love with indifferent destruction. This is particularly potent in the sections featuring Safran, from the simple contrast between love and death (including the erotic response in the shtetl’s

²²² Tracy Floreani, ‘Metafictional Witnessing in Jonathan Safran Foer’s *Everything is Illuminated*’, in *Unfinalized Moments: Essays in the Development of a Contemporary Jewish Narrative*, ed. by Derek Parker Royal (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2011), pp. 139-149 (p. 147).

²²³ Faris’s criteria, often considered definitive for the genre, are as follows: ‘First, the text contains an ‘irreducible element’ of magic; second, the descriptions in magical realism detail a strong presence of the phenomenal world; third, the reader may experience some unsettling doubts in the effort to reconcile two contradictory understandings of events; fourth, the narrative merges different realms; and, finally, magical realism disturbs received ideas about time, space, and identity.’ *Everything is Illuminated* similarly appears to conform to the category of ontological magic realism as elucidated by Spindler, in which ‘the supernatural is presented in a matter-of-fact way as if it did not contradict reason, and no explanations are offered for the unreal events in the text. There is no reference to the mythical imagination of pre-industrial communities. Instead, the total freedom and creative possibilities of writing are exercised by the author, who is not worried about convincing the reader.’ Wendy B. Faris, *Ordinary Enchantments: Magical Realism and the Remystification of Narrative* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2004), p. 7; William Spindler, ‘Magic Realism: A Typology’, *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, xxxix:1 (1993), 75-85 (p. 82).

²²⁴ Anna Hunter, ‘Tales from Over There: The Uses and Meanings of Fairy-Tales in Contemporary Holocaust Narrative’, *MODERNISM / modernity*, 20:1 (2013), 59-75; Menachem Feuer, ‘Almost Friends: Post-Holocaust Comedy, Tragedy, and Friendship in Jonathan Safran Foer’s *Everything is Illuminated*’, *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies*, 25:2 (2007), 24-48; Philippe Codde, ‘Transmitted Holocaust Trauma: A Matter of Myth and Fairy Tales?’, *European Judaism*, 42:1 (2009), 62-75.

²²⁵ Codde, ‘Transmitted Holocaust Trauma’, p. 65.

women to his ‘dead arm’ and the meeting of Safran and his lover in a ‘petrified corner’ (229) of the forest), to the exchange of love letters between the couple that are crafted from newspaper clippings reporting on the war, and finally culminating the magical realist scene of Jonathan’s grandfather Safran’s first orgasm, which is presented against the backdrop of the Nazi bombing of Trachimbrod. The juxtaposition of love and annihilation is even propounded in the title and its recurring imagery: in the Trachimbrod narrative, ‘illumination’ primarily refers to the aforementioned light produced during intercourse, but the word is also used to denote a metaphorical illumination of the Holocaust past and the literal illumination of Trachimbrod’s burning synagogue.

The magic and colourful elements of the Trachimbrod narrative also allow Foer to rekindle real traditional Yiddish oral—and more recently, literary—storytelling practices, a cultural history that was systematically placed under threat during the war. Taking on elements of folklore and shtetl gossip in addition to the whimsical and magical, the novel is not dissimilar to works by earlier Jewish writers, such as Isaac Bashevis Singer, Sholom Aleichem, and Bruno Schulz; influential writers of the Ukrainian region, such as Nikolai Gogol; and traditional Jewish folktales such as the foolstown of Chelm. Hence, it can be read as a form of cultural reclamation—or, perhaps more accurately, (re)discovery—bringing the third generation writer into closer contact with parts of their heritage that had been lost to the potency and silence of the Holocaust. Foer indeed attributes these aspects of *Everything is Illuminated* to his inquiries into his family history. Prior to his trip to Ukraine, he ‘kept an ironic distance from religion, and was skeptical of anything described as “Jewish[,]”’ yet he describes how the experience generated ‘a Jewish sensibility, if not content’ to his writing.²²⁶ It was only in actively confronting the absences that he was able to understand their role, both positively and negatively, in his identity. Hence while, as Hunter writes, in the novel ‘the impossibility of the magical works in tandem with the impossibility of memory in order to produce a history that is pure fantasy’, it also aptly represents a real connection between Jewish American Foer and his Eastern European Jewish heritage; a linkage maintained by his grandparents’ survival whilst jeopardised by their traumatised silence.²²⁷

However, although some studies—particularly regarding the historical traumas of Native Americans—have suggested that the same landscape within which such ancestral traumas occurred can be reinscribed with new meanings as part of a therapeutic working-through process, it is ambiguous as to whether this is the case in *Everything is*

²²⁶ Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, ‘Press Release’, p. 5 of 6.

²²⁷ Hunter, p. 66.

Illuminated.²²⁸ Whilst the Trachimbrod narrative does reanimate the shtetl, thus imbuing its history with meanings unrelated to Holocaust atrocity, the prophetic visions of its inhabitants lend the bombing a sense of fatalistic determination, something which Vice associates with Holocaust fiction generally: ‘in fictional terms,’ she writes, the Holocaust ‘entails the loss of such novelistic staples as suspense, choosing one’s ending, constructing characters with the power to alter their fate, allowing good to triumph over evil, or even the clear identification of such moral categories.’²²⁹ In *Everything is Illuminated*’s magical realist performance of this concept, just as Brod has a vision of the future, in which she sees the photograph of Augustine and reads a description of her rape before it occurs shortly afterwards in the narrative, Nazi soldiers burning books following the bombing of Trachimbrod uncover the entry ‘*The dream of the end of the world*’ from ‘The Book of Recurrant Dreams’:

bombs poured down from the sky exploding across trachimbrod in bursts of light and heat [...] hundreds of bodies poured into the brod that river with my name I am embraced them with open arms come to me come I wanted to save them all to save everybody from everybody the bombs rained from the sky
(272)

The reference to the ‘river with my name’ suggests that this dream is also Brod’s, and furthermore places the entry chronologically around 150 years prior to the actual destruction of Trachimbrod. Reminiscent of Melquíades’s prophetic parchments in Gabriel García Márquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude*—to which *Everything is Illuminated* has frequently been compared—this prediction and its eventual fruition suggests the inevitability of the Holocaust.²³⁰ The disappearance of the shtetl into the same river from which its identity was born also makes the narrative cyclical. Trachimbrod both begins and ends with the Holocaust; imagined as a result of the absence left by the Holocaust, its history is inescapably pulled

²²⁸ See, for example, Katie Schultz et al, “‘I’m stronger than I thought’: Native women reconnecting to body, health, and place”, *Health & Place*, 40 (2016), 21-28; and Karina L. Walters et al, ‘Bodies Don’t Just Tell Stories, They Tell Histories: Embodiment of Historical Trauma among American Indians and Alaska Natives’, *Du Bois Review*, 8:1 (2011), 179-189.

Although these studies focus on a very different context of historical trauma, an important parallel can be drawn in that in both instances the communities were forcibly displaced from their multi-generational homelands and/or massacred. The same physical spaces, therefore, have developed new traumatogenic associations.

²²⁹ Vice, *Holocaust Fiction*, p. 3.

²³⁰ See, for example, Adams, p.15; Feuer, p. 37; Rody, p. 52.

towards that point. In this way, this part of the text and its Ukrainian landscape are never successfully dissociated from the Holocaust.

The Holocaust, in fact, is present as a subtext throughout the Trachimbrod narrative. Some of the more playful elements act as analogies for certain aspects of the third generation experience of the Holocaust and the search for information therein. For example, at the very beginning when Trachim B's wagon 'did or did not' (8) enter the Brod, the miscellaneous debris released provides, as Codde notes, 'a beautiful metaphor for Holocaust historiography: after the crisis, the scattered evidence, the fragmented material elements, slowly float to the river's surface, which people desperately try to collect and make sense of via a host of narrative employments.'²³¹ One of these items, 'wandering snakes of white string' (8), is thus recalled later in the narrative in several ways, such as in the white string decoration that creates networks of connections throughout Trachimbrod each Trachimday, between seemingly arbitrary buildings and objects. Through the repetition of this ritual, continuity is created through both space and time, a notion within which Foer blurs the boundaries of literality: in a fairly explicit comment on the relationship of the third generation to history, he writes that

children had it worst of all, for although it would seem that they had fewer memories to haunt them, they still had the itch of memory as strong as the elders of the shtetl. Their strings were not even their own, but tied around them by parents and grandparents—strings not fastened to anything, but hanging loosely from the darkness. (260)

This simultaneous image of entrapment and disconnection not only aptly describes the absent presence of the Holocaust in the lives of its descendants, but is also perpetuated even within Alex's chapters: it is no coincidence that the artifacts contained in Lista's box, which provide a material connection to Trachimbrod, include a scroll bound in white string, nor that when Eli urges Alex to release himself from his dark familial past he uses the phrase '*cut all the strings*' (275).

This sense of transgenerational and historiographic connectedness is not unproblematic, however. Even within the metaphor of the string, the clarity of the message is called into question. One of Trachimbrod's villagers, Sofiowka, is described as having

²³¹ Codde, 'Transmitted Holocaust Trauma', p. 74, n3.

...tied [a length of string] around his index finger to remember something terribly important, and fearing he would forget the index finger, he tied a string around his pinky, and then one from waist to neck, and fearing he would forget this one, he tied a string from ear to tooth to scrotum to heel, and used his body to remember his body, but in the end could remember only the string. (15)

In 'using memory to remember memory' (258), the string-as-mnemonic has become detached from its original referent, which remains unknown. The inability to remember a specific detail, substituted for remembering *remembrance* itself, echoes the lack of information available on the Holocaust that may be accessible to the third generation, as well as the prolific use of the maxim 'never forget'; a phrase which, as with Sofiowka's mnemonic, is often used in place of reflective engagement with its subject. Hence, this part of the narrative presents two sides to the issue of Holocaust memory, involving both the realities of possible connection and disconnection.²³² Other issues to do with the knowability of the Holocaust are also analogised by Foer. For example, in a period recorded in 'The Book of Antecedents' as 'The Time of Dyed Hands', the hands of every member of the shtetl were dyed a different colour in order to catch the thief of baker Herzog J's rolls. However, all these colours blend together on objects and people around the town in a 'compressed rainbow' (200) and become indistinguishable both from each other and from the towns' natural colours ('it was impossible to tell what had been touched by human hands and what was as it was because it was as it was' (200)), thus reflecting the complicated problem of culpability pertaining to the Holocaust, an issue which also foreshadows Eli's confession later in the novel.

In addition to the problems encountered by the third generation in gathering histories of the Holocaust, Foer also analogises the issue of preservation. In the fable-like story of the Wisps of Ardisht, for example, the Wisps realise that they are running out of matches to light their cigarettes. They believe that soon they will no longer be able to smoke, until a child recognises that so long as at least one cigarette is lit at all times, they can light the others from that. This translates well into the crisis of the loss of Holocaust survivors who are able to bear testimony and the mechanisms for doing so, and a call to subsequent generations to keep the memory metaphorically alight. Therefore, whilst Feuer reads the 'pessimistic and tragic'

²³² This dichotomy is augmented by the fact that Sofiowka is also an alternative name for Trachimbrod (the real shtetl was named variants of Trokhimbrod in Yiddish and Ukrainian, and variants of Zofiówka in Polish and Russian), suggesting two different faces to the issue of (dis)connection embodied by the village in Foer's imagination.

Trachimbrod narrative as ‘a means of deceiving the reader who believes he or she will find a moral and optimistic lesson’ as it ‘does not seem to provide the materials necessary to cope with trauma’, such an assessment does not take into account the ‘lessons’ presented in the imagined folktales and customs of the shtetl.²³³ The narrative covers, as shown, a range of matters relevant to the transmitted trauma of absence surrounding the Holocaust, from the risks of creating an overly simplistic good-and-evil account of the Holocaust or of perpetuating memory without a referent, to the importance of sharing what is known so that memory is not lost along with the survivors. Yet, the primary method for coping with the transmitted trauma is propounded through the narrative itself. As Francisco Collado-Rodríguez suggests, the ‘capacity to tolerate such multiple and contradictory registers might constitute a healing component of response to trauma’, as it signifies an adaptation to a fragmented and in places unreliable or unknown heritage: imagination, speculation, and history all become viable components in piecing together the past, and uncertainty an acceptable aspect of reality.²³⁴ Finally, the process of reanimation depicted through Jonathan’s writings defy the domination of the Holocaust and its associated trauma over history, both in its content of death and destruction and in its de facto negation of the history that preceded it.

Alex’s parts of the narrative, by contrast, depict traumas based on knowledge and tend towards a more realistic portrayal. As each part of the narrative occurs in separate chapter groups, distinguished both visually (the chapter headings for each section adopt a different style, and Alex’s letters are recounted in italics) and by very distinct narrative voices, Foer hence, in the words of Adams,

draws a clear distinction between those elements of the past which are accessible as objects of knowledge [...] and those of which imagination is the only source [...] in this sense affirming the existence of a realm of knowable history by refusing to allow magical or transgressive elements to exceed the elaboration of historical ‘dark areas’.²³⁵

²³³ Feuer, p. 36.

²³⁴ Francisco Collado-Rodríguez, ‘Ethics in the Second Degree: Trauma and Dual Narratives in Jonathan Safran Foer’s *Everything Is Illuminated*’, *Journal of Modern Literature*, 32:1 (2008), 54-68 (p. 64).

²³⁵ Adams, p. 30.

Indeed, as the narrative approaches the knowable parts of history—those that constitute the greater part of the trauma received by Alex—Alex rejects more and more fictionalisations, culminating in raw transcriptions of the testimonies of his grandfather and Lista. It is also important to note that while *Everything is Illuminated* is a very humorous book, this tone is not applied to the parts of the final chapters in which Alex receives these two testimonies. Whereas the playful and humorous elements of Jonathan's novel can be attributed to a carnivalesque or absurd response to the absences in his knowledge and identity, Alex applies a different ethics to objects of knowledge. Alex plays the role of witness to their testimony, opening himself up to the experience of the other, and urges Jonathan to do the same should he read the account in the chapter sent to him: 'Jonathan, if you still do not want to know the rest, do not read this. But if you do persevere, do not do so for curiosity. That is not a good enough reason' (186). Hence, aesthetic or casual access to the testimony is denied, highlighting the importance of abandoning personal agendas in bearing witness. Similarly, the creative and inventive parts of the writer's voice must be subdued to the realities of history; an imperative that resonates with the third generation impulse to use their position as the last living link to the Holocaust to preserve the testimony of survivors before it is lost to history. The more traditional, realistic narrative style of Alex's chapters that results from this does not, however, constitute a conventional approach to the increasingly well-known atrocities of the Holocaust. Rather, they are renewed primarily through two different aspects of the narrative: the unfamiliarity of his Ukrainian consciousness, and the focus on the memories of a Holocaust perpetrator.

The clearest way in which Alex's perspective creates a sense of defamiliarisation is through the narrative style of his chapters, which is itself, as Adams writes, a 'comic defamiliarization of the English language'.²³⁶ Thesaurus-inflected and riddled with misremembered idioms such as 'made a shit of a brick' (28) and 'having shit between his brains' (2), Alex's 'not so premium' (32) English makes it 'at times hard to decide if we should be laughing at or with our Ukrainian narrator', in the words of Varvogli.²³⁷ Banerjee takes this further, writing that '[i]t seems regrettable [...] that Foer's American humor should capitalize on an Eastern European character's ineptness at getting things "right."' ²³⁸ However, whilst Alex's ignorance of both the English language and much detail regarding the Holocaust (notably of Ukrainian collaboration and antisemitism) at first appears striking in

²³⁶ Ibid, p. 38.

²³⁷ Varvogli, p. 88.

²³⁸ Banerjee, p. 150, n4.

contrast to Jonathan's erudition and Holocaust knowledge, Foer increasingly suggests the opposite as the novel progresses. In one instance, Jonathan offers a packet of Marlboro cigarettes as a tip to a Ukrainian man who gave them directions. This causes a great deal of confusion amongst his Ukrainian guides, both with regards to the concept of a tip and the meaning of the cigarettes themselves. Furthermore, his explanation that 'I read in my guidebook that it's hard to get Marlboro cigarettes here' (109) seems outdated at best, implying that Jonathan is ignorant of contemporary Ukrainian culture. Similarly, and more significantly, Jonathan inadvertently causes a conflict between Alex and some rural Ukrainians when he does not obey Alex's request to abstain from speaking to them. Alex's rationale that

people who speak only Ukrainian sometimes hate people who speak a fusion of Russian and Ukrainian, because very often people who speak a fusion of Russian and Ukrainian come from the cities and think they are superior to people who speak only Ukrainian, who often come from the fields. [...] I commanded the hero not to speak, because at times people who speak Ukrainian who hate people who speak a fusion of Russian and Ukrainian also hate people who speak English (112)

is likewise alien to Jonathan. Here, through the character of Alex, Foer hints at the aftereffects of a cultural trauma that is less familiar to the American perspective: that of the Soviet regime and its consequent dissolution. In addition to Jonathan's lack of preparedness for some of the poverty and crime encountered during the trip, his ignorance of the politics of language—the use of Russian associated both with urban areas and the Russian cultural and political hegemony in the USSR, and English with the anticommunist West—is made clear, highlighting a lack of western awareness of the persistent interethnic tensions in Ukraine.²³⁹ Hence, as Jennifer M. Lemberg notes, Alex acts as 'a European counterpart to the American traveler whose existence challenges the notion that Eastern Europe is a place fixed forever in the Holocaust past': not only does Alex have a strong affinity for American music and

²³⁹ See, for example, Evgueny Golovakha and Natalya Panina, 'Interethnic Intolerance in Post-Soviet Ukraine', in *States of Mind: American and Post-Soviet Perspectives on Contemporary Issues in Psychology*, ed. by Diane F. Halpern and Alexander E. Voiskounsky (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 315-324 (Table 15.1, p. 319).

popular culture, but also recontextualises Jonathan's association of Ukraine with the Holocaust within its more recent history, including its own cultural traumas.²⁴⁰

The defamiliarising quality of Alex's narration is also used by Foer in relation to the Holocaust. This is achieved in a number of ways. Firstly, Alex's aforementioned mangled English adds a layer of interpretative difficulty to the text, and the reader must engage in a process of translation before the content can be disclosed. This discourages a detached spectatorship of the horrors of a well-known Holocaust history; in the words of Ruth Franklin, Lista's 'story of Trachimbrod's liquidation, another familiar account of rounding up, torture, desecration, [...] becomes unfamiliar, remarkably, through the strangeness of its telling, filtered through Alex's alien consciousness.'²⁴¹ This effect is compounded by Alex's own unfamiliarity with the subject matter of the Holocaust, due to his Ukrainian cultural context. As Andrii Portnov explains, the Holocaust has been given little attention in Ukraine, due to its post-Soviet political environment, in which both of the dominant perspectives on Ukrainian postwar memory—the (post-)Soviet view that glorifies Soviet workers uniting against fascism and the nationalistic view that venerates resistance to the USSR—hold as a taboo the extermination of the Jewish people and Ukrainian complicity. Indeed, considering that the Holocaust was only made a mandatory topic in Ukrainian schools in 2001, and even after that was given minimal recognition, it is both unsurprising that Alex is unaware of Ukrainian Holocaust history, and very likely that his assertion that '[i]t does not say this in the history books' (62) in response to Jonathan's appeal to research Ukrainian collaboration in the Holocaust, is correct.²⁴² As a result, his own shock at the narrated atrocities and especially his grandfather's complicity is clear, thus to an extent renewing the story and rendering it once more unfamiliar.

Perhaps the most potent way in which Foer defamiliarises the history of the Holocaust is through the novel's humour, however. While, as previously mentioned, the humour of Jonathan's chapters is primarily a rebellion against the dominant Holocaust narrative, the majority of the humour in *Everything is Illuminated* is contained within Alex's chapters, which is more significantly incongruous with its explicit rather than implicit Holocaust focus. The unsettling contrast produced is targeted towards two key areas. Firstly, it draws attention

²⁴⁰ Jennifer M. Lemberg, "'Unfinished Business': Journeys to Eastern Europe in Thane Rosenbaum's *Second Hand Smoke* and Jonathan Safran Foer's *Everything is Illuminated*", in *Unfinalized Moments*, pp. 81-94 (p. 83).

²⁴¹ Ruth Franklin, *A Thousand Darkesses: Lies and Truth in Holocaust Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 239.

²⁴² Andrii Portnov, 'The Holocaust in the Public Discourse of Post-Soviet Ukraine', in *War and Memory in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus*, ed. by Julia Fedor et al (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 347-370 (pp. 355-356).

to the cultural disparity between Ukraine and America, thus subverting Jonathan's American-centric expectations surrounding his search for Holocaust information. This is clear from the outset, in Foer's parody of the American road trip genre, replacing the classic bildungsroman with a fruitless quest aided by comical characters such as a 'blind' old man and his flatulent 'OFFICIOUS SEEING-EYE BITCH' (29) Sammy Davis, Junior, Junior. This narrative contains many amusing anecdotes, including interactions between Sammy Davis, Junior, Junior (who is sexually attracted to Jonathan) and Jonathan (who is afraid of dogs); Alex's deliberate mistranslations of his grandfather's expletive-ridden complaints to Jonathan; and recurring confusion surrounding Jonathan's vegetarianism, which is treated as if it were a form of madness. Jonathan's vegetarianism, a lifestyle choice associated with wealthy nations in which there is an abundance of available nutritional sources that make it possible to exclude certain food groups without detriment to one's health, is particularly noticeably out of place in Ukraine. This is humorously highlighted when Jonathan, Alex, and Eli stop to eat in a restaurant, and both Ukrainians (and their waitress) fail to comprehend that Jonathan does not eat meat, incredulously listing types of meat that Jonathan confirms he does not consume. When he is eventually able to receive two potatoes to eat as his meal, one is almost immediately knocked to the floor, to everyone's distress. Eli, wordlessly retrieving it and splitting it between the four travellers, sardonically proclaims 'Welcome to Ukraine' (67). This moment represents a shift in perspective towards the realities of rural Ukraine in contrast to Jonathan's expectations of the country, which is an oxymoronic combination of the Holocaust past and the universality of American culture. Hence, Jonathan's perceptions of Eastern Europe are shown to be as fallacious as America-obsessed Alex's stereotypical impressions of the USA, which are primarily founded on the content of magazines. These anecdotes, many of which have invented elements according to Alex's own admission, secondly provide a sharp contrast with the unmodified Holocaust testimonies that are recounted later, a dissonance which augments their horror. Thus, as before, the emotional impact of this now well-known atrocity is renewed, and made unexpected. As Banerjee explains, this serves the third generation motive to keep Holocaust memory alive well because '[m]emory is kept alive, not through the invocation of duty, but through the rousing of curiosity', which is effectively achieved through the unusual and humorous narrative of *Everything is Illuminated*.²⁴³ This also somewhat explains Jonathan's philosophy that 'humorous is the only truthful way to tell a sad story' (53). The coexistence of the two, in the

²⁴³ Banerjee, p. 148.

words of A. Roy Eckardt, is necessary as '[b]ereft of pain, humor appears to share the same plight that afflicts "the good" when its antagonist, "evil" is somehow removed. Humor requires tears; tears require humor. Imperializing laughter is not laughter, imperializing tears are not tears.'²⁴⁴ In order to experience one to its fullest extent, knowledge of the other is required.

Despite these defamiliarising measures, the most unexpected way in which the Holocaust is depicted in *Everything is Illuminated* is through its unusual focus; that is, by centering the subjectivities of a perpetrator and his descendants. In the climax of Alex's novel, it is revealed that Eli acted as a perpetrator during the Holocaust, having pointed out his Jewish friend Herschel to the Nazis in order to save his own and his family's lives during a horrific attack on his village. The long, rambling passage in which this scene is described reflects its traumatic impact on both Alex and his grandfather, in which punctuation, and even the spacing between words, disintegrates. In the words of Axel Stähler and Annette Kern-Stähler, 'language becomes fused and confused as do the identities of perpetrator and victim and witness and interpreter'.²⁴⁵ In addition to blurring the generational boundaries with regard to a traumatic experience, Foer hence advances the question of non-Jewish victimhood and trauma arising from the Holocaust, summarised in Alex's grandfather's claim that '[j]ust because I was not a Jew, it does not mean that it did not happen to me' (246). This acknowledgement of his trauma complicates widely held beliefs regarding clear dichotomies between victims and perpetrators; pure good and absolute evil. It is symptomatic of a third generation movement towards a more balanced understanding of the Holocaust, which recognises the problematic nature of strict moral categories, and, correlatively, the ambiguous ethicality of many persons involved, such as Jewish perpetrators. Just as the Jewish trauma requires the simultaneous confrontation of multiple realities, so too does the trauma of a perpetrator. As Lisa Propst submits, it is important to 'acknowledg[e] distinctions such as the differences between active collaboration and forced violence and understanding the overlapping of identities (as a person might be at different times a collaborator, a bystander, or a victim)'.²⁴⁶ Indeed, far from committing a 'fundamental wrong', as Banerjee would have it,

²⁴⁴ A. Roy Eckardt, 'Divine Incongruity: Comedy and Tragedy in a Post-Holocaust World', *Theology Today*, 48:4 (1992), 399-412 (p. 403).

²⁴⁵ Axel Stähler and Annette Kern-Stähler, 'The Translation of Testimony and the Transmission of Trauma: Jonathan Safran Foer's *Everything is Illuminated* and Liev Schreiber's Film Adaptation', in *Voices and Silence in the Contemporary English Novel*, ed. by Vanessa Guignery (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), pp. 160-184 (p. 175).

²⁴⁶ Lisa Propst, "'Making One Story"? Forms of Reconciliation in Jonathan Safran Foer's "Everything Is Illuminated" and Nathan Englander's "The Ministry of Special Cases"', *MELUS*, 36:1 (2011), 37-60 (p. 38).

Alex's grandfather was unable to make a choice that was purely morally good.²⁴⁷ By writing the account of the atrocity through the first person perspective—albeit mediated through Alex's translation, which, although still retaining its idiosyncratic English, is no longer deployed for comedic effect, instead suggesting the limits of language in describing a trauma—Foer appeals to a humanistic empathy for those whom history has branded the antagonists. This humanisation is reminiscent of Hannah Arendt's concept of the banality of evil; the realisation that 'many [perpetrators of the Holocaust] were neither perverted nor sadistic, that they were, and still are, terribly and terrifyingly normal.'²⁴⁸ Foer's representation of the Holocaust similarly defies simplistic moralisation, and accordingly refuses to reductively bifurcate those affected into heroes and villains. Instead, the Holocaust is treated less as having been effectuated solely through the unchangeably bad character of its perpetrators, and more as a reciprocal influence in and of itself on people's actions.

Certainly, Foer not only depicts Eli's pain and trauma (which is clear in his testimony, with all its repetitions and disrupted pacing in the fusion of certain words and phrases), but the effects that this has had on his life and family. For example, he has declared himself 'blind' despite being perfectly able to see. Varvogli interprets this as a '[figurative] represent[ation of] his own and his country's "blindness" in relation to the past', which is given further significance when placed in the context of idiosyncratic language, in which the verb 'to see' is replaced with its synonym 'to witness'.²⁴⁹ As an example of Abraham's concept of 'staged words'—key words that are associated with and evoke an otherwise concealed trauma—Eli's pretence at being unable to see becomes a refusal to bear witness to the Holocaust and his own role in it.²⁵⁰ In this way, he is able to live at a remove from his past, something which is ameliorated by his creation of a new identity, changing his name from Eli to Alexander (the name that is passed onto his descendants also) and adopting an antisemitic demeanor. Not only does this allow him to separate himself from the massacre at Trachimbrod, but also to protect himself from the pain of Jewish persecution by association. Whilst the name 'Alexander' has a great deal of significance in terms of the experiences of Alex and his father (a point to which I will return shortly), the name 'Eli' is also very symbolic, in that it links him to Jewish trauma through its biblical significance. Eli appears in the book of 1 Samuel in the Old Testament as a priest, who is punished by the Lord for

²⁴⁷ Banerjee, p. 166.

²⁴⁸ Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, rev. ed. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), p. 276.

²⁴⁹ Varvogli, p. 84.

²⁵⁰ Abraham, p. 292.

acknowledging, but not preventing the sin of his sons, Hophni and Phineas, through the loss of his sight. God's anger also, significantly, extends onto Eli's descendants.²⁵¹ The similarities Foer presents in Eli's life cannot be ignored; he claims to become blind after his inaction in preventing the deaths of the Jews, and especially Herschel, in his shtetl, and the transmission of the trauma this precipitates can be seen to affect his son and grandsons. The name 'Alexander', by contrast, does not have any Hebrew biblical associations, but whose etymological origin pertains to protection. This is very relevant to the function of this identity, which is intended to act as a shield to defend him, and his family, from his perpetrator trauma.

The effects of Eli's trauma can be more clearly understood through the effects it has on his family, however, following a similar principle to that of 'acting out;' the process described in the introduction wherein an individual exhibits behaviour that consistently reenacts the traumatic circumstance.²⁵² After having pointed out Herschel to the Nazis, Eli recounts how he took his infant son into his arms and 'Iheldhimwithmuchforce so much that he started crying I said I love you I love you I love you [...] I held him with somuchforcethathecried because I loved him so much that I madeloveimpossible' (251). In a literal representation of the idea that if Eli were to hold his son figuratively close he would do him violence, the coldness and abuse that permeates the Perchov family is substantially rooted in this moment. The interrelatedness of Eli's traumas—encompassing both his actions as a perpetrator and his presence during the massacre—and Alex's own trauma as a victim of abuse is made clear in a frank conversation between the two:

[Alex:] (You have ghosts?)

[Eli:] (Of course I have ghosts.)

(What are your ghosts like?)

(They are on the insides of the lids of my eyes.)

(This is also where my ghosts reside.)

(You have ghosts?)

(Of course I have ghosts.)

(But you are a child.)

(I am not a child.)

(But you have not known love.)

(These are my ghosts, the space amid love.) (246)

²⁵¹ 1 Sam. 2.22-33.

²⁵² See pp. 12-13.

Several details emerge here. Firstly, the connections between the original source of trauma and its traumatic effects on Alex are emphasised through the exact repetition of the question and answer ‘You have ghosts?’/‘Of course I have ghosts’ alongside the image of ‘ghosts’ itself. This image, furthermore, is associated both with death and psychoanalytic trauma: as Abraham writes, the phantom is ‘the gap that the concealment of some part of a loved one’s life produced in us.’²⁵³ Because the ghost exists as a lacuna, it is capable of being transmitted transgenerationally, hence suggesting that Alex’s ‘ghosts’ are in fact a direct transgenerational product of Eli’s.²⁵⁴ The emotional distance and physical violence he experiences can be considered ‘metaphors’, to use Lacan’s term, or echoes of his grandfather’s Holocaust trauma.²⁵⁵

Foer also depicts this cycle of abusive behaviours in the Perchov family more concretely. The repetitive nature of this cycle is one again evident through near-identical sets of questions and behaviours: just as Eli verbally berates Alex for making an error in reading the map by asking him ‘Did I ask you to prepare me breakfast while you roost there? [...] Did I ask you to invent a new type of wheel? [...] How many things did I ask you to do?’ to which Alex replies ‘Only one’ (30), Alex echoes this questioning structure when angry that Jonathan spoke English in front of the Ukrainians, similarly asking ‘Did I ask you to prepare breakfast? [...] Did I ask you to invent a new type of wheel? [...] No, I asked you to do one thing’ (113). Although Alex ultimately chooses to break from this cycle, it has an observable effect on his sense of identity. In order to retain a sense of shared identity with his family, Alex adopts a hyper-masculine self-image in response to the demands of his father. At the beginning of his narrative he describes himself as a man who ‘disseminate[s] very much currency at famous nightclubs’, is ‘carnal’ with many women ‘in many good arrangements’, and ‘like[s] to punch people’ (2, 4). However, he later confesses that none of this is true, explaining to Jonathan that ‘*it would disappoint [my father] very much if he knew what I am really like*’ (144). There are numerous influences that contribute to this invented persona, across both cultural and transgenerational spheres of trauma. On the one hand, the (post-)Soviet cultural trauma of Ukraine can be observed in the implied alcohol consumption in the nightclub and in Alex’s father’s alcoholism. As Boris S. Bratus notes, not only was alcoholism a huge problem during the Soviet era, as a quick solution to the low quality of life associated with the period, but

²⁵³ Abraham, p. 287.

²⁵⁴ See also Frosh pp. 119-140.

²⁵⁵ See p. 13.

became fused with ideals of masculinity. Describing drinking to the point of intoxication as ‘close to compulsory at many social gatherings’, he writes that ‘[g]rown-ups keep urging the adolescent boy: “Drink! Everyone drinks! You are not a man if you have no taste for alcohol.”’²⁵⁶ The significant homophobia of the period (which persists to this day) is also implicated in Alex’s concealment of his sexuality. The hedonistic pleasures he claims to enjoy can be, moreover, related to his grandfather’s experiences during the Holocaust: casual sex and going to nightclubs are not associated with the formation of strong emotional attachment, and therefore they bear a low risk of the sort of pain encountered by Eli when the lives of his loved ones, including Herschel, were endangered or lost. Most importantly, however, the predominance of physical violence (both in the physical abuse within the Perchov family and in its glorification generally) seems to take the form of Belnap’s concept of a ‘life lesson’, as outlined in the introduction: it teaches that if one throws the first punch, they can avoid victimisation.²⁵⁷ In other words, by taking on the position of abuser, they can avoid becoming the abused, a concept which once more clearly relates to Eli’s experience in Trachimbrod.

While Foer hence depicts both genuine trauma and its transmission in the family of a perpetrator, it is not without its differences from the Jewish trauma portrayed in Jonathan’s narrative. Fundamental to this is the element of choice. Historically, collaborators such as Eli theoretically had a choice whereas those persecuted did not. This is reflected thematically in both of the opposing narratives. As previously mentioned, Foer imbues Jonathan’s chapters with a strong sense of fatalism, with the Holocaust as its inevitable and inescapable conclusion. At times, this is even meditated on explicitly, especially with regard to Jonathan’s grandfather, Safran, who was born with a full set of teeth:

Wasn’t everything that had happened [...] the inevitable result of circumstances over which he had no control? How guilty could he be, really, when he never really had any real choice? [...] So it was because of his teeth, I imagine, that he got no milk, and it was because he got no milk that his right arm died. It was because his arm died that [...] he was exempted from the draft that sent his schoolmates off to be killed in hopeless battle against the Nazis. [...] His arm saved him again when it caused Augustine to fall in love with him and save him, and it saved him once again, years later, when it prevented him from

²⁵⁶ Boris S. Bratus, ‘Alcoholism in Russia: The Enemy Within’, in *States of Mind*, pp. 198-212 (pp. 201-202).

²⁵⁷ See p. 28.

boarding the *New Ancestry* to Ellis Island, which would be turned back on orders of U.S. immigration officials, and whose passengers would all eventually perish in the Treblinka death camp. (165-166)

Foer constructs this summary of Safran's history as a directly causal chain of events, predicated entirely on coincidence rather than agency; Safran is the passive recipient of his fate, and even Augustine is deprived of will in her rescue of Safran, his arm having 'caused' her to do it. Just as Trachimbrod was predetermined to be destroyed during the Holocaust, so too was Safran fated to survive. By contrast, Alex's narrative tends towards a point of action, which is achieved in two ways. Firstly, Alex ejects his abusive father from the household, in addition to eschewing the persona he had created in his family's image. In this way, he breaks from the identity-bind experienced by many members of the third generation, neither assimilating completely into it, as demanded by his father in joining the family business after his graduation, nor totally rejecting it, as implicated in his (discarded) plan to relocate to the US with his younger brother. His final letter illustrates this, exchanging his normal, overly formal signature '*Guilelessly, Alexander*' with '*Love, Alex*' (242). Here, the conversion to his preferred nickname Alex exhibits fidelity to his familial identity whilst maintaining a degree of individuality, while the use of the word 'love' lays an empowering claim to the emotional connection of which his family deprived him; a simultaneous acceptance that love is absent from his home environment, but with the understanding that this does not impair his own ability to love. Thus, Foer signifies his break and transcendence from the transmitted cycle of trauma that marks his family.

This act is facilitated, in part, by Eli's own decision to die. While critics such as Marion Spies and Floreani make reference to guilt and survivor guilt in their interpretations of his suicide, the choice serves as 'an attempt to break the hardened generational cycle and free [Alex] from the older, hopelessly-corrupted family community', in the words of Paul Ardoin.²⁵⁸ '*They must begin again*' (275), Eli asserts, suggesting that both Alex and his younger brother must be unmoored from the grip of the past. Eli's suicide itself is precipitated both by Alex's banishment of his father and Alex's refusal to provide him with money with which to continue the search for Augustine, whose mythical quality renders her more of an

²⁵⁸ Marion Spies, 'Recent Directions in Holocaust Writing', *Religion and the Arts*, 8:2 (2004), 244-259 (p. 257); Floreani, p. 144; Paul Ardoin, 'A Very Unrigid Cosmopolitanism: Shame, Laughter, and Flexibility in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Everything Is Illuminated*', *Lit: Literature Interpretation Theory*, 24:3 (2013), 185-201 (p. 196).

invention than a reality. Suggesting that '[w]e were not five days from finding her. We were fifty years from finding her' (216), Alex informs Jonathan that

I do not believe in the Augustine that Grandfather was searching for. The woman in the photograph is alive. I am sure she is. But I am also sure that she is not Herschel, as Grandfather wanted her to be, and she is not my grandmother, as he wanted her to be, and she is not Father, as he wanted her to be. If I gave him the money, he would have found her, and he would have seen who she really is, and it would have killed him. (241-242)

Augustine, for Eli, has come to symbolise a form of redemption or rescue; someone who can save him and his loved ones from his past just as she saved Safran. Yet, as Foer conveys, this possibility exists at a fifty-year remove, not in the future but within the wartime past. Thus, as Eli's redemptive invention collapses, he realises that he will not be saved by another, and instead chooses to try to save his family through his own agency. Foer ends the novel with this assertion of personal action, the incomplete resolution '*I will*' (276), recalling once again the debris that floated to the surface of the river at the birth of Trachimbrod, which included papers bearing the same script. Thus, contained within the end of the novel is the suggestion of a new beginning.

It is this dynamism and open-endedness that marks *Everything is Illuminated*. In the words of Ardoin,

It is a book built on movement and collage. It is a formal enactment of the bounded (literally, by covers) but unfinished project (again literally, cutting off mid-sentence). Because the work is never finished, its destination is unclear, but because the destination is not fixed, it can remain always optimistic. ²⁵⁹

It comprises an active and necessarily incomplete engagement with several ambiguous issues pertaining to the Holocaust and trauma through its dual narration, from Alex's approach as witness to testimony to Jonathan's rejection of a direct portrayal of the Holocaust in favour of a more allegorical, playful mode; to the interrogation of such dichotomies as presentable/unpresentable, victim/perpetrator, life/death, absence/knowledge, and fate/choice.

²⁵⁹ Ardoin, p. 200.

In this way, both narrative threads complement each other, and ultimately engage the reader as a third party: as Spies notes, we ‘are asked to construct the final narrative; this is only possible by going back and forth in the text, choosing [sic] from equally convincing variants, something that, of course, is never wholly successful.’²⁶⁰ Similarly, Behlman observes that ‘[t]he novel foregrounds, through a set of untrustworthy narrators, the impossibility of any unmediated, wholly accurate access to the past,’ situating the reader in a similar position to that of the third generation in its approximation of the task of accessing and processing information regarding the Holocaust past.²⁶¹ Ultimately, Foer’s novel opens up, rather than defines, the ways in which the trauma of the past affects us in the present day, which is paradoxically realised in its decisive conclusion. In this way, Foer emphasises our capacity for choice, both in how we view history and how we proceed.

Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close

Whilst, despite some detractors, *Everything is Illuminated* was received generally positively, Foer’s second novel, *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* (2005), has met with more mixed criticism.²⁶² Although charges against the book have included protagonist Oskar Schell’s unbelievability as a nine-year-old and dissatisfaction with the narrative’s whimsy, including its ‘deeply traditional’ and ‘conventional’ family-oriented ending, *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* has been most often criticised for its depiction of trauma, and, in fact, is explicitly highlighted by both Gibbs and Seghal as an example of the ‘formulaic’ trauma narrative that they oppose.²⁶³ Gibbs in particular argues that ‘when we consider that although *Extremely Loud* may be a “convincing representation” according to certain aesthetic criteria, this fulfilment and its laudatory reception by critics inevitably works to limit how how trauma can be represented’.²⁶⁴ Yet, as I will demonstrate throughout this section, situating the trauma depicted in the novel within transgenerational and cultural contexts not only foregrounds

²⁶⁰ Spies, p. 258.

²⁶¹ Behlman, p. 100.

²⁶² Criticism of *Everything is Illuminated* tends to centre around its historically inaccurate and irreverent portrayal of the destroyed Trachimbrod; see for example Ivan Katchanovski, ‘NOT Everything is Illuminated’, *Prague Post*, 7 October 2004
<<https://www.praguepost.com/archivescontent/40032-not-everything-is-illuminated.html>> [Accessed 6 November 2020].

²⁶³ Gibbs, pp. 152, 148; Michel Faber, ‘A tower of babble’, *Guardian*, 4 June 2005
<<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2005/jun/04/featuresreviews.guardianreview22>> [Accessed 6 November 2020]; Richard Gray, *After the Fall: American Literature Since 9/11* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), pp. 52-53.

²⁶⁴ Gibbs, p. 153.

different ideas of the contextual specificity of its representation, belying claims of an exclusively formulaic approach to the trauma narrative, but also introduces important commentaries regarding our collective consideration of trauma and the traumatised.

A further point of controversy surrounding the text can be adduced to its 9/11 subject matter; a choice which notoriously prompted Harry Siegel to accuse Foer of ‘crossing the line that separates the risible from the villainous.’²⁶⁵ Like that of many novels published shortly after the attacks and whose narratives centre on the tragedy, the critical response to *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* has been characterised by the ethical questions and demands that surround a novel cultural trauma whose meaning has yet to be collectively inscribed. In the words of Kristiaan Versluys,

the question arises of how much time has to elapse before one can take enough critical and meditative distance to deal with an event such as 9/11. As every invented story about that tragic day is in a sense an appropriation of the event, who has the credentials to speak about it with authority? And how long does it take before such narrativizing becomes permissible or at all possible?²⁶⁶

In the impassioned and polarising debate surrounding the literary representation of 9/11 there can be seen not only issues of representational ethics (which, similarly to the Holocaust context, can be roughly divided into proponents of unrepresentability and advocates of the importance of artistic expression), but a reflection of the process of establishing a cultural trauma outlined in the introduction, as the public dialogue attempts to identify key roles in the narrative, such as victims, perpetrators, and the event’s place in an international and transhistorical context.²⁶⁷ These concerns, as I will explore throughout this section alongside Foer’s representations of individual trauma, are in fact encoded within the text of *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*, and, just as with *Everything is Illuminated*, Foer depicts this process as necessarily incomplete.

Yet, the categorisation of *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* as a 9/11 novel is problematic in itself, a difficulty of which Foer is not unaware. In an interview for *Powell’s*, he explained that ‘[i]f someone were to say to [him], ‘What’s your book about?,’ it would be

²⁶⁵ Harry Siegel, ‘Extremely Cloying and Incredibly False’, *NY Press*, [April 2005] 17 February 2015 <<http://www.nypress.com/news/extremely-cloying-incredibly-false-JVNP1020050420304209984>> [Accessed 6 November 2020], n.p.

²⁶⁶ Kristiaan Versluys, *Out of the Blue: September 11 and the Novel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), p. 11.

²⁶⁷ See pp. 50-51, 37-38.

disingenuous not to mention September 11th. It would misrepresent the book. On the other hand, to only talk about it is even more misrepresentative.’²⁶⁸ In fact, of the novel’s three narrative strands, only Oskar’s centres substantially on the aftereffects of 9/11. The other two, comprising letters written by his paternal grandparents, are focused on the aftermath of the allied firebombing of Dresden. Even within Oskar’s narrative, which follows his adventures as he embarks on what Matthew Mullins calls a ‘literal and psychological journey in dealing with the traumatic loss of his father’ to the attacks on the World Trade Center, attempting to find the corresponding lock for the mysterious key he found amongst his father’s possessions, 9/11 appears only as a spectral backdrop.²⁶⁹ Interestingly, the term ‘9/11’ does not appear at any point during the text. This oblique approach goes some ways towards countering the way in which, as explained in the introduction, the signifier comes to take the place of the signified, emptying it of its traumatic content even as it claims to encapsulate it.²⁷⁰ Indeed, contrary to the popular approach identified by Derrida, in which discourse ‘is reduced to pronouncing mechanically a date, repeating it endlessly, as a kind of ritual incantation, a conjuring poem, a journalistic litany or rhetorical refrain that admits to not knowing what it’s talking about [...] for repetition always protects by neutralizing, deadening, distancing a traumatism’, Foer’s obvious, but not verbally explicit, treatment of 9/11 grants him greater freedom to explore individual trauma and grief without their elision by the public narrative surrounding the tragedy.²⁷¹ The few references to the date of the attacks are instead codified by the phrase ‘the worst day,’ which not only incorporates the strongly negative affect the date holds for Oskar, but also aligns itself as a personal relationship with the event, thus highlighting Foer’s focus on individual, rather than ‘politicized or commercialized’—that is, those means and mechanisms by which a cultural trauma is primarily established—responses to trauma.²⁷²

Complexly, Oskar is situated at the juncture between personal and cultural (and, as I will explore later, even transgenerational) trauma. Although critics such as Gibbs consider Oskar part of an ambiguous ‘collective trauma’ alongside other New Yorkers, the sudden loss

²⁶⁸ Dave, n.p.

²⁶⁹ Matthew Mullins, ‘Boroughs and Neighbors: Traumatic Solidarity in Jonathan Safran Foer’s *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*’, *Papers on Language and Literature*, 45:3 (2009), 298-324 (p. 298).

²⁷⁰ See p. 51.

²⁷¹ Jacques Derrida, ‘Autoimmunity: Real and Symbolic Suicides—A Dialogue with Jacques Derrida’, in *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida*, ed. by Giovanna Borradori (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2003), pp. 85-136 (pp. 86-87).

²⁷² Deborah Solomon, ‘The Rescue Artist’, *New York Times*, 27 February 2005
<<https://www.nytimes.com/2005/02/27/magazine/the-rescue-artist.html>> [Accessed 13 November 2020], n.p.

of his father in a terrorist attack would qualify Oskar for possible PTSD per the guidelines in DSM-V, which state that '[e]xposure to actual or threatened death'—part of the primary criterion for the diagnosis of PTSD—can occur via '[l]earning that the traumatic event(s) occurred to a close family member or close friend.'²⁷³ Regardless, the impact of the trauma on his psyche is clear throughout the novel, although, as with his approach to 9/11, Foer's child-narrator provides a comparably non-explicit portrayal of his posttraumatic symptoms. Most obvious are euphemisms such as 'heavy boots' to signify depression, which once again emphasise personal experience over the predominantly accepted language used in adult public discourse, in this case, psychological terminology. Instead, 'heavy boots' recalls a specific psychosomatic aspect of depression, a feeling of sluggishness and weightedness, that is not plainly contained within its conventional designation. Other indicators of Oskar's posttraumatic condition are similarly thinly-veiled but identifiable in other areas of his narrative, such as in his anxieties and inventions. In the case of the former, Oskar provides a diverse list of 'stuff that made [him] panicky', including

suspension bridges, germs, airplanes, fireworks, Arab people on the subway (even though I'm not racist), Arab people in restaurants and coffee shops and other public places, scaffolding, sewers and subway grates, bags without owners, shoes, people with mustaches, smoke, knots, tall buildings, turbans.²⁷⁴

Although certain triggers for Oskar seem random or generic (such as knots or fireworks, the latter presumably relating to a hyperaroused response to the loud sound of their exploding), a considerable number can clearly be related directly to the events of 9/11 (such as airplanes, Arabs, and tall buildings), and constitute traumatic reminders that restrict his daily life—for example, he carries 'iodine pills in case of a dirty bomb' (87) with him on his journey around New York as an essential item along with his cell phone and a map. Curiously, Oskar's fear of turbans fits into neither of the above categories, and instead suggests a conflation of Sikh and Muslim cultures, a particularly problematic result of cultural trauma (highlighted in the introduction) in which perpetrators are misidentified in the ensuing confusion and tribalism.²⁷⁵ Here, with an effect similar to the juxtaposition between the adult mentality in Oskar

²⁷³ Gibbs, p. 131; American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 5th edn., p. 271.

²⁷⁴ Jonathan Safran Foer, *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* (London: Penguin, 2012), p. 36. All further references are to this edition, and are given after quotations in the text. Unless otherwise specified, all italics occur in the original.

²⁷⁵ See pp. 41-42.

Matzerah's infant body as depicted in Günter Grass's German postwar novel *The Tin Drum*—an important intertextual reference in *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* that connects tin-drumming German Oskar Matzerath with Foer's tambourine-playing German-descended Oskar Schell—the puerility of this perspective stands in contrast with Oskar's otherwise precocious narration. This, alongside Oskar's own assertions that he is 'not racist', is not only used by Foer to stimulate a critical reappraisal of such common errors in the post-9/11 American cultural climate, but points at the ways in which racism is not only constituted by active hatred, but also, insidiously, through an ignorance that frequently goes undetected in individuals, allowing it to harmfully proliferate within the community. Such incongruities in maturity, like Grass's commentary on postwar Germany, also act as a challenge towards the nation's biases and deficits in knowledge about the September 11 attacks, and especially the 'lone victim' mentality that was prevalent in the immediate aftermath, provoking questions regarding the complexity of these views and whether or not they are appropriately well-developed.

Oskar's posttraumatic anxiety is also reflected in his inventions. Many of these fantastic creations also refer unmistakably to 9/11, such as 'a skyscraper that moved up and down while its elevator stayed in place' (3), 'incredibly long ambulances that connected every building to a hospital' (258), and 'skyscrapers made with moving parts, so they could rearrange themselves when they had to, and even open holes in their middles for planes to fly through' (259). Such fantastic creations, in a manner typical of hyperarousal described in the introduction, serve to gain a sense of retroactive mastery over the event, to prevent his traumatisation in the first place.²⁷⁶ Evocative of the 9/11 Commission's assessment that '[t]he most important failure was one of imagination' in anticipating the attacks, Oskar's imagined preventatives seek to correct this perceived oversight, whilst their unfeasible nature subtly belie the plausibility of the endeavour.²⁷⁷ Oskar's trauma also has an intrusive character. When visiting Ruth Black in the Empire State Building, Oskar is subject to an involuntary and highly detailed visualisation of a plane crashing into the skyscraper that blurs into his present reality. Notably, the traumatic specificity of this scenario is alien to Oskar, who constructs the encounter through a mixture of mediated images and accounts (such as those found online) and his own imagination. In a sense, he is acting out a trauma that he never experienced, but

²⁷⁶ See pp. 16-17.

²⁷⁷ National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, 'Executive Summary', *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States* <https://govinfo.library.unt.edu/911/report/911Report_Exec.pdf> [Accessed 7 September 2020], p. 9.

is made frighteningly graphic both by his emotional investment in the disaster and the thoroughness of his online research. Hence, Foer hints at the complications that may be present in the post-9/11 categories of the traumatised, suggesting that physical proximity to the towers is but one of a number of traumatogenic proximities to 9/11, which include emotional proximity via personal relationships, and, interestingly, the proximity conferred by the immediacy of the digital landscape.²⁷⁸

The importance of globalising technologies such as the internet are of particular interest to Foer, which is something he has remarked upon on more than one occasion. '[K]ids in particular', he explains,

have access to the tragedy that they didn't even five years ago. Kids are so proficient with the Internet, not to mention curious. Also, kids are *darkly* curious in a way that adults might not be. You can see a beheading within five minutes if you want—and a lot of kids want to, or they feel compelled to.²⁷⁹

This compulsion, which is certainly reflected in Oskar's characterisation, is compounded by 9/11's status as 'a global media event', to use the words of Richard Gray, with a uniquely visual dimension.²⁸⁰ In their depiction in the media and the global consciousness, the events of September 11 have become almost synonymous with images of smoke, burning skyscrapers, and dust- and ash-covered survivors and first responders stumbling onto the streets below, which were repeated over and over again on television sets all over the world. Mirroring this, *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* also makes extensive use of visual media. Described by Aaron Mauro as 'a performance of visual bombardment', the narrative is interspersed with a series of images, including personal photographs from Oskar's quest, movie stills, and images

²⁷⁸ It is worth noting that several of the elements that I have read here in terms of trauma have been interpreted differently by other critics. In particular, I want to draw attention to Sonya Freeman Loftis's reading of Oskar as autistic. Although potential ASD has been noted in Oskar before, and even constituted an explicit concern in Stephen Daldry's 2011 adaptation of the film, Loftis provides the most detailed and sophisticated analysis to date, including the issue of stereotyping. Even the title of the novel, *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*, she argues, is suggestive of the experience of autism. She suggests that one of the important outcomes of her interpretation is that 'Oskar's unspoken disability and struggle to communicate symbolize the larger cultural trauma surrounding 9/11', and that '[i]f this novel asks fundamental questions about what it means to speak, to communicate, to be heard, and to connect emotionally, seeing Oskar as an autistic character may help readers to see that these are problems for all people, not just autistic people.'

Sonya Freeman Loftis, *Imagining Autism: Fiction and Stereotypes on the Spectrum* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2015), pp. 108, 124.

²⁷⁹ Dave, n.p.

²⁸⁰ Gray, p. 6.

downloaded online, which Oskar includes in his scrapbook ‘Stuff That Happened to Me’.²⁸¹ While Lewis S. Gleich argues that the ‘passive construction “Stuff That Happened To Me” is an apt characterization of the passive manner in which Americans allow images to colonize our daily lives’, it also suggests, furthermore, that the diverse range of content from a diverse range of sources—such as an image of Laurence Olivier as Hamlet, one of mating tortoises, a design for a paper aeroplane, pages from a drawing pad in an art store, and a man falling from the collapsing World Trade Center—are all considered by Oskar things that have happened to *him* specifically, expanding his world of experience from the physical to encompass the virtual as well.²⁸² Importantly, repeated images pertaining to 9/11 also reinforce his preoccupation with the attacks—in other words, the centrality of the tragedy in his lifeworld as the most significant thing he considers to have happened to him—recurring in a manner that mirrors that of traumatic intrusion. The images appear suddenly and without warning in the middle of the text, much like the intrusive nature of a flashback. This temporal disruption is augmented further due to the fact that apprehension of an image as a whole is much more immediate than the slower construction of a whole via prose, where both its linearity and the time taken to read delay its holistic comprehension. In short, as with traumatic memory (as discussed in the introduction), the data in an image is received and processed differently from that of a verbal narrative, and Foer’s use of images simulates and stimulates such alternative methods of locating and gathering information.²⁸³ Yet, although this visual enactment of trauma has been highlighted by Gibbs as a ‘banally literal’ response to such findings in trauma theory, and therefore evidence of Foer’s formulaic approach to trauma representation, when combined with its specificity to 9/11 a different picture emerges: not only mimicking Oskar’s experience of trauma itself via the sensory rather than narrative nature of the image, the use of images in *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* reflects what Foer calls the ‘visual language’ of 9/11, both in content and in representation.²⁸⁴

Of the images used in *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*, perhaps the most controversial is that of a man falling from one of the collapsing buildings. Although, as explained on the copyright page, the image Foer uses is a photo illustration, it functions, as Mauro notes, ‘as a symbolic correlate across all the images of the estimated two hundred

²⁸¹ Aaron Mauro, ‘The Languishing of the Falling Man: Don DeLillo and Jonathan Safran Foer’s Photographic History of 9/11’, *MFS*, 57:3 (2011), 584-606, (p. 597).

²⁸² Lewis S. Gleich, ‘Ethics in the Wake of the Image: The Post-9/11 Fiction of DeLillo, Auster, and Foer’, *Journal of Modern Literature*, 37:3 (2014), 161-176 (p. 168).

²⁸³ See pp. 14-16, 18.

²⁸⁴ Gibbs, p. 151; Dave, n.p.

people who jumped that day.’²⁸⁵ Based on the prolific photographs by Lyle Owerko, the falling man image captures and preserves a fleeting moment that was not even apprehensible at the time: ‘Due to the motion blur of the towers, the artificial proximity attributed to the 200mm zoom lens, and the closure of the shutter that obfuscates the image at the very moment of exposure,’ Mauro explains, photographers such as Richard Drew ‘could not see the moment as it flit past.’²⁸⁶ The resultant image, which is one of the most haunting of the images metonymically associated with 9/11, is therefore one that, due to the speed of its occurrence and the method of its capture, was not experienced at the time. It is also something of a taboo, preserving the final moments of an anonymous life, and strikingly embodying Barthes’s ‘horror [of] an anterior future of which death is the stake.’²⁸⁷ This belatedly tragic quality opens up perusal of the image to charges of voyeurism, of the deliberate *creation* of a spectacle out of suffering. In light of this, several ethical concerns arise as a result of Foer’s use of the picture, both on diegetic and representational levels. Most obvious is the issue of appropriating the image for artistic and commercial gain. Although the image is created rather than recorded, and therefore Foer does not appropriate a real, *individual* death as part of his fictional narrative (as Derrida notes, there is a unique intimacy to the photograph in its likeness of the person represented: ‘when I give someone [...] the photographed double of my look, I give him something with which I see but which I myself cannot see. [...] Nor can I see myself or know myself as giving. [...] This is an experience of the gift, of what cannot return to me’, which in this case would be nonconsensual), the factual deaths that are conceptualised within the image are still clearly evoked.²⁸⁸ Yet, simultaneously, as Gleich argues, ‘Foer and his characters subvert the spectacle by appropriating visual and print media for private purposes.’²⁸⁹ The picture appears as part of ‘Stuff That Happened to Me’ and is subject to Oskar’s private ruminations and speculation as to his father’s fate, rather than to further a specific political agenda or for sensationalist purposes. Therefore, Foer’s use of the image, while not wholly uncontroversial, retains as its focus the individual experience of trauma, and especially the role played by such photographic imagery in Oskar’s (and indeed many others’) personal experience of 9/11.

Oskar’s belief that 9/11 is something that happened to him takes on a problematically exceptionalist dimension, however. While I do not wish to suggest that Oskar is simply an

²⁸⁵ Mauro, p. 597.

²⁸⁶ Ibid, p. 588.

²⁸⁷ Barthes, p. 96.

²⁸⁸ Derrida, *Copy, Archive, Signature*, pp. 31-32.

²⁸⁹ Gleich, p. 163.

analogical representation of America, he, like the United States following 9/11, very much espouses a lone victim mentality. As Judith Butler explores extensively in *Precarious Life*, following the events of September 11 there was a prominent ‘fear of understanding’ why the United States was a target for Al-Qaeda, which ‘belies a deeper fear that we shall be taken up by it, find it contagious, become infected in a morally perilous way by the thinking of the presumed enemy’; that to understand the context which precipitated 9/11 was tantamount to sympathising with the terrorists or suggesting that the attacks were justified.²⁹⁰ The sentiment was so strong that organisations such as Take Back The Memorial formed and campaigned against what they perceived as a ‘disturbing and disrespectful’ plan to include an International Freedom Center (IFC) museum in the 9/11 memorial, which would highlight international and historical crimes against humanity including those perpetrated by the United States, perceiving this as disparagement of America, the dead, and the ‘sacred’ nature of the site.²⁹¹ Oskar, similarly, does not appear to make any connections between his experiences of grief and trauma and those of other people. In a class presentation, he plays a recording of Kinue Tomoyasu’s account of her experiences when the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, but Oskar does not seem to identify with, or even give much attention to, her emotional pain. Instead, as Merle Williams notes, he uses ‘the scientific method of observation as a screen from emotion and openness to others’, focusing his interest on the physics of the explosion, such as how scientists were able to discern its hypocentre, and the fact that dark-coloured objects were destroyed while white ones were not, as a result of their increased absorbance of light.²⁹² Although Oskar’s refusal to wear any colour other than white suggests that he has understood the ramifications of the account and has acted in a manner which would be conducive to the prevention of his own victimisation in the case of a recurrence, no explicit emotional connections are drawn between the two disasters and for Oskar, 9/11 remains a unique tragedy. As he explains to his therapist, ‘it really is worse for me’ (201).

This is not to suggest that there is not a genuine element of isolation inherent to Oskar’s trauma. The pervasive sense of disconnection in Oskar’s narrative is also reinforced by his environment and the circumstances of his trauma. Because of his age, Oskar is often dismissed or denied participation in conversations about 9/11 or his grief; for example, his mother hides her grief from him, rather than creating the conditions for solidarity in an

²⁹⁰ Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004), p. 8.

²⁹¹ Take Back The Memorial, ‘Welcome!’ *Take Back The Memorial*, 1 July 2005
 <<http://takebackthememorial.net/about.htm>> [Accessed 20 November 2020], n.p.

²⁹² Merle A. Williams, ‘A Tale of Two Oskars: Security or Hospitality in Jonathan Safran Foer’s *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*’, *American Literary History*, 28:4 (2016), 702-720 (p. 715).

experience that they both, on the whole, share. As Adrienne Harris notes of her clinical research in family mourning, when a parent is lost early in a child's life, 'all too often the surviving, grief-stricken parent "disappeared" emotionally as well. The depression in the surviving parent feels to the child like another abandonment.'²⁹³ Moreover, his alarmingly insensitive therapist Dr Fein (who once tactlessly asks Oskar 'Do you think any good can come from your father's death?' (203)) not only speculates that Oskar's pain might be a byproduct of the onset of puberty (201), but also excludes Oskar from a discussion about his mental health—including such serious measures as hospitalisation (206-207)—which Oskar only learns about through eavesdropping. In this way, Oskar's trauma is to an extent diminished and delegitimised by the other characters, and, because of his status as a child, he is denied the position of a valid, subjectified 'victim' in the ongoing narrativization of 9/11. As an aside, this is important not only within the confines of the text, but also in terms of a broader discussion regarding acceptable modes of trauma representation and the role of literary criticism therein. As intimated earlier, Gibbs finds the theoretically conventional portrayal of Oskar's trauma to be 'limit[ing]', yet simultaneously rejects age-appropriate linguistic symbolisation of the trauma in Oskar's narrative, such as the use of phrases such as 'heavy boots', as coy rather than valid forms of representation for an individual whose age likely restricts apprehension of clinical vocabulary.²⁹⁴ This is similarly reflected in his automatic categorisation of Oskar as experiencing the effects of a cultural rather than personal trauma as highlighted before. Although I do not disagree with Gibbs's charge that *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* is rather sentimental, his dismissal of the more sentimental depictions of Oskar's trauma is suggestive of an inappropriately restrictive approach to trauma, which, given the blurred fictional boundary associated with literary trauma studies identified in the introduction, carries worrying ethical implications regarding the consideration of traumatised children in public discourse.²⁹⁵

However, even with a more accepting approach to Oskar's status as a traumatised individual, it is undeniable that Oskar is complicit in his isolation, due to his refusal to challenge the uniqueness of his loss. While the text of *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* highlights a myriad of opportunities for identification for Oskar, from intertextual references such as the eponymous hero of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* to the diverse experiences of the 'Blacks' he encounters on his key quest, Ilka Saal notes that 'what needs to be emphasized

²⁹³ Adrienne Harris, 'Relational Mourning in a Mother and Her Three-Year-Old After September 11', in *September 11: Trauma and Human Bonds*, pp. 143-164 (p. 144).

²⁹⁴ Gibbs, pp. 153, 149.

²⁹⁵ See pp. 61-62.

here is Oskar's complete rejection of an analogical representation of trauma.'²⁹⁶ The most important site of potential identification, however, lies in the novel's German context, which is staged in two primary ways: firstly, through the intertextual reference to *The Tin Drum*; and secondly, through the stories of Oskar's grandparents, survivors of the Allied firebombing of Dresden. Not only suggestive of the borderlessness of violence and trauma, Foer's German characters also raise important questions surrounding victimhood and the writing of history. In terms of cultural trauma, the collective branding of German citizens as the perpetrators of the Holocaust has led to the denial of claims to victimhood for various atrocities—including the bombing of Dresden, which, as Collado-Rodríguez highlights, was essentially a calculated terror attack committed by the Allies against civilians—for Germans.²⁹⁷ This creates an interesting perspectival contrast between the two main traumata considered in *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*, and one that is not always received with comfort. Saal, for example, expresses 'concern' that the rather idyllic view of Dresden before its destruction held by Foer's German narrators

purposefully effaces concrete historical circumstances that are important for understanding the trauma of Dresden—such as, that Dresden was not a mere village in the middle of Europe and that Germans were not simply men of letters and lovers of nature. Elided from this particular narrative framing of the trauma of Dresden—and by analogical extension, of New York—are precisely the events leading up to the cataclysm, so that it must necessarily strike out of the blue.²⁹⁸

It would be incorrect to suggest that such an effacement is complete, however. Most notably, the background character of Simon Goldberg, a Jewish man who is first hidden by Oskar's grandmother's family and later ends up in Westerbork transit camp, acts as what Codde calls 'the most important absent presence in this novel', recalling the spectre of the Holocaust even

²⁹⁶ Ilka Saal, 'Regarding the Pain of Self and Other: Trauma Transfer and Narrative Framing in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*', *MFS*, 57:3 (2011), 453-476 (p. 460).

²⁹⁷ Francisco Collado-Rodríguez, 'Trauma, Ethics and Myth-Oriented Literary Tradition in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*', *Journal of English Studies*, 5-6 (2005-2008), 47-62 (p. 58). For an analysis of the changing perceptions of German postwar identity, see Bernhard Giesen, 'The Trauma of Perpetrators: The Holocaust as the Traumatic Reference of German National Identity', in *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, pp. 112-154.

²⁹⁸ Saal, pp. 466-467.

as the narrators present a romantic view of their childhood.²⁹⁹ This reference to the ongoing extermination of the Jews, combined with a common cultural knowledge of the events of World War II, forms a tension with the Germany depicted in the novel. The reader's knowledge that the attack on Dresden did not occur 'out of the blue' is juxtaposed with that of the characters, rendering the perspectives contained within the narratives of the grandparents—as summarised in Oskar's grandmother's question, '[h]ow could anything less deserve to be destroyed?' (313)—ostentatiously simplistic. The same challenge is applied by extension to the novel's 9/11 subject matter, and to Oskar's parallel impressions of 9/11 as a random, transculturally contextless event that can be unproblematically reduced into binaries of good and evil, victims and terrorists.

The fact that Oskar does not draw an analogy between his experience of 9/11 and his grandparents' experience of Dresden, clear within the narrative through such parallel images as the burning of loose sheets of paper (83, 325), is also attributable to, and compounded by, the grandparents' (in the case of grandfather Thomas Schell, quite literal) inability to speak about their experiences as a result of the trauma. This act of constriction, made clear in their respective narrative strands, operates to the extent that it blurs the boundaries of interior and exterior spaces, most notably performed in the division of their shared apartment into 'Something' and 'Nothing Places', to create 'nonexistent territories [...] in which one could temporarily cease to exist' (110). These zones, as Codde writes, 'enable them to act out the emptiness that pervades their lives', to map the mental sense of absence engendered by the loss of their entire lifeworlds in Dresden onto their physical environment.³⁰⁰ Yet, as with the other forms of representation depicted throughout the novel, the Something and Nothing Places do not provide an unproblematic solution to the issue: 'in the morning the Nothing vase cast a Something shadow, like the memory of someone you've lost, [...] at night the Nothing light from the guest room spilled under the Nothing door and stained the Something hallway' (110). Their demarcations of the boundaries between areas of experience and emptiness are impossible to manifest and maintain, and the experiences of Dresden and posttraumatic survivorship involuntarily bleed into each other. They cannot be fully dissociated by virtue of their unavoidable mutual existence within the grandparents' personal histories.

²⁹⁹ Philippe Codde, 'Keeping History at Bay: Absent Presences in Three Recent Jewish American Novels', *MFS*, 57:4 (2011), 673-693 p. 682.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid*, p. 682.

The attempt to enact the split, this binary division between Something and Nothing, is rendered further untenable by its application to everything within their lifeworlds. Thomas describes the pervasive nature of the Nothing zones, writing that

I was sitting on the sofa in the second bedroom one afternoon, thinking and thinking and thinking, when I realized I was on a Something island. ‘How did I get here,’ I wondered, surrounded by Nothing, ‘and how can I get back?’ (111)

He finds himself encircled by these imposed areas of emptiness to the point of becoming trapped by them, indicating the increasingly constrictive effect they have. Inevitably, moreover, the question arises as to whether the grandparents themselves can be considered Something or Nothing. ‘I told her “Something,”’ Thomas replies when his wife asks. “‘We must be.’” But I knew, in the most protected part of my heart, the truth’ (111). In the frame of a binary understanding of loss and survivorship, both grandparents are forced to choose between endlessly acting out the trauma of Dresden or moving on with their lives; a decision which has at its centre a question of posttraumatic identity and which elicits opposing responses from each grandparent, culminating in their respectively blank and black pages of life story. While Thomas, as highlighted above, is overwhelmed and integrates into this self-annihilating and melancholic sense of Nothing, his wife is more willing to try to mourn, and establish her life as Something.

That is not to suggest, however, that the grandmother’s life is not marked by a pervasive sense of absence. Unnamed throughout the text and treated to a great extent as a ‘memorial candle’ for Anna—her sister and Thomas’s pregnant sweetheart, killed in Dresden—the grandmother’s identity and sense of self are depicted as having been nullified by her trauma. Instead, she is defined in relation to others, and especially Anna. When she meets Thomas again in New York, she models for his sculpture, but

After only a few sessions, it became clear that he was sculpting Anna. He was trying to remake the girl he knew seven years before. He looked at me as he sculpted, but he saw her. (83)

In this way, her own body—the very locus of her self—becomes a site of remembrance for Anna, associated more with her sister than herself. Her compliance in Thomas’s endeavour to reclaim his lost lover hence comes at the expense of her own identity, as she cannot (literally)

embody both herself and her sister simultaneously. The use of sculpture as a form of representation is also significant here, as it simulates the form of a body, but remains empty of its consciousness or capacity for individual experience. The loss of her sense of self is likewise reflected in the life story Thomas encourages her to write, in which she ‘hit the space bar again and again and again’, in order to represent her feeling that her ‘life story was spaces’ (176). Her life story, just like her body, has been emptied of all individuated feeling and meaning, and is mimetically presented as a profound absence: a series of blank pages (121-123).

These feelings of absence are compounded by the grandmother’s attempts to overwrite and abandon her old life in Dresden with her new life in the US. Her immigration casts a geographical and cultural distance between herself and the events of the firebombing. Versluys notes that ‘[n]ot coincidentally, Grandpa and Grandma meet each other for the first time at the Columbian Bakery on Broadway. The name of the bakery and of the street evoke the promise of the American Dream’.³⁰¹ This dream, echoing the movement of people from ‘Old World’ Europe to the ‘New World’, is characterised less by the desire to improve her life and circumstances so much as to create one anew. This endeavour is facilitated in part by her decision alongside Thomas to discontinue speaking their native German (85). Instead, she becomes obsessed with the accumulation of American idioms, which she learns from magazines, in order to ‘become a real American’ (79). She desires her language to sound natural, in contrast to the formality usually associated with speakers of a second language; the language is to be considered a replacement rather than an extension of expressive possibilities. Her conversion to English is also significant because, as Caruth suggests, ‘there is also, perhaps, a certain loss of self implicit in the speaking of another’s language.’³⁰² Congruently, the grandmother’s two languages each come to symbolise a different self: the Something American present and future and the Nothing German past. Such a transition, moreover, is complicated by the spectre of another trauma: the cultural trauma of immigration. Although lacking in the cultural upheaval normally associated with a cultural trauma, the immigrant individual does find themselves, as Piotr Sztompka observes, ‘in the milieu of the alien culture’, creating similarly traumatogenic conditions and necessitating comparatively significant adaptations in terms of belief and identity.³⁰³ In this case, however,

³⁰¹ Versluys, p. 86.

³⁰² Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, p. 49.

³⁰³ Piotr Sztompka, ‘The Trauma of Social Change: A Case of Postcommunist Societies’, in *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, pp. 155-195 (p. 163).

the grandmother makes use of such loss of meaning to further separate herself from the trauma associated with Dresden, compounding the loss of her prior sense of self.

This process of blanking (as opposed to blackening, to which I will return shortly), leaves the grandmother with the potential for future possibility. Although her life story is blank, she succeeds in writing a letter to Oskar outlining her trauma and lessons she has learned from it, the text of which constitutes her narrative chapters of *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*. The pages themselves are characterised by a lot of blank space, including large gaps or even paragraph breaks between individual sentences; a visual allegory for ‘the slow, painstaking genesis of the word—the laborious victory of the survivor over the muteness of traumatic experience’, to use the words of Versluys.³⁰⁴ In this way, Foer does not depict a simplistic triumph over the sense of absence inherent to the grandmother’s experience, but shows the ways in which, as is fundamental to the process of working through a trauma, this absence exists simultaneously with its overcoming. To take this further, some of the achievements of her story hence lie both in the act of successful communication and in the communication specifically of the ‘life lesson’, per Belnap’s concept explained in the introduction, imparted by her trauma:

Here is the point of everything I have been trying to tell you, Oskar.

It’s always necessary.

I love you[.] (314)³⁰⁵

Recalling the grandmother’s regret that she did not tell her sister she loved her the night before she died, deeming it ‘unnecessary’ as ‘[t]here would be other nights’ (314), this lesson appears immediately before Oskar’s final chapter, in which he reconciles with his mother. This has led critics such as Earl G. Ingersoll to believe that Oskar received and read the letter prior to the final chapter, and that it influenced its outcome, supported by the fact that Oskar’s imaginative reversal of time is reminiscent of his grandmother’s own narrated dream sequences.³⁰⁶ In the grandmother’s dream, which Codde likens to Billy Pilgrim’s disrupted experience and narration of time in Kurt Vonnegut’s *Slaughterhouse-Five* (itself a novel focused on the bombing of Dresden, and strongly critical of the tragedy’s marginalisation in

³⁰⁴ Versluys, p. 99.

³⁰⁵ See p. 28.

³⁰⁶ Earl G. Ingersoll, ‘One Boy’s Passage, and His Nation’s: Jonathan Safran Foer’s “Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close”’, *CEA Critic*, 71:3 (2009), 54-69, p. 64.

American postwar discourse), not only was the bombing undone, but the dream continues on throughout history, culminating at the point of Genesis:

God brought together the land and the water, the sky and the water, the water
and the water, evening and morning, something and nothing.
He said, Let there be light.
And there was darkness. (313)³⁰⁷

Here, as Williams notes, '[t]he very terms of the dream underscore its attraction and its danger as a wish fulfillment, poised on the cusp of sacrificing Something to Nothing.'³⁰⁸ Unlike Oskar's vision of the floating man, to which I will return shortly and in which a degree of agency is regained over the traumatic event, the grandmother's dream is a testament to the incompleteness of her recovery from the trauma of Dresden, in its indication of potential regression into nonexistence at the expense of living. Likewise, although it is framed within the context of a dream, it lacks the conditional tone used by Oskar that would reinforce its fictive nature, or the boundary between it and the realities of lived existence. Hence, while the grandmother maintains the possibility of creating a life for herself beyond her trauma, this is not realised unproblematically or unambiguously.

The grandmother's narrative is in many ways complemented and contrasted by that of her husband. While the grandmother finds a way to communicate her trauma and begin the work of reestablishing a social connection, Thomas Schell is depicted in terms of failed communication and a life governed by his unresolved trauma; as Versluys puts it, he is 'the impersonation of constriction'.³⁰⁹ Foer stages Thomas's communication issues most explicitly through his muteness. The condition develops progressively after Thomas's arrival in the US, and mirrors the trajectory of his posttraumatic state. The first word he loses is 'Anna', corresponding to her death in Dresden, followed by the word 'and', signifying his ability to aggregate different events and ideas: he is unable to develop further beyond the initial trauma (16). Soon, a combination of the loss of the majority of his vocabulary and the specific word 'yes' means that Thomas begins to speak in negatives, such as 'I am the opposite of full,' or, when asked if he is Thomas, he answers '[n]ot no' (17). In other words, he loses the ability to describe events as they are, and must instead define them by what they are not. Finally, the

³⁰⁷ Codde, 'Keeping History at Bay', p. 682.

³⁰⁸ Williams, p. 717.

³⁰⁹ Versluys, p. 87.

last word Thomas loses is 'I' (17), a symbolic loss of self in the social context of language. Consequently, he seeks out alternative modes of communication. In one instance, he attempts to communicate with his estranged wife by telephone, and resorts to pressing the keys on the handset that correspond with the letters of the words he is trying to say, resulting audibly in a series of unintelligible beeps on her end, and represented by Foer by two and a half pages filled with random sequences of numbers (269-271). The code in this way acts as a kind of metaphor; his trauma remains to be decoded, or, to echo the metaphor present in Oskar's narrative, unlocked. While, as Sonya Freeman Loftis observes, '[e]very string of numbers is followed by either a question mark or an exclamation point. [Thomas] is asking for answers. He is shouting, frantic to communicate with her after finding out about their son's death', the message is not received, and remains a mystery both to the grandmother and the reader.³¹⁰ A social connection is therefore not (re)established and his trauma remains unexpressed.

Following his becoming mute, Thomas attempts to communicate most frequently through the written word, however. He inscribes his thoughts on objects and his environment around him, such as the walls of his room, and on his body itself, both with a pen and through the 'YES' and 'NO' tattoos on his hands. In this, as S. Todd Atchison writes, 'he uses his body as text. Grandfather authors himself on himself. He demarcates his body, objectifying the self in order to communicate with another.'³¹¹ Hence, in a manner somewhat parallel to the objectification of the grandmother's body as sculpture, Thomas employs his own body as an artifact to represent ideas, and in doing so attempts to render the internal external and visible. However, whilst these tattoos facilitate day to day interactions, they also reduce his expressive capabilities into a binary logic, excluding the means for expressing ambiguity or nuance and reflecting his belief that the world is reducible into Something and Nothing. More complex thoughts are expressed through his daybooks, which he uses both as a means of basic communication and to write letters to his son. In the case of the former, Foer highlights the simultaneous expansive and limiting qualities of language, as a deficit of pages forces Thomas to recycle old lines of dialogue towards new ends. For example, the phrase 'The regular please' (28) (presumably initially used to order food from the bakery) is used as a response to the question of how he is feeling on a particular day. Words and phrases are hence creatively imbued with new meaning and expressive possibilities, but, like Alex's translated English in *Everything is Illuminated*, Thomas's interactions using this method are clearly

³¹⁰ Loftis, pp. 118-119.

³¹¹ S. Todd Atchison, "'Why I am writing from where you are not': Absence and presence in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*", *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 46:3-4 (2010), 359-368 (p. 363).

marked by the imprecision of the signifiers employed, and conversation is convoluted, strained, and often ineffective or incomplete. The same incompleteness can be attributed to the letters he writes to his son, which form the most introspective and detailed elucidations of his experiences, not only because all but one are unsent (with the empty envelopes the grandmother receives further highlighting their absence), but because the aforementioned material limitations of his daybooks mean that his writing becomes more and more cramped, until it overlaps so much that the entire page becomes black and illegible. Consequently, 'losing his words has the same effect as this overabundance of words', as Versluys puts it; Thomas again finds himself incapable of communicating his trauma, and instead offers a representation of absence.³¹² Yet, unlike the blank pages of his wife, they cannot be overwritten.

Such a trajectory towards annihilation is furthermore emphasised within the legible content of the letters, which includes the most detailed description of a traumatic event within the whole text. Thomas depicts the firebombing of Dresden, as Saal observes, in terms of 'a biblical cataclysm, a catastrophe wrecked by higher powers and not war. His heavy emphasis on apocalyptic imagery and vivid colors aestheticizes the event in the manner of a baroque allegorical painting.'³¹³ The passage hence not only is suggestive of the Revelations-esque end of his world, but complements the grandmother's vision of regression towards Genesis. Thus, while completely opposite in their approach, both grandparents exhibit a compulsion towards nonexistence, and both therefore end up in 'the liminal space of the airport', as Williams notes, 'in a partial parody of Beckett-like waiting that suspends, rather than resolves, binary oppositions'.³¹⁴ However, the main difference between them lies in that Thomas's apocalyptic attitude towards his trauma does not allow for the possibility of beginning again. The grandmother, by contrast, acknowledges from the airport that 'this won't last' (313), and while Thomas has already run out of space in his daybooks, she occupies herself with her letter to Oskar, in which finally '[t]he words are coming so easily' (313). While she dreams of a return to the beginning of the world, this is in some ways metaphorically realised in her writing of the letter over the blank pages of her previous life story. Her love for Oskar has enabled to forge new and meaningful social connections—integral to the recovery from trauma—that Thomas was unable to make in his absence.

³¹² Versluys, p. 95.

³¹³ Saal, p. 466.

³¹⁴ Williams, p. 711.

The duality of these narratives, furthermore, is used by Foer in a manner similar to that in *Everything is Illuminated*, wherein the three different narrative strands complement and help clarify each other. For example, the grandmother's repeated comments about her husband's affinity for animals, and her comparison of the number of pets he keeps in his apartment to a 'zoo' (82), are given additional meaning by the later revelation that during the bombing of Dresden, Thomas was enlisted to shoot the escaped animals from the Dresden zoo. His later adoption and care for the animals can, therefore, be understood as an act of atonement. Similar comparisons also frequently highlight lapses in communication and understanding, such as when Oskar notices his grandmother walking with a large rock (which he interprets in terms of the attractive rocks she collects for him, although he never receives this particular one), which is revealed in her narrative to be her chosen suicide plan ('I was going to walk to the Hudson River and keep walking. I would carry the biggest stone I could bear and let my lungs fill with water' (82)), even if she never refers to the actual event in question. Oskar's obliviousness to his grandmother's trauma and resulting mental health issues also underscores the main direction of miscommunication in the novel: the transgenerational. Oskar, as previously mentioned, is unaware of his grandparents' traumatic past, and therefore lacks insight into parallels between their experiences and his own through which he could mitigate his feelings of aloneness and of not being understood. These parallel experiences range from the obvious loss of a loved one to specifics such as inhabiting the role of a memorial candle: Oskar is compared to his late father with a similar frequency to his grandmother's implicit comparison to her sister. Similarly, some knowledge of his family past would allow Oskar to understand some of the eccentricities of his family's behaviour, such as his grandmother's intense anxiety, to the point of panic, when Oskar hides out of her sight, which is a behaviour closely associated with people who have undergone a traumatic event.

The most striking example of transgenerational miscommunication, however, is represented through Oskar's father's response to the only letter he receives from his own father. The letter in question—in which Thomas describes the firebombing—is presented covered in red ink where Thomas Jr. has circled spelling and grammatical errors, as well as phrases that have struck him. This has been interpreted by critics such as Saal as his having 'little interest in the traumatic content' of the letter, instead focusing on its technical mistakes, rather like the scientific buffer Oskar places between himself and Kinue Tomoyasu's interview.³¹⁵ Interestingly, however, there is a lack of differentiation between the phrases

³¹⁵ Saal, p. 465.

highlighted for their grammatical incorrectness and those that he deemed noteworthy. Therefore, when Foer draws attention to the signature on the letter ('I love you,/ Your Father' (216)), the reasons for Thomas Jr.'s interest are ambiguous. Although it may suggest that he is touched by his estranged father's expression of affection, it is entirely feasible that he deems it, like the spelling of 'actresses' (208) or the lack of capitalisation in 'alps' (209), a mistake, and thus constitutes a rejection of his father's testimony and a refusal to abandon his own agenda and feelings of resentment at the estrangement when receiving it.

However, an alternative explanation is suggested when the grandmother reveals that Thomas Jr. was 'obsessed with [the letter], always reading it' (277); that he is seeking clues that might allow him to understand the absent field left by his father's physical disappearance and his parents' silence regarding their past lives, a skill which he passes on to Oskar through the 'Reconnaissance Expedition' games he plays with him. In one such game, Thomas Jr. deliberately does leave a clue for Oskar by circling the words 'not stop looking' (10) in the newspaper, but, more importantly, emphasises the importance of the consideration of absence as an object—or clue—in itself:

For the last one we ever did, which never finished, he gave me a map of Central Park. I said, 'And?' And he said, 'And what?' I said, 'What are the clues?' He said, 'Who said there had to be clues?' 'There are always clues.' 'That doesn't, in itself, suggest anything.' 'Not a single clue?' He said, 'Unless no clues is a clue.' (8)

Although the skill of creating meaning from fragmentary or missing information is an important skill for the third generation, Oskar initially finds it difficult to employ. As Versluys notes, Oskar's 'scientific scrutiny' of the items he finds in Central Park during his search 'does not allow him to raise the status of these objects or integrate them into a semblance of order.'³¹⁶ Yet, it is also this technique that underlies his key quest and the Sixth Borough bedtime story, which, respectively, successfully brings him closer to his family (albeit in an unexpected way, drawing him closer to his mother rather than father), and encourages him to implement a creative interplay between historical, factual, or material evidence and imaginative possibility. In other words, Oskar learns how to creatively cope with historical absence. Moreover, it is perhaps the development of this technique over the course of the

³¹⁶ Versluys, p. 109.

novel that influences the comparatively optimistic outcome experienced by Oskar. In what he deems ‘a simple solution to an impossible problem’ (321), Oskar, alongside his grandfather, digs up his father’s empty coffin, and confronts the absence therein; the absence of a body, and of information or evidence pertaining to exact circumstances of his death. His ability to cope with these absences is contrasted by Thomas’s inability to do the same, as he fills the coffin with the unsent letters in an attempt to (literally) bury the past instead of facing it, and retreats to the airport instead of facing the tension between the traumatic past and the future. Oskar, on the other hand, applies a technique for coping with transgenerational trauma to his personal trauma, with positive results.

This is perhaps clearest, however, in Oskar’s imaginative reversal of the falling man images in the final pages of the novel, so that it appears that ‘the man was floating up through the sky’ (325). Oskar goes on to imagine that ‘if [he]’d had more pictures, he would’ve flown through a window, back into the building, and the smoke would’ve poured into the hole that the plane was about to come out of’, before recounting the last evening he spent with his father in reverse, and ending with the assertion that ‘[w]e would have been safe’ (326). While critics such as Saal and Collado-Rodríguez read this as ‘attempt[ing] [...] a retrieval of a lost pre-9/11 innocence’ or as symbolic of the inability of Americans to accept the reality of 9/11 respectively, such explanations do not reflect the nuance of the role of the flipbook in Oskar’s progress towards recovery from trauma. It is especially important to note, in the words of Codde, that ‘the entire closing section of the novel is written in the past conditional mood, which clearly indicates the illusory nature of the entire endeavor’.³¹⁷ Hence, while Oskar is aware that the exercise occurs in his imagination only, this interplay of fact and fiction also has the compounding effect of ‘assuming agency over the image that haunts him,’ as Gleich observes.³¹⁸ To take this further, this restoration of a sense of agency, integral to traumatic recovery, differs from Oskar’s earlier inventions in that it implicitly involves a degree of acceptance of factual events, and an understanding that the tragedy could not have been prevented in the ways that he had previously imagined. Furthermore, such acceptance allows him to begin the process of recovery, in which, as Harris outlines, ‘there is (perhaps always to some degree) the simultaneous need for acceptance and creative denial.’³¹⁹ The flipbook and accompanying narrative exemplifies this urge, representing at the same time his cognisance of

³¹⁷ Saal, p. 472; Collado-Rodríguez, ‘Trauma, Ethics and Myth-Oriented Literary Tradition in Jonathan Safran Foer’s *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*’, pp. 51-52; Philippe Codde, ‘Philomela Revisited: Traumatic Iconicity in Jonathan Safran Foer’s *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*’, *Studies in American Fiction*, 35:2 (2007), 241-254 (p. 251).

³¹⁸ Gleich, p. 171.

³¹⁹ Harris, p. 158.

the impossibility of return to a pre-9/11 'safety' and a reestablishment of his creative agency. The image that once bound him in a cycle of invention is, therefore, also the means by which he can begin to free himself from the constantly intrusive and fixed scenarios of destruction and devastation that haunt him earlier in the novel. Oskar's manipulation of the image into the flipbook also further signifies a shift in the representational strategy denoted by the image of the falling man, transforming it from a factual representation of 9/11 through the image's use as a historical artifact towards a creation that specifically engages the emotional components of his trauma, namely an artistic expression of his pain and yearning. This acknowledgement and explicit confrontation with the emotional register of the image is suggestive of movement towards more effective narrativization as per the work of Pennebaker and colleagues noted in the introduction, in addition to the usage of a more stable sense of time and tense, as opposed to the enduring and intrusive present tense in which trauma is experienced.³²⁰ This lends the denouement an optimistic air, even as the recovery process is incomplete within the diegesis of the text, and the remainder (or regression) is not portrayed within the narrative.

Just as Oskar's recovery process is not completed within the text of the novel, nor is the communication between the grandparents and their grandson restored. In this way, instead of mapping out solutions to the problems of personal and cultural trauma, Foer opens up possible sources for traumatic solidarity and methods for coping with absence, which must necessarily be realised beyond the diegesis of the novel. In other words, while the transnational community that Mullins attributes to the novel is not attained by its characters, the parallels between their experiences and traumas are made clear through the collation of their individual narrative strands.³²¹ Like *Everything is Illuminated*, *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* hence posits ways in which we might apply the lessons of history to a present day context, and especially in response to the recent trauma of 9/11. In this, although the novel is not overtly political, Foer challenges strongly nationalistic and exceptionalist responses to the attacks: it is clear that Oskar, while his circumstances are legitimately poignant, is by no means a lone victim. While the novel has been criticised by Gibbs and Sehgal in the context of opposition to trauma fiction, for failing to significantly enrich geopolitical narratives, this is the contribution that Foer makes to the ongoing placement of September 11 in cultural discourse, along with the very prescient reminder that such tragedies are not simply a chapter in a political narrative.³²² Ultimately, Foer emphasises that at the

³²⁰ See pp. 45-47.

³²¹ Mullins, p. 301.

³²² Gibbs, p. 124; Sehgal, n.p.

heart of a tragedy—whether a contemporary or historical event; and whether enacted upon or perpetrated by the USA, Germany, Japan, or any other nation—is its victims, whose pain and trauma should neither be overlooked nor overwritten, and must remain at the core of our response.

Here I Am

Published eleven years after *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*, *Here I Am* (2016) reflects not only a temporal distance within Foer's fiction, but creative and thematic differences too: as one review in *The Scotsman* exclaims, '[m]y, but Safran Foer has grown up.'³²³ However, despite early positive reviews such as this (in 2016, Alan Bett stated that '*Here I Am* is being declared Jonathan Safran Foer's masterpiece'), the reception of the novel has been generally tepid, and has garnered no significant critical attention to date.³²⁴ As well as a shift in narrative style, including containing fewer experimental and postmodern elements than his previous novels, *Here I Am* focuses less on individual psychological responses to trauma and more on broader questions surrounding cultural trauma and identity. Where *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* constitutes in itself participation in the process of establishing a cultural trauma, *Here I Am* explicitly imagines the ways in which cultural traumas are invoked and written in the wake of an imagined disaster: an earthquake that ravages the Middle East and causes pre-existent tensions to erupt. However, much like in *Everything is Illuminated* and *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*, this trauma serves as a backdrop to the private concerns of the novel's central characters; in this case the Bloch family, a middle-class American family consisting of two members of the third generation and their three fourth-generation children, who grapple with questions of their Jewish identity in relation to facets such as tradition, the Holocaust, and modern Israel. The narrative takes place during the planning of the eldest son Sam's bar mitzvah, and revolves around four main crises and traumas: a serious injury sustained by Sam as a young child when his hand was crushed in a door, the legacy of family patriarch Isaac's experiences in surviving the Holocaust, the breakdown of Jacob and Julia's marriage, and, of course, the chaos incurred by the destruction of Israel in the earthquake. Each trauma, as this section will examine, is interlinked by Foer as a means of forming—or breaking down—different identity ties within the Bloch family.

³²³ Stuart Kelly, 'Book review: *Here I Am* by Jonathan Safran Foer', *Scotsman*, 28 August 2016 <<https://www.scotsman.com/whats-on/arts-and-entertainment/book-review-here-i-am-jonathan-safran-foer-1468453>> [Accessed 8 April 2021], n.p.

³²⁴ Bett, n.p.

The title of the novel, though interpreted by reviewers such as Michelle Dean and Yevgeniya Traps as containing an element of autobiographical declaration, is intended as a reference to the Akedah, an additional cultural reference point in which Abraham responds to God's injunction to sacrifice his son Isaac with the assertion 'here I am!'³²⁵ The quotation, and the story it is taken from, has been interpreted numerous times, but Foer uses it in the context of *Here I Am* primarily as an ethical imperative to be fully present for the other. In an interview with Bett, he explained that

devotion is what is at stake, in the book and in the title. To what is one unconditionally devoted? There are things that we think we are unconditionally devoted to, until some crisis actually forces a real world choice rather than a conceptual choice.³²⁶

The traumatic ruptures of the novel certainly incite such dilemmas in its characters, culminating in Jacob's choice not to fight for Israel, and the choice made with his wife to divorce. At the heart of these choices, Foer also suggests, is the question of home, '[w]hether home is inside of a marriage, or inside of a family, or inside of oneself.'³²⁷ To this can be added a geographical or political dimension of home, recalling the prepositional nature of the word 'here', and including, as I will explore further later, locations such as the United States, the Galician region of Eastern Europe, Israel, and even the digital landscape.

The central, successful example of ethical presence invoked by the phrase 'here I am' occurs in relation to Sam's injury. Although the incident itself is depicted as very traumatic for Julia—she is described as feeling 'untethered from rationality, from reality, from herself',

³²⁵ Michelle Dean, 'Me Oh My!', *The New Republic*, 7 September 2016 <<https://newrepublic.com/article/136331/oh-my>> [Accessed 15 February 2016], n.p.; Yevgeniya Traps, 'Jonathan Safran Foer's Extremely Ambitious and Incredibly Long New Novel', *Forward*, 2 September 2016

<<https://forward.com/culture/348919/jonathan-safran-foers-extremely-ambitious-and-incredibly-long-new-novel/>> [Accessed 15 February 2021], n.p.; Gen. 22.1.

Especially, perhaps, because Foer's autobiographical presence in his first novel is very clear, all of Foer's works have repeatedly been read as at least somewhat autobiographical, and *Here I Am* is no exception. In this case, although it is tempting to parallel Foer's own contemporaneous divorce with Krauss with the divorce depicted in the novel, Foer pointed out in an interview with Lev Grossman that most of the detail in the book was taken from an unaired television show he wrote. He explicitly states that '[his] divorce didn't affect the plot of the book at all. But [he is] sure it informed emotions that are being expressed.'

Grossman, n.p.

³²⁶ Bett, n.p.

³²⁷ Ibid.

unable to even hear Sam scream for a brief moment of peritraumatic dissociation—Foer writes that

Sam looked at Julia with a prehuman terror and screamed, ‘Why did that happen? Why did that happen?’ And pleaded, ‘It’s funny. It’s funny, right?’ She gripped Sam’s eyes with her eyes, held them hard, and didn’t say, ‘It will be OK,’ and didn’t say nothing. She said, ‘I love you, and I’m here.’³²⁸

Rather than providing platitudes, negating by rationalisation the emotional register of Sam’s confused horror, or affirming Sam’s attempts to negate his own experience by reimagining it as a humorous event (a tendency which, as I will elucidate shortly, is in part derived from a transgenerational response to Isaac’s Holocaust experience), Julia instead expresses the devotion highlighted by Foer, asserting her presence and availability for his pain. In this, the interpersonal connection between them is affirmed rather than lost at the point of trauma. Moreover, although this event does become the ‘trauma center’ (173) of Julia’s mind, eliciting further traumatic symptoms highlighted in the introduction—the intrusion of the memory in the manner of a flashback when triggered by feelings of anxiety according to state-dependent memory retrieval; and a constrictive hyperfocus on his disfigured hand that echoes the temporal disruption of secondary dissociation, perceiving its movements in ‘slow motion’ (83)—it is also recalled as a testament to the fact that ‘in the most important moment of her child’s life, she’d been a good mother’ (174).³²⁹ It thus functions as a benchmark by which she can measure the extent to which one’s needs are given over to those of the other. Accordingly, in addition to its recollection under conditions of anxiety, Sam’s injury is recalled as a symbolic framework for Julia when other ‘emergency’ scenarios arise, from as disparate sources as the gaining of a hypothetical nuclear weapon at her son’s Model UN or her disintegrating marriage. In particular, in the case of the latter, the injury is invoked both at the point of discovery of Jacob’s secret phone (used to send sexually explicit messages to another woman), and in Jacob’s reflection on their ultimate separation. In a phone call to Julia, he observes that ‘[y]ou opened the door, unknowingly. I closed it, unknowingly’ (508), referring simultaneously to their accidental causation of Sam’s injury and, metaphorically, to their equal participation in the circumstances leading to their divorce. The allegorical door, as a

³²⁸ Jonathan Safran Foer, *Here I Am* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2016), p. 174. All further references are to this edition, and are given after quotations in the text. Unless otherwise specified, all italics occur in the original. For peritraumatic dissociation, see p. 19 of this thesis.

³²⁹ See pp. 17-18, 19.

point of exit charged with connotations of trauma, hence acts a boundary between where they are present for each other and their marriage, and where they are not.

Another instance in which the titular presence is not realised is with regard to family patriarch Isaac. The irony of this fact is foregrounded by Foer in two main ways: firstly, the novel opens with Isaac, ostensibly centralising him in the narrative, a placement which in actuality generally only occurs abstractly or ideologically; and secondly, Isaac's naming is significant in terms of the Akedah. Isaac, as the son of Abraham, is the one offered up as a sacrifice to God. The symbolic connections that can be drawn between Isaac of the Akedah and Isaac of *Here I Am* with regard to his Holocaust survivorship are numerous—in fact, even the word 'holocaust' itself, when uncapitalised, refers to the ritual burnt offering that Isaac was supposed to become in the biblical story—and include aspects such as the invocation of connotations of sacrifice prevalent in early Holocaust discourse in addition to explicit reference to the Akedah, as remarked upon by Frosh; Isaac's marginal escape from death; and the ethical problems incurred by the treatment of Isaac specifically.³³⁰ Although translations of the biblical passage vary—some versions have Abraham answer his son's appeal with 'yes, my son?' while others repeat the phrase 'here I am' or 'here am I'—the extent to which Isaac's needs are considered—or, in other words, the extent to which Abraham is present for Isaac—is questionable: Abraham never considers not sacrificing Isaac.³³¹ Rather, Isaac becomes the means by which other presences are fulfilled, such as that to God, as opposed to being an agentic presence within the story. In the context of *Here I Am*, Isaac similarly occupies a symbolic rather than agentic role, his Holocaust experiences acting as an ethical appeal that is not answered within the personal sphere, but used to justify other objects of devotion.

Consequently, Isaac's family maintain a somewhat dualistic relationship with him characterised both by reverence and impassivity; as Sam puts it, '[m]y family cares very much about caring for [Isaac], but not enough to actually care' (101). Both Isaac's son, Irv, and grandson, Jacob, are depicted with clear senses of a perceived duty incurred by Isaac's status as a Holocaust survivor. In Irv's case, this is translated into vehemently right-wing and pro-Israel politics, typified in hyberbolic rants such as the following:

³³⁰ Frosh, pp. 127-128.

³³¹ Compare, for example, the New International Version with the King James Version, both available online at biblegateway.com.

People in glass houses shouldn't throw stones, but people with no homeland *really* shouldn't. Because when those stones of theirs start breaking Chagall windows, don't expect to see us on our knees with a dustpan. [...] The Arabs have to understand that *we've* got some stones, too, but *our* slingshot's in Dimona, and the finger on the button is connected to an arm with a string of numbers tattooed on it! (192-193)

Yet, while Irv displays a strong sense of outrage, and, as in the above, a desire for vengeance for the persecution incurred during the Holocaust, his feelings towards Isaac himself are generally marked by disregard, and occasionally outright contempt. He is dismissive of the emotional content of Isaac's Holocaust experience ('[i]f he were capable of depression, he would have killed himself seventy years ago' (193)) to the point of describing him as a 'human callus' (193). In this way, Irv is little concerned with Isaac as a person as opposed to his symbolic weight—the functionality of his story in advocating for a Jewish identity that is identified with aggressive strength—thus, in theory, precluding the possibility for further persecution and attempting to justify the militant oppression of others; notably, Palestinian residents of Israel. Hence, while Irv's response to Isaac contains elements of transgenerational trauma in the positive sense (for example, learned paranoia: Jacob recalls being taught that 'it didn't matter whether or not I thought of myself as Jewish, the Germans thought of me as a Jew' (484)), the transgenerational effects of Isaac's trauma tend to manifest as a reaction *against* Isaac's experience, by fostering the masculine strength whose contemptible lack he perceives as a contributing factor in his father's persecution.

Jacob, while expressing a more balanced and sympathetic view of Isaac as is typical of the third generation, is likewise prone to expressing reverence without adequate individuation of his grandfather. Unlike with Irv, however, Foer portrays Jacob's perceived sense of duty with undertones of guilt and humility. In a discussion with his cousin Tamir regarding his response to a poem written by a child victim of Auschwitz, in which the speaker requests that 'Next time you throw a ball, throw it for me' (408), Jacob explains that he feels conflicted

Not because every time you throw a ball you're thinking of the corpse of a kid who should have been you, but because sometimes you just want to veg out in front of shitty TV, and instead you think, 'I should really go throw a ball.'
(408)

Jacob's feelings of having inherited a transgenerational burden here take on the quality of survivor guilt, which, as mentioned in the introduction, Juni has attributed to the offspring of Holocaust survivors.³³² This guilt, furthermore, has a deontological character, which Juni defines as 'entail[ing] the failure to live up to a certain values which are not transpersonal'; Jacob feels that his life does not adequately honour those lost during the Holocaust, that he is not making full use of a life that was denied to the poet and to members of his own family.³³³ His hyperawareness of and belief in the duties owed to Holocaust survivors also extends to others, and encompasses behavioural minutiae. For example, Jacob observes with distaste that the rabbi presiding over Isaac's funeral 'wore unlaced sneakers, which felt [...] like a shabby tribute to someone who had probably *eaten* sneakers in the skyless forests of Poland' (341-342). Despite the obvious lack of correlation between the rabbi's chosen footwear and the hardships faced by Isaac during the Second World War, Jacob's interlinking of the two elevates his criticism of the rabbi from a simple lack of deference to a Holocaust-specific insult, implying a code of behaviour required for the appropriate respect toward survivors of the Holocaust, and, more importantly, indicates the omnipresence of Holocaust-related meaning in his subjective experience of the world.

However, Foer contrasts the inconsequentiality of these details with Jacob's response to much more significant matters. Central to the narrative is Isaac's impending move to the Jewish Home, a decision taken by his family without his assent, and against which, moreover, he considers (and ultimately chooses) suicide as a more desirable alternative. Yet, his negative appraisal of the planned move, wishes to die, and concurrent feelings of having been 'forgotten' (150) are both ignored and disregarded by Jacob, who instead asserts that Isaac 'has hopes for the future [...] [l]ike living to see Sam's bar mitzvah' (150), which Sam, by contrast, states is 'something my great-grandfather has never, himself, asked of me' (101). Related to this is Isaac's consideration of his great-grandchildren as his 'revenge against the German people' (381), the successful creation of a family after the Nazis failed to destroy exactly that, or, as Chaitin puts it, 'rebuilding their lives after the war.'³³⁴ Yet, even as Jacob assumes that Sam's bar mitzvah would provide an effective symbol for this success, as it celebrates his official entry into manhood, the notion nevertheless fails to take into account the ways in which Isaac actually experiences this victory, such as Skype calls with his great-grandchildren, and especially the importance of his independence and home. In the

³³² See p. 24.

³³³ Juni, p. 330.

³³⁴ Chaitin, p. 381.

opening paragraph of the novel, Foer lists in one long sentence the places in which Isaac has lived, including, chronologically, ‘an apartment with books touching the ceilings, and rugs thick enough to hide dice’; ‘on forest floors, beneath unconcerned stars’; ‘under the floorboards of a Christian’; ‘in a hole for so many days his knees would never wholly unbend’; ‘above half a dozen grocery stores he killed himself fixing up and selling for small profits’; and ‘finally, for the last quarter century, in a snow-globe-quiet Silver Spring split-level’ with ‘a refrigerator mummified with photographs of gorgeous, genius, tumorless great-grandchildren’ (3). This list, exploring Isaac’s history through the lens of the concept of ‘home,’ obliquely recounts Isaac’s life story, from his early life in affluence and comfort, to his flight from Nazi persecution that has had a lasting physical and mental toll on him (evident in his legs and the feeling of metaphysical and theological abandonment contained in the phrase ‘unconcerned stars’, respectively), to his eventual arrival in the United States and work towards building a career and family. Moreover, in the transition from the complete loss of a home—the reversion to bare earth—to another comfortable, well-established abode, Chaitin’s concept of ‘rebuilding’ is represented quite literally by Foer. The proposed move to the Jewish Home, therefore, symbolises a loss of the embodiment of this process, of a concession to the loss of the agency and (radical) independence that allowed him to rebuild his life in the first place, and the lack of devotion from his family that contrasts his own in the reverse.

In a departure from his earlier novels, Foer also considers the relationship between the Holocaust past and the fourth generation, in which he depicts a sustained effect. Sam, after being shown a Holocaust documentary in Hebrew school, observes that in his daily life

he was given plenty of guidance—almost all of it unintentional and extremely subtle—never to ask about [the Holocaust], never even to acknowledge it. So it was never mentioned, always never talked about, the perpetual topic of nonconversation. Everywhere you looked, there it wasn’t. (338-339)

The tension between the silence and the omnipresence of the Holocaust highlights how, in the Bloch family—as with many families of Holocaust survivors—it is ubiquitous as an absent presence, underlying a significant number of their actions and values; an oblique relationship which characterises both the form and content of Foer’s third generation fiction. Sam connects the spectre of the Holocaust to traits in his entire nuclear family. In his parents are more concrete behaviours, such as Julia’s penchant for ‘physical contact before saying

goodbye, and fish oil, and outer garments, and “the right thing to do” (339)—relating to Holocaust-relevant issues such as the unpredictable loss of loved ones to the Gestapo; problems with nutrition and warmth while in hiding; and a heightened sense of morality in day-to-day actions, relating to the actions of gentile citizens who either concealed or reported Jewish people to the Nazis—and Jacob’s ‘displays of optimism, and the imagined accumulation of property, and joke-making’ (339), which suggest an awareness of the loss of property experienced by many Jewish people during the war, and an imperative to disguise pain. This latter concern is elucidated further in Jacob’s ‘Bible,’ a complex set of directions produced through autobiographical anecdotes intended as an accompaniment to his script for a television show, which contains instructions such as ‘[u]se humor as aggressively as chemo’ (475), and specific directions on how to play emotions such as sadness (‘[i]t doesn’t exist, so hide it like a tumor’ (475)) and fear (‘[f]or a laugh’ (475)). The use of humour here takes on a quality of avoidance or defense against difficult realities, including the discovery by his dentist of a tumour in Jacob’s throat, and Sam’s aforementioned attempts to overwrite the pain of his crushed hand with humour. In addition, it also expresses simultaneously a dedication to the creation of a steadfastly optimistic and idyllic view of life in Isaac’s family that will support his feeling of ultimate victory over or vengeance against the Nazis, and, as is common in the descendants of Holocaust survivors, a concealment based on a feeling of the triviality of his own tribulations compared with the ordeals suffered by Isaac.

Although the case of the fourth generation is absent in any substantial form from scholarly literature thus far (and indeed, the fourth generation, even more so than the third, can be said to sit at an ambiguous juncture between transgenerational and cultural trauma, meaning that vertical links in the transmission of trauma are increasingly tenuous), Foer hence depicts a consistency in the way in which the Holocaust is experienced by the third and fourth generations, tempered with nuance in both the abstract and concrete approaches of the Bloch children to Isaac and his legacy.³³⁵ Firstly, the Holocaust-related traits Sam observes in himself and his brothers are much more abstract than those of his parents, including Max’s

³³⁵ It is important to note in this context that Foer’s fourth generation characters have a personal relationship with survivor Isaac. This is pertinent to the consideration of the transgenerational transmission of trauma to the third and fourth generations, especially considering the role of literal and historical distance between the survivor and their descendants in the blurring of transgenerational trauma into cultural trauma. While, as I noted in the introduction (see p. 29), the third generation have been considered an ambiguous case in this context, it is generally accepted that their frequent role as the last living link to Holocaust survivors has a direct impact on their experience of the Holocaust. In many cases, survivors will have passed away before meeting the fourth generation. The fact that in *Here I Am* Isaac is alive and interacts with his great-grandchildren is thus significant: the sustained effect of the Holocaust on the fourth generation portrayed by Foer may be a direct consequence and almost entirely attributable to the personal relationship between Isaac and the children.

‘extreme empathy’, Benjy’s preoccupation with ‘metaphysics and basic safety’, and his own ‘longing’, grounded in elements of loneliness, suffering, shame, and fear and related, conversely, to ‘stubborn belief, stubborn dignity, and stubborn joy’ (339). Unlike Jacob and Julia, the traits in the children are representative more of the philosophical or emotional content underpinning the transgenerational approach to the Holocaust—such as questions of humanity in the wake of Nazi dehumanisation, the metaphysical reality of a world that can contain the evils of the Holocaust, and the apparent paradoxes of psychological resilience—rather than constituting Holocaust-related behaviours in and of themselves. Thus, Foer suggests that the Holocaust’s hold has loosened on the fourth generation, as these qualities not only suggest a kind of critical ontological questioning that surpasses even that of the third generation, but, in their unspecificity, are much more transferable to new, contemporary contexts. Yet, oppositely, Foer also depicts his fourth-generation characters with a more substantially realised relationship with their great-grandfather. Their relationship with him is much more individualised, and focuses on his own experiences and needs rather than what he and his experience symbolise. This is conveyed in the text through explicit references made by the children to what Isaac says or requests, such as Sam’s statement that Isaac ‘*has asked [...] not to be forced to move into the Jewish Home*’ (101), or in the following conversation between Max and Jacob, occurring immediately after Jacob’s assertion that Isaac is keenly anticipating Sam’s bar mitzvah:

Jacob [...] said, ‘Who said Great-Grandpa feels forgotten?’

‘He does.’

‘When?’

‘When we talk.’

‘And when is that?’

‘When we skype.’

‘He doesn’t mean it.’ (150)

Here, two aspects of Jacob’s response stand in direct contrast with that of Max. Firstly, Jacob’s questioning suggests that he himself has not heard—or has chosen not to hear—Isaac’s experience of feeling forgotten. Secondly, and more importantly, once this experience has been attested to by Max, Jacob’s immediate response is to dismiss Isaac’s authority to claim this experience, and thus invalidates it. Although, as children, Sam and Max are granted little influence in the Bloch family affairs, Foer makes it clear that they

disagree with their parents' treatment of Isaac. Max in particular challenges Jacob's imposing approach to Isaac and his wishes by a pointed comparison with his empathic treatment of the ailing family dog, Argus: 'hold on. You think Argus understands, but Great-Grandpa doesn't?' (151). Foer's fourth-generation characters, unconstrained by the transgenerational burden of duty like that perceived by Jacob—that which prevents him from interacting with Isaac on the individualised basis he is able to adopt with Argus—hence treat Isaac as an agentic, experiencing subject rather than a symbolic object.

The constitution of Isaac as a symbol also occurs outwith the family sphere. Notable in this respect is Isaac's funeral service, which is almost completely overwritten with the politics of Jewish identity. Aside from speeches from relatives that constitute 'rambling generalities. Isaac was courageous. He was resilient. He loved' (344)—and including, interestingly, an 'embarrassing inversion of what the goyim say about their guy: he survived for us' (344), which not only elevates the symbolic weight of Isaac to (literally) biblical proportions, but the dedication 'for us' displaces him further from being the object of attention—the rabbi's speech contains very little of Isaac's personal life, and what is present is not only suspected by Jacob to be invented, but is outweighed by meditations on the legacy of the Holocaust and Holocaust survivors generally, and their effects on the composition of contemporary Jewishness. The rabbi references the 'choice to have Anne Frank's diary replace the Bible as our bible' (349), highlighting the displacement of tradition and ritual as the centrepiece of Jewish consciousness by the Holocaust, and lamenting that '[w]e choose to make life the ultimate Jewish value', where 'life itself is not the loftiest ambition. *Righteousness* is' (349). These sentiments, not only providing moral instruction that once again effaces Isaac as the centrepiece of the funeral ('[o]ur answer will not save him, but it might save us' (353)), but also refers to and spotlights a different, concurrent trauma: the impending outbreak of war in Israel following the earthquake. Thus, while he draws a distinction (blurred elsewhere) between the existence of Israel and Jewish identity, stating that '[o]ne [war] is on the brink of breaking out. The other has been happening for seventy years. The imminent war will determine the survival of Israel. The old war will determine the survival of the Jewish soul' (348), he employs Isaac's history towards the end of directing the attendees' attention to the political issues raised by the war in Israel; namely, the importance (or lack thereof) of Israel to Jewish global consciousness. In doing so, he exchanges Isaac's personal trauma for a more general sense of cultural trauma, which he views as particularly maladaptive to the point of endangering Jewish identity as a whole.

Foer's hypothetical imagining of the destruction of Israel, unsurprisingly, raises such questions about Zionism and contemporary Jewish identity, and particularly American Jewish identity, in a similar vein to that of other Jewish American writers who deal with the subject of Israel. Philip Roth's *Operation Shylock*, especially, is comparable in its dealing with the conflicting issues of Zionism and the Diaspora, containing, through the character of Pipik, such anti-Zionist argumentation as '[t]he roots of American Jewry are not in the Middle East but in Europe—their Jewish style, their Jewish words, their strong nostalgia, their actual, weighable history, all this issues from their European origins', while noting that 'I am not proposing that Israeli Jews whose origins are in Islamic countries return to Europe, since for them this would constitute not a homecoming but a radical uprooting.'³³⁶ In other words, he displaces Israel as the Jewish homeland in favour of more recent, and indeed, he argues, more significant, cultural origins. Similarly, contained within *Here I Am* is the suggestion that the Jewish culture embodied within the American Bloch family is rooted more in middle-class, suburban America, with historical roots in Galicia, than in Israel, as evinced by Jacob's eventual decision not to fight for Israel, and instead remain literally and figuratively present in Washington, D.C. The multiplicitous and complex spatiality of American Jewish identity is contained microcosmically in a conversation between Jacob, his Israeli cousin Tamir, and Irv, wherein Jacob not only disagrees with the designation of Israel as 'the Jewish homeland' ('Israel is the Jewish *state*' (232)), but suggests that the locus of ancestral origins is

[']arbitrary. We could go back to the trees, or the ocean, if we wanted. Some go back to Eden. You pick Israel. I pick Galicia.'

'You feel Galician?'

'I feel American.'

'I feel Jewish,' Irv said. (232)

Here, Foer portrays both the mutability and electability of the geographical origins of Jewishness, with selections possible from a range of sources that include the origins of life on earth generally, biblical mythology, pre-Holocaust communities in Europe (often the earliest origin in living memory), and the location of an individual's personal, rather than ancestral, home. Furthermore, the idea in itself that one's geographical origins can be *chosen* constitutes a subversion of what Diasporic theorists Daniel and Jonathan Boyarin call 'the

³³⁶ Philip Roth, *Operation Shylock: A Confession*, New e. edition (London: Vintage Digital, 2010). Kindle Ebook, pp. 47, 42.

myth of autochthony' present in the principles of Zionism.³³⁷ Interesting, however, is Irv's counter-argument that he 'feel[s] Jewish'. Although he is overtly sympathetic towards Israel within the text, his declaration makes no reference to a specific location grounding his identity. From this can be extrapolated two different viewpoints: that Israel as a location is synonymous with the feeling of Jewishness, or that the feeling of Jewishness is transcendent of location.

However, to echo Foer's words cited before, the destruction of Israel engenders 'a real world choice rather than a conceptual choice' in the characters of *Here I Am*, particularly in relation to their concept of the origin—or home—of their identity. Of especial note in this regard are the complementary responses of Jacob and Tamir. Descended from the same Holocaust survivor brothers, each of the cousins represents the other's Israeli/American counterpart, and even acts almost in the manner of a double, embodying the life the other might have had had their grandfather chosen to emigrate to the other country following the Holocaust. In many ways, their respective cultural upbringings render them opposites in terms of both personality and expression of Jewishness; antitheses representing dual poles or fragments of Jewish consciousness, so that 'If they could meet halfway, they'd form a reasonable Jew' (345). While Jacob's Jewish identity revolves strongly around his grandfather's Holocaust experience and the (somewhat reluctant) maintenance of certain traditions and cultural inheritance, such as enrolling their children in Hebrew school or bar mitzvah celebrations, Tamir's is more implicit and bound up with Israeli nationality; as Michael Krausz notes, 'Zionists will hold that the very question of Jewishness does not arise for it is fully replaceable by becoming an Israeli national; Israeli nationality dissolves or makes otiose the question of Jewishness'.³³⁸ Tamir shows little reverence for Jewish ritual, such as using his phone during Isaac's funeral, or ordering pork lo mein from the Panda Express at the airport, but is critical of Jacob's ambivalence towards Israel, and encourages him both to contribute more financially to the state and to join the war effort after the earthquake.³³⁹ Due to Jewish cultural dominance in Israel, Tamir's cultural identity is

³³⁷ Daniel Boyarin and Jonathan Boyarin, 'Diaspora: Generation and the Ground of Jewish Identity', *Critical Inquiry*, 19:4 (1993), 693-725 (p. 699).

³³⁸ Quoted in Debra Shostak, 'The Diaspora Jew and the "Instinct for Impersonation": Philip Roth's *Operation Shylock*', *Contemporary Literature*, 38:4 (1997), 726-754 (p. 745, n15).

³³⁹ This is consistent with Stephen Sharot's sociological observations on Jewish identity in Israel. He writes of a 'New Civil Religion' that formed following the Six Day War, which 'has incorporated traditional religious symbols through a strategy of reinterpretation that "points the symbols away from God and toward the Jewish people, the Jewish state, and the particular needs of the state." There are emphases on the unity of all Jews, Israelis or not, on the sacred writings, on the centrality of the Holocaust, and on the Jews as an isolated nation confronting a hostile world.'

comparably singular—not containing, for example, the dual competing identities of ‘Jewish’ and ‘American’ held by Jacob—and therefore its component parts do not necessitate explicit expression or mutability: as Foer writes of Israel’s relationship with the Holocaust, ‘[t]he Jewish American response to the Holocaust was “Never forget,” because there was a possibility of forgetting. In Israel, they blared the air-raid siren for two minutes, because otherwise it would never stop blaring’ (221). Therefore, the suggestion here is that Jacob’s preoccupation and interrogation of the shape of his Jewishness, along with its explicit expressibility and mutability, is a uniquely Diasporic concern.

The relationship between the cousins, moreover, is marked by a mutual, but unexpressed, jealousy. Foer depicts their lives as stark opposites, juxtaposing their environments at simultaneous points in time, such as how

At nineteen, Tamir was in a half-buried outpost in south Lebanon, behind four feet of concrete. Jacob was in a dorm in New Haven whose bricks had been buried for two years before construction so that they would look older than they were. [...] [Tamir had] fought for his homeland, while Jacob spent entire nights debating whether that stupid *New Yorker* poster where New York is bigger than everything else would look better on this wall or that one. Tamir tried not to get killed, while Jacob tried not to die of boredom. (223-224)

Although Tamir does not disagree with the militaristic politics of Israel (‘I never doubted the rightness of my firing a weapon to defend my home, or of [my son] doing so’ (543)), he nevertheless ‘would have *been* Jacob, given the choice’ (224), and situates himself between feeling ‘offended’ and ‘furious’ (392) at Jacob’s suggestion that the dangers of his life are enviable. He and his wife have also, it is later revealed, been considering moving to the US, and thus leading lives closer to Jacob’s own. Jacob, by contrast, makes unfavourable comparisons between what he sees as the inauthentic triviality of his life (as allegorised in the faux-historicity of the dorm in which he makes inconsequential decor choices in the passage quoted above), and the assertively masculine qualities and way of life of his ‘more aggressive, more crazed, more hairy, more muscular [Israeli] brothers’ who are ‘more brave, more beautiful, more piggish and delusional, less self-conscious, more reckless, more *themselves*’ (541, emphasis added). This sense of authenticity of self-expression is exactly what Foer

Stephen Sharot, ‘Israel: Sociological Analyses of Religion in the Jewish State’, *Sociological Analysis*, 51 (1990), S63-S76 (S68).

depicts Jacob (and Julia) as lacking. In their house, the tension between superficial appearance and what is concealed is staged in descriptions such as ‘[h]ydrocortisone acetate suppositories beneath a stack of New Yorkers in the middle drawer of the medicine cabinet. A vibrator in the foot of a shoe on a high shelf. Holocaust books behind non-Holocaust books’ (202). In addition to the obvious care taken to hide items pertaining to subjects they feel are undiscussable—including, here, health, sexuality (and especially personal or masturbatory sexuality), and the Holocaust—Jacob makes use of a similar process of guise and disguise with regards to his self and body. He is particularly self-conscious about his thinning hair (which, uncoincidentally, stands to contrast with ‘the hair on [Tamir’s] knuckles and head’ and ‘ability to grow a full beard while a bagel toasted’ (229) that are some of the first things Jacob notices about Tamir upon his arrival), stimulating him to secretly take medication to prevent balding. This is, moreover, something he conceals from his wife, even though it has an adverse effect on his libido and therefore their sex life: ‘I couldn’t let her know about the Propecia, because I couldn’t admit that I cared how I looked. Better to let her think she couldn’t make me hard’ (476). It is also uncoincidental that Jacob’s obsession with his outward appearance, occurring at the expense of trust, communication, and sexual intimacy with Julia, only dissipates—as evinced in his choice to discontinue taking the Propecia—after his divorce and choice not to fight for Israel, allowing him, as Benjy puts it, to ‘[f]inally [look] like [him]self’ (478). Interestingly, however, it is also Jacob’s performance of self—which is, as Debra Shostak puts it in another context, ‘always becoming, always an impersonation [...] in fact, the very model of the postmodern performative self’—that induces him to consider fighting for Israel in the first place.³⁴⁰ The choice arises dually as a response to Tamir’s observation that Jacob would not ‘die for *anything*’ (397), which in turn echoes Julia’s assessment of Jacob’s passivity, that he does not ‘believe in anything’ (397), and, following the discovery of the text messages he sent to another woman, that it is ‘easy to believe’ that no physical consummation had occurred because he is ‘incapable of an actually brave transgression’ (95). Fighting for Israel, therefore, would constitute an act of assertiveness, both in terms of behaviour and ideology. It would allow him to create, or *become*, a persona that better resembles Tamir, and especially in terms of his envied physical, masculine, and sexual potency.

Yet, despite all this conceptual self-formation on both sides, the actual traumatic rupture of the war triggers the centrifugal and centripetal tendencies of a cultural trauma, stimulating

³⁴⁰ Shostak, p. 726.

the important switch to a concrete, 'real-world' alliance of identity. It results in Jacob's return to Washington, D.C. to continue with the divorce from Julia, producing, ironically, a more positive relationship with her; and Tamir's choice to fight for and continue living in Israel, where the trauma of his son Noam's critical injury in the war will ultimately draw him back closer to his wife, with whom his relationship had been becoming increasingly strained and estranged. In addition to the obvious politics of identity established here, in which Tamir remains loyal to his Israeli identity and Jacob decides that, despite the commonly cited importance of the state of Israel to Jewish Americans, his (Jewish) identity is not fundamentally grounded in the existence of Israel, Foer imagines the ways in which these forces are manipulated by political leaders to further their cause.³⁴¹ In the sixth part of the novel, three different simultaneous narrative threads are interspersed; a speech made by the prime minister of Israel, a speech made by the Ayatollah, and the speech made by Sam at his bar mitzvah. In the latter, the themes in the two former are allegorised on a microcosmic scale, embodied in Sam's assertion that 'the hardest thing to say is the hardest thing to hear: forced to choose between my parents [in the event of their impending divorce], I would be able to' (462). This, in turn, he relates to his experience at the Model UN, in which Micronesia came into possession of a nuclear weapon. A metaphor for the destructive potential of a traumatic rupture or cataclysm, the nuclear weapon forces a choice, an establishment of that to which one is fundamentally devoted, whether it be a nationality, a value, or an identity. Thus, although Sam warns that 'there's a reason why people have [nuclear weapons], and it's to never have to use them' (462), his friend Billie's scream of '[y]et!' (462) highlights the necessity of a transition from a theoretical choice to a factual choice. Such a crisis, be it the breakdown of Jacob and Julia's marriage or the earthquake in the Middle East, certainly effectuates such a slippage, provoking a reappraisal of both ways of life and an individual's self-identity that is applicable both to personal and cultural spheres.

This is also precisely what is at stake in the other two speeches, as they attempt to respond to the trauma of the earthquake through the invocation of other cultural traumas into a politically expedient cultural narrative. The first, by the prime minister, constitutes a call to arms aimed at the global Jewish population, encouraging the Diaspora to 'come home.' Using rhetorical techniques such as biblical allegorising—even the name of his plan, Operation

³⁴¹ In their 2013 Pew Research Center study of Jewish American self-perception, Lugo et al found that 69% of Jewish Americans reported being either very or somewhat attached to Israel, with 43% citing 'caring about Israel' as something 'essential' to being Jewish. Moreover, 9% of respondents believe that one cannot identify as Jewish if they are strongly critical of Israel. Lugo et al, pp. 13-14.

Arms of Moses, explicitly refers to a story in Exodus in which Moses ensures victory for Israel against Amalek by holding his arms aloft, aided by two others when his human limitations render him unable to continue doing so alone—and an appeal to Jewishness as a predominant and unifying identity across the global population, he suggests that Israel is of fundamental importance to the entire Jewish population. Not only is this emphasised through the repeated use of the word ‘home’ in place of ‘Israel,’ suggesting their synonymity, but in his inextricable interlinking of the Jewish individual and Israel: ‘Come home not only because your home needs you, but because you need your home. Come home not only to fight for Israel’s survival, but to fight for your own’ (454). Going to so far as to deny the humanity of a Jewish person detached from Israel (‘Come home because a people without a home is not a people, just as a person without a home is not a person’ (454)), he suggests that the destruction of Israel is equivalent to the destruction of the Jewish people generally, and thus uses the centripetal force of cultural trauma to attempt to bind the global Jewish population into a singular group in order to garner military strength for Israel. This possibility of destruction is, furthermore set at odds with the way in which he presents the Jewish cultural narrative. He asks of his audience

where are our historical enemies, who have always outnumbered us? Where are the pharaohs, who destroyed our firstborn but could not destroy us? Where are the Babylonians, who destroyed our Holy Temple but could not destroy us? Where is the Roman Empire, which destroyed our Second Temple but could not destroy us? Where are the Nazis, who could not destroy us? [...] [S]urvival is the story of the Jewish people, only because the Jewish people have not been destroyed.
(446-447)

Here, in the invocation of numerous historical traumas enacted against the Jewish people, he frames the narrative in terms of a tension between destruction and survival, thus tailoring its use for Israel’s aims in the war at hand. The suggestion is that to fail to save Israel would be to undermine the whole of Jewish history, and that survival, especially in contrast with the oppressing group, is of primary importance to the Jewish identity.

The Ayatollah similarly calls for a united identity amongst Muslims, and makes reference both to several cultural traumas and the Qur’an. Although the parallels between the two speeches are disrupted by a jarring tonal difference, as this speech focuses on the destruction of the Jewish populace in a distinctly antisemitic and bloodthirsty manner, the

similarities of their rhetorical methods are notable.³⁴² The Ayatollah stresses that the war will allow Muslims to ‘have our revenge for Lydda, we will have our revenge for Haifa and Acre and Deir Yassin, we will have our revenge for the generations of martyrs, we will have our revenge, praise Allah, for al-Quds [Jerusalem]! (453). These locations are metonymically associated with mass dislocation of Arab populations from areas now controlled by Israel during the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, massacres of Arab peoples by Israelis (the Deir Yassin massacre of 107 Palestinians by Zionist paramilitaries, and the Haifa Oil Refinery massacre in which six Arabs were killed and 42 wounded by Zionist paramilitary grenades whilst seeking work), and the contested territory of the holy site of Jerusalem; thus, a cultural trauma narrative of victimisation by Jewish people is created and used to justify the war against Israel. He also draws heavily on scripture, explicitly suggesting that ‘[w]hen the Muslims, the Arabs, the Palestinians, make war against the Jews, they do so to worship Allah’ (458), proposing that the war is fundamental to proper religious observance. To further solidify this, he draws upon stories relating to the Prophet Muhammed, such as his attempted poisoning by a Jewish woman and his sanctioning of the torture and murder of another Jewish man, and references the Battle of Khaybar: ‘*Khaybar, khaybar, ya Yahud, Jaish Muhammad Saouf*

³⁴² Although an analysis of the controversial issue of antisemitism in Islam is most certainly beyond the scope of this thesis, it would appear that Foer has modelled the Ayatollah’s speech on those of other prominent fundamentalist Islamic figures in response to incidents such as outbreaks of violence in Israel between Zionists and Palestinians. These sermons and speeches likewise employ scripture, and especially some of the antisemitic elements of the hadith, to support their arguments, contain similar calls for the death of Jewish people or assertions of their wickedness and bestiality, and represent a very militant and violent response to the issue at hand. A well-known example of this is the call for Salman Rushdie’s execution following the publication of *The Satanic Verses*, delivered by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. These controversial and extreme statements are also not a new phenomenon. For example, Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi has been the centre of controversy over the use of the same quote employed by Foer in which stones and trees encourage Muslims to kill Jewish people on Judgement Day, the condoning of Palestinian suicide bombing, and remarks defending the Holocaust. In more recent years, similar controversies have been established over speakers such as Imam Ammar Shahin, Sheikh Omar Abu Sara, and Sheikh Muhammad bin Musa Al Nasr. Andrew Anthony, ‘How one book ignited a culture war’, *Guardian*, 11 January 2009 <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2009/jan/11/salman-rushdie-satanic-verses>> [Accessed 5 May 2021]; Jeffrey Goldberg, ‘Sheikh Qaradawi Seeks Total War’, *Atlantic*, 23 February 2011 <<https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2011/02/sheikh-qaradawi-seeks-total-war/71626/>> [Accessed 5 May 2021]; Esmerelda Bermudez, ‘Davis imam apologizes for inflammatory remarks about Jews’, *Los Angeles Times*, 28 July 2017 <<https://www.latimes.com/local/california/la-me-imam-apology-20170728-story.html>> [Accessed 5 May 2021]; i24NEWS, ‘Palestinian preacher gets jail time for anti-Semitic incitement’, *i24NEWS*, 25 September 2016 <<https://www.i24news.tv/en/news/israel/diplomacy-defense/126313-160925-palestinian-preacher-gets-jail-time-for-anti-semitic-incitement>> [Accessed 5 May 2021]; Brennan Neill and Stephen Smith, ‘Imam calling for Jews to be killed in sermon at Montreal mosque draws police complaint’, *CBC*, 23 March 2017 <<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/imam-sermon-montreal-mosque-1.4037397>> [Accessed 5 May 2021]; Mohammed Dajani, ‘Dealing with Hate Sermons’, *Fikra Forum*, 5 September 2017 <<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/dealing-hate-sermons>> [Accessed 4 May 2021].

Ya'ud' (453). The quote, often used in antisemitic contexts and protests regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, urges Jewish people to remember their loss in the battle, and warns that the army of Muhammed will return, once again establishing a scriptural context for the war on Israel.³⁴³ The war is furthermore linked to the prophesied Judgement Day of the hadith, upon which the Prophet Muhammed asserts that 'even the stones and the trees will speak, with or without words, and say, "O servant of Allah, O Muslim, there is a Jew behind me, come and kill him!"' (453). The religious sanctioning and overtones of the Ayatollah's impassioned call to arms—it is, notably, riddled with exclamation marks and is far less measured than the prime minister's speech—is also fundamental to the identity politics he rallies for his cultural narrative: Foer hypothesises an unprecedented alliance between surrounding Arabic countries, which are normally fairly hostile to each other, in response to the situation in Israel. Named 'Transarabia,' this alliance of nations forms despite political disharmony, based on a shared Islamic unity defined in opposition to Jewish Israel. As Foer writes in the Ayatollah's speech, '[t]he hadith does not say, "O Sunni, O Shiite, O Palestinian, O Syrian, O Persian, come fight." It says, "O Muslim"! (458). Like the prime minister, the Ayatollah generates, manipulates, and weaponises post-traumatic religious tribalism in his audience.

However, as reviewer Lev Grossman notes, while these speeches provide *Here I Am* with 'a lot of political argumentation, [the book] is not itself a political argument.'³⁴⁴ Indeed, in Aaron Kreuter's review of the novel, he expresses difficulty in determining Foer's own views from the text, worth quoting at length:

As I read the book, I kept changing my mind about this, zigzagging back and forth. In some ways, Foer exemplifies the current (dangerous) mindset of the liberal Zionist: the belief that Israel inside the green line is a functioning, if problematic, democracy; that the occupation is the only problem that needs solving; that the Arabs are, have been, and will be against us. In other ways, however, Foer begins to elucidate a more radical, more ethical, and more nuanced take: Israel runs into problems after the earthquake exactly because of its ethno-nationalism (which would exist with or without the occupied

³⁴³ See, for example, Ben Weich, 'Protestors scream antisemitic slogans at demonstration outside US embassy in London', *JC*, 10 December 2017 <<https://www.thejc.com/news/uk/protestors-scream-antisemitic-slogans-outside-us-embassy-in-london-following-trump-announcement-on-jerusalem-but-did-bella-hadid-attend-1.450090>> [Accessed 4 May 2021].

³⁴⁴ Grossman, n.p.

territories), its refusal to help suffering Arab populations, its abandonment of the West Bank at the exact moment when their technological and medical superiority could save hundreds of thousands of lives. In a burst of optimism, Foer seems to suggest that once this fact—Israel's damaging desire to take care only of itself—becomes impossible to ignore, the American Jewish community will step away from Israel, will remain loyal to the pluralism and liberalism of America that has been so good to them (and that, it's necessary to point out, has been little more than a lie to tens of millions of other Americans).³⁴⁵

These ambiguities, which he unfavourably contrasts with *Operation Shylock*, he believes fail to encapsulate his concept of diasporic heteroglossia; a fluid polyphony of culture that pertains to the Diaspora, due to their sharing of space with other, non-Jewish cultures, that is not possible in Zionism.³⁴⁶ While it is true that the argumentation surrounding Israel is fairly one-sided in *Here I Am*, especially regarding the problematic absence of consideration of the plight of the Palestinians under present-day Israel in the occupied territories, the novel firstly takes a diasporist leaning in its privileging of Jacob's life and commitments in the USA over his ideological temptation by Israel, and secondly appears to disagree with unnuanced cultural metanarratives (such as those espoused by the prime minister and Ayatollah respectively) generally, once again recentring the focus onto the individual. For example, when Jacob finds himself in the liminal space of the airport from which he intended to fly to Israel, his exit is described as being 'REINCARNATED' (519). This metaphor, signalling his entry into his new life in which, as mentioned before, he lives more authentically, also simultaneously implies the death of his previous lives; both his attempts to emulate Tamir and his performance of himself as an adequate husband, father, and, most importantly, grandson. As he confesses to Tamir, he has not shared his television show with anyone because he 'was afraid of betraying' Isaac '[w]ith the truth of who we are, and what we're like' (409), since the script serves as the authentic 'antidote to the inauthenticity of his life' (200). In other words, his perceived third-generation obligation to his grandfather is carried out at the expense of his sense of self-identity. Rather than the politics surrounding Israel, it is the issue of the effects of trauma—personal, transgenerational, and cultural—on an individual's self-identity that underpins *Here I Am*, I would suggest.

³⁴⁵ Aaron Kreuter, 'A Review of Jonathan Safran Foer's *Here I Am*', *Rusty Torque*, 13 (2017) <<http://www.rustytoque.com/fiction-review-aaron-kreuter.html>> [Accessed 4 March 2021], n.p.

³⁴⁶ Aaron Kreuter, 'Against "Jewish Totalism": Operation Shylock: A Confession's Missing Chapter', *Philip Roth Studies*, 15:2 (2019), 24-43 (p. 28).

Foer does not, however, depict the tensions between trauma and identity wholly pessimistically. In particular, as previously intimated, Foer appears to view the fourth generation quite optimistically, especially with regards to having the tools and distance to move beyond the Holocaust. Important to this, in an extension of Oskar's tendencies in *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*, is the role of digital spaces, technologies that have risen in prominence concurrently with the fourth generation. Online virtual worlds, as opposed to social media such as Facebook, have been highlighted in recent sociological research such as that by Tom Boellstorff, Hellen Harris et al, Vincent Miller and Gonzalo C. Garcia as sites of meaningful interaction and identity formation.³⁴⁷ In *Here I Am*, Sam spends much of his time in one such virtual world, a fictional environment similar to that of Minecraft or Second Life called Other Life, which he often finds generates more meaningful experience than his real life; juxtaposing, for example, his 'real friends in Other Life' with his 'fake friends in school' (79), or comparing the bar mitzvah conducted by Noam, after which he considers himself genuinely 'reborn' (369), with his unwanted, real-life bar mitzvah. Because of the 'unique quantum quality' of digital spaces, that, according to Miller and Garcia, grant them the ability to be 'both here *and* there', he is also able to meet, and meaningfully interact with, Noam.³⁴⁸ In other words, because they are able to occupy the same digital space whilst physically occupying the very different and distant locations of the USA and Israel, they can interact in a manner to an extent uninhibited by the national politics experienced by Jacob and Tamir, including the power politics of existing in one's (cultural) home versus a (culturally) foreign environment, and are, moreover, honest—or authentic—with each other on topics that their fathers are more secretive or performative about, such as infidelity and their unhappiness with their homes and lives. Their simultaneous distance and proximity allow them to speak with a frankness that Jacob and Tamir lack.

Using the Other Life platform, Sam also experiments with his sense of self and identity expression, uninhibited by constraints in physical spaces, ranging from geopolitics to the bodily. For example, he builds a synagogue in Other Life that is able to better represent his sense of Jewish religiosity, including personal values of his (such as a hatred for animal cruelty, represented through 'urinals made of the bones of ivory poachers' (15)), desires (the addition of pornography magazines and 'make-out grottoes' (15)), and the creative

³⁴⁷ Tom Boellstorff, *Coming of Age in Second Life: An Anthropologist Explores the Virtually Human* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008); Helen Harris et al, 'The Evolution of Social Behavior over Time in Second Life', *Presence*, 18:6 (2009), 434-448; Vincent Miller and Gonzalo C. Garcia, 'Digital Ruins', *cultural geographies*, 26:4 (2019), 435-454.

³⁴⁸ Miller and Garcia, p. 440.

incorporation of the present into tradition, embodied in the stained glass windows. The windows, created from a script that finds videos from Jewish news stories and projects them onto the window surface, simultaneously evoke the aesthetics of tradition and present a dynamic, real-time portrayal of present events, both the movement and content of which destabilise the stasis of tradition. Sam also experiments with his own bodily self-expression. He is able to present himself through his avatar, somewhat like the disabled Second Life users encountered by Boellstorff, without his disfigured hand which is a source of self-consciousness for him: in real life, he explains that ‘i [sic] keep my hand in my pocket a lot and when i’m [sic] sitting i’ll [sic] slide it under my thigh’ (215) and is even hesitant to look at it, to the extent that it affects normal daily activities such as texting.³⁴⁹ In fact, he questions if the last time ‘he felt at home in his body’ was ‘before he smashed his fingers’ (65). He is also able to experiment with—and, in a loose sense, embody—different forms of identity, such as styling his avatar in the image of his great-grandfather as Eyesick, or, previously, as a Latina girl named Samanta. Although Sam asserts that he has no explicit desire to be either female or Latin American in real life, and nor was Samanta his first avatar incarnation, he feels that ‘her logarithmic skin fit’ (65), and through this representation he experiences, as one user explains to Boellstorff, ‘not being body-bound, being able to be yourself.’³⁵⁰ He is able, in the virtual space, to live free of both teenaged bodily awkwardness and the physical traces of the trauma embodied in his hand. While it is obvious that these experiments are a form of self-performance, not unlike what Jacob does, a key difference exists in that there is an (albeit permeable, as Harris et al argue) split between one’s existence on Other Life and in real life.³⁵¹ As a result, Sam’s experimentation allows him to transfer knowledges and experiences between real life and Other Life, effecting real-world changes to his life in both; something which is unavailable to Jacob because his performance of self occurs in a singular space, and is bound by his self-imposed behavioural criteria pertaining to Holocaust reverence.

Therefore, while Lugo et al have found that perceptions of the Holocaust’s essentiality to Jewish American identity have been declining across generations, Foer suggests in *Here I Am* that this trend is not necessarily inherently undesirable.³⁵² Although his fourth generation characters are clearly concerned with the wellbeing of their Holocaust survivor great-grandfather, their devotion to him is not constrictive in nature, and, in comparison with

³⁴⁹ Boellstorff, pp. 134-138.

³⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 137.

³⁵¹ Harris et al, p. 444.

³⁵² Lugo et al, p. 57.

third-generation characters such as Jacob—and this could even perhaps be extended to the third-generation characters of *Everything is Illuminated*—they are able to lead much more independent lives. They are able even to undo certain behaviours associated with transgenerational trauma. For example, near the end of the novel, Sam is discussing Jacob and Julia’s impending divorce with his brothers, who begin to cry, and ‘[r]eflexively, Sam wanted to say, “It’s funny, it’s funny,” but a yet stronger reflex prevailed, and he said, “I know, I know”’ (438); subverting the behaviour learned from Jacob that pain must be disguised, or coped with, through humour, and choosing instead to openly and ethically acknowledge it. The difference in perspective Foer imagines between the third and fourth generations is ultimately epitomised in the treatment of Isaac’s Leica camera, passed from Isaac to Jacob and then Jacob to Sam upon their bar mitzvahs. Although Isaac had lost all of the photographs of his family killed during the Holocaust, the camera was the device with which they were taken. For Jacob, it exists therefore as a material embodiment of a negative trace, a reified symbol of all that is absent. When he gifts it to Sam, however, his son asks

‘Does it work?’

‘Gosh, I don’t know. I’m not sure that’s the point.’

He said, ‘Shouldn’t it be?’

Sam had the Leica refurbished; he brought it into the world and it brought him out of Other Life. (515)

Unlike Jacob, Sam treats the camera in terms of what it is, rather than as a historical or moral symbolic artifact, and thus focuses on the present and future instead of the past. His life is linked with his great-grandfather’s through the camera, but not at the expense of the creation of his own, independent memories. Thus, Foer highlights in *Here I Am* that devotion—and all the ways in which various traumas personal, transgenerational and cultural form and destroy it—demands an open and ethical authenticity between oneself and others, and that this, rather than ideology, is the truest way to live in the wake of trauma.

Summary

In this chapter, I have considered the intersections between individual, transgenerational, and cultural traumas in *Everything is Illuminated*, *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*, and *Here I Am*. Through close reference to the theory of trauma elucidated

in the introduction, not only are insights generated regarding the contextual specificities of traumas, such as the ways in which the media coverage of 9/11 is reflected in Oskar's symptomatology in *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*, or how the transgenerational traumas differ between Jonathan's and Alex's families in *Everything is Illuminated* and Jacob's and Tamir's in *Here I Am*, but so too are different ethical concerns revealed and developed. The sense of a balanced history, and especially with regard to perpetrator trauma, that is foregrounded in *Everything is Illuminated* is furthered in *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* with its German focus, while Foer's interest in the ways in which history is constructed is developed from the defamiliarised Holocaust history in *Everything is Illuminated* to an explicit mediation on the ways in which cultural traumas are inscribed in *Here I Am*, via the challenge to 9/11's uniqueness through contextualisation with the Dresden firebombing in *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*. Throughout all three texts, however, Foer highlights that the most important aspects of these traumatic histories are the individuals affected; including the personal autofictional focus of *Everything is Illuminated*, and the subjugation of larger global politics to the individual in *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* and *Here I Am*. This concern is equally important to Krauss, as I shall discuss in the next chapter.

Chapter Two: On Writing

Nicole Krauss

And to me, this is so beautiful. Because the answer to catastrophic loss was absolute reimagination.

- Nicole Krauss, interview with Jennie Rothenberg Gritz ³⁵³

Introduction

Perhaps the most striking thing about Nicole Krauss's image in the media is that, despite an impressive collection of awards and nominations she has received for her novels, short stories, and poetry, a disproportionate amount of attention has been placed on her marriage to Foer over her writing itself. In a sense, much like in her novels of mirrors and parallels, the public perception of Krauss is doubled: there is Krauss the writer, who holds accolades such as the Anisfield-Wolf Book Award, the William Saroyan International Prize for Writing, and the Prix du Meilleur Livre Étranger, has been shortlisted for the National Book Award and the Orange Prize (twice), appeared on *The New Yorker's* '20 under 40' list in 2010 and *Granta's* 'Best American Novelists under 40' in 2007, and whose poetry attracted the attention of Joseph Brodsky who acted as her mentor for several years; and then there is Krauss as the (ex-) wife of Foer, the less-famous half of a now-dissolved 'literary power couple'. ³⁵⁴

This treatment of Krauss is symptomatic of insistently misogynistic approaches to her life and work, and is something that is not only confined to the subject of marriage. Interviewing Krauss for *Elle*, Keziah Weir highlights how, for example, '[Krauss's] books, despite being critically acclaimed and liberally awarded, are still often described as "lovely."

³⁵³ Jennie Rothenberg Gritz, 'Nicole Krauss on Fame, Loss, and Writing About Holocaust Survivors', *Atlantic*, 21 October 2010
<<https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2010/10/nicole-krauss-on-fame-loss-and-writing-about-holocaust-survivors/64869/>> [Accessed 10 June 2021], n.p.

³⁵⁴ Poetry Society of America, 'Stopping by with Nicole Krauss', *Poetry Society of America* <<https://poetrysociety.org/features/stopping-by/stopping-by-with-nicole-krauss>> [Accessed 5 November 2021], n.p.; Catherine Conroy, 'Nicole Krauss: end of a marriage is 'terrifying but the freefall is exhilarating'', *Irish Times*, 21 September 2017
<<https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/nicole-krauss-end-of-a-marriage-is-terrifying-but-the-freefall-is-exhilarating-1.3226402>> [Accessed 11 August 2021], n.p.

(Books by important male authors, she notes, are “never called lovely. They’re called ‘strong’ and ‘brilliant.’”), and goes on to describe an appalling incident where,

at a magazine photo shoot for a review of *Man Walks Into a Room*, [Krauss] had to fight a stylist who wanted her to wear a low-cut dress. After they’d finally settled on a white button-down, just before the photographer took his shot, the stylist leapt forward and unbuttoned the shirt.³⁵⁵

Such a persistent focus on her image and physical appearance rather than her writing serves to occlude, if not downright elide, the value of her literary work, undermining her status as a writer in her own right. Notably, reviews include determined but tenuous comparisons between her work and Foer’s—*The History of Love* and *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* have been particular targets, published separately one month apart, and have elicited insulting questions such as ‘[d]id Krauss learn to be cute from her husband[?]’ and assertions that a blue glass vase that appears in both books is somehow a reference to ‘her marriage’ (emphasis added)—or readings of her novels explicitly and condescendingly in terms of her personal life, such as a review of *Forest Dark* that regards the entire novel as a ‘passive aggressive [...] act of relationship revenge’ following her divorce from Foer and, bizarrely, deploys passing references to guinea pigs as evidence for this claim.³⁵⁶

This treatment is especially ironic when one considers that Krauss’s work is so strongly concerned with the act and artifact of writing, something that is evident in the three novels that will be discussed in this chapter. The novels are concerned with questions of why and how we write, encompassing issues of representation, introspective identity, and interpersonal connection. From the array of writer-characters that occupy her pages, to numerous intertextual references to the wider literary context, Krauss’s literature is deeply embedded in, and indeed inseparable from, the literary world. Of particular note here is her affinity with

³⁵⁵ Keziah Weir, ‘Nicole Krauss Talks Divorce, Freedom, And New Beginnings’, *Elle*, 12 September 2017 <<https://www.elle.com/culture/books/a12119575/nicole-krauss-profile-october-2017/>> [Accessed 11 August 2021], n.p.

³⁵⁶ Jennifer Reese, ‘EW review: Krauss’ ingenious “Love”’, *Entertainment Weekly*, 27 April 2005 <<http://edition.cnn.com/2005/SHOWBIZ/books/04/27/ew.book.history/index.html>> [Accessed 8 November 2021], n.p.; Rachel Aviv, ‘Written With Invisible Ink’, *Village Voice*, 19 April 2005 <<https://www.villagevoice.com/2005/04/19/written-with-invisible-ink/>> [Accessed 5 November 2021], n.p.; Ron Charles, ‘Is Nicole Krauss’s new novel an act of literary revenge?’, *Washington Post*, 12 September 2017 <https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/books/is-nicole-krauss-new-novel-an-act-of-literary-revenge/2017/09/11/edbe912a-9690-11e7-87fc-c3f7ee4035c9_story.html> [Accessed 5 November 2021], n.p.

Franz Kafka, who not only features prominently as part of the plot of *Forest Dark*, but to whom references appear frequently in Krauss's work, from the simple personification of the desert as a 'hunger artist' in her first novel, *Man Walks into a Room* (2002), to an obituary for Kafka written by Leo in the style of the hunger artist in *The History of Love*, and the Kafkaesque use of initials to identify people by Nadia in *Great House*.³⁵⁷ As with the treatment of Kafka, Krauss's work elicits questions of the relationship between writers and their writing, and the confusing uncertainty of the world we live in.

Krauss's exploration of the theme of writing is also heavily influenced by her own experiences both as a writer and a member of the third generation. In addition to biographical references to her grandparents in *The History of Love* and *Great House*, and the autofictional perspective in *Forest Dark*, the theme of the capacity of literature to represent and reform connection after a rupture such as the Holocaust is recurrent as an undertone to her fiction, via concepts such as nostalgia and alternative lives. These concerns are, moreover, consolidated through Krauss's preoccupation with neurology and memory, applying a distinct neuroscientific sheen to her meditations on identity and trauma. Granted a residency at the Zuckerman Mind Brain and Behavior Institute at Columbia University in 2020 to further explore the subject through memory and storytelling, Krauss has long been interested in the science of memory.³⁵⁸ Both *Man Walks into a Room* and *Great House*, for example, feature Holocaust survivors with neurodegenerative disease, considering the interactions between the conditions of dementia and trauma. *Man Walks into a Room*, furthermore, imagines both the effects of the loss of its protagonist Samson's memory as the result of a brain tumour and a science-fictional programme to transfer memories between individuals, with the intention of the creation of true empathy. With propositions such as 'we're just a bunch of habits. [...] without them we'd be unidentifiable. We'd have to reinvent ourselves every minute' (weighed against an encounter with a Tourette's patient in the neurology institute, whose tics involve mirroring the gestures of those she sees and provoke the doctor to ask '[w]hether the individual Marietta truly exists or if the impulses, so all-consuming, make her just a phantasmagoria of a person'), Krauss's interactions with neuroscience ask what exactly the relationship is between memory and the constitution of the self, and, congruently, the formation of identity following a massive mnemonic rupture, such as the trauma of the Holocaust.³⁵⁹

³⁵⁷ Nicole Krauss, *Man Walks into a Room* (London: Penguin, 2007), p. 112.

³⁵⁸ Zuckerman Institute, 'Alan Kanzer Writer-in-Residence Nicole Krauss', *Columbia University* <<https://zuckermaninstitute.columbia.edu/writer-residence>> [Accessed 9 November 2021].

³⁵⁹ Krauss, *Man Walks into a Room*, pp. 39, 41.

Beyond the scientific and intellectual dimensions of Krauss's writing, her work is, fundamentally, interested in broader issues of human connection. This occurs both within her texts, with their emphasis on aspects such as love and survival after loss, and in a wider context of writing and reading. 'I write because I want to reach people and have the kind of conversation with them that can happen only through a book', she explains to Alden Mudge. 'It's one of the most beautiful conversations there is, I think.'³⁶⁰ These conversations take place on a global stage, linking countries and continents, from the Americas to Europe and Middle-Eastern Israel, and cross years of history and culture. However, despite this initially broad context, it is still ultimately the (writerly) individual that shines through, and particularly Krauss herself. Indeed, as I shall explore throughout this chapter, the subtextual presence of Krauss the writer, present throughout her literary work, only becomes stronger and more explicit. In this chapter, as with the previous chapter, I will examine the ways in which Krauss represents intersecting individual, transgenerational, and cultural traumas in three of her novels: *The History of Love*, *Great House*, and *Forest Dark*. In addition to reference to elements of trauma theory, such as the disrupted temporality of the traumatic experience and the transmission of trauma via parenting strategies, I will apply, and explore Krauss's contributions to, the debates signalled in the introduction surrounding the representational ethics of trauma, including aspects such as representability, the use of humour, and the fact-fiction boundary. Thus, not only will I highlight some different perspectives imagined by Krauss on these topics, but also enhance current scholarship on Krauss (particularly via critical engagement with *Forest Dark*) and third generation writings generally.

The History of Love

Upon opening Krauss's second novel, *The History of Love* (2005), the reader is confronted with four photographs. They are of Krauss's grandparents, whom the dedication reveals 'taught [her] the opposite of disappearing', and whose faces emphasise a physical, embodied, presence, rather than one that is simply nominal.³⁶¹ Indeed, the theme of disappearance, and refusal to disappear, is of central importance to the novel, which, as

³⁶⁰ Alden Mudge, 'Nicole Krauss: The Strength to Survive', *BookPage*, May 2005
<<https://bookpage.com/interviews/8300-nicole-krauss#.YKPqDKjYmF>> [Accessed 19 May 2021], n.p.

³⁶¹ Nicole Krauss, *The History of Love* (London: Penguin, 2015). All further references are to this edition, and are given after quotations in the text. Unless otherwise specified, all italics occur in the original.

Krauss explained in her interview with Mudge, is linked for her with survival: ‘In my mind the opposite of disappearing is survival. The book is shot through with odes to survival, to the strength it takes to survive, and to the joy of those who have survived’.³⁶² Survival takes many forms in *The History of Love*, specific to each of its four interlinked narrators, from teenaged Alma Singer’s interest in and notes on ‘How to Survive in the Wild’, to the multifarious survivorship of Leo Gursky, whom Jessica Lang identifies as ‘the survivor of a heart attack, the survivor of numerous mostly unsuccessful visits to the toilet, the survivor of the Nazis.’³⁶³ Yet, as is characteristic of third generation writing, Leo’s Holocaust history is not depicted at length, and nor does it constitute a primary focus of his narrative. Rather, the novel revolves around Leo’s manuscript, also entitled ‘The History of Love’, which he entrusts to his friend, Zvi Litvinoff, prior to the latter’s emigration to Chile from Poland in 1941.³⁶⁴ Later, believing his friend to be dead, Litvinoff publishes the book in Spanish under his own name, a copy of which is purchased by Alma’s father. The latter names his daughter after every female protagonist in the book, who represent Leo’s childhood love Alma Mereminski. Realising that the Alma in the book must be based on a real person, Alma Singer embarks upon a quest to find the woman depicted in the text, which eventually brings her to Leo at the conclusion of the novel. Leo’s novel, of which excerpts are included within the text, links the characters of Krauss’s novel across the globe, including the US, Israel, England, Slonim—a town that is ‘sometimes Poland and sometimes Russia’ (7)—and Chile, suggestive of the transcontinental and transhistorical implications of the Holocaust, and, more importantly, not what is lost but what has survived.

The evocation of the Holocaust in *The History of Love* is multifaceted. In addition to Leo’s own experiences in avoiding Nazi persecution, Alma Singer is herself a member of the third generation, although she is little concerned with her own family’s Holocaust history. In fact, partially as a reaction to her mother’s overbearing second generation tendencies—such as constant, explicit affection, especially after allowing Alma small instances of freedom; her mother ‘hardly even let [her] go halfway down the block’ (43)—she is fiercely independent, expressed through her interests in outdoor survival with minimal external intervention and her angry outburst of ‘I’M AMERICAN!’ (97) when confronted with her mother’s sixteen pie charts defining her national identity in terms of either her grandparents’ places of birth or

³⁶² Mudge, n.p.

³⁶³ Jessica Lang, ‘*The History of Love*, the Contemporary Reader, and the Transmission of Holocaust Memory’, *Journal of Modern Literature*, 33:1 (2009), 43-56 (p. 51).

³⁶⁴ For ease of differentiation, I will refer to Krauss’s novel using the italicised *The History of Love* and Leo’s in single inverted commas.

her parents'. She is keen to establish an identity free of the traumatic past and death. While both she and her brother are quite explicitly given the role of memorial candles (he is named after, among others, Emanuel Ringelbaum, who preserved documents pertaining to life in the Warsaw Ghetto, and an uncle murdered by the Nazis; and her Hebrew name, Devorah, honours a great-aunt who died in the Warsaw Ghetto), Alma later discovers that Alma Mereminski is also dead, and laments that 'people always get named after dead people[.] If they have to be named after anything at all, why can't it be things, which have more permanence, like the sky or the sea, or even ideas, which never really die, not even bad ones?' (176), thus providing the person with a future-oriented and life-affirming identity. This diegetic connection to the Holocaust is combined, moreover, with elements of Krauss's presence as a member of the third generation. As Ann Marsh notes, Alma Mereminski shares a surname with Krauss's paternal grandmother, Sasha Mereminski, who also came from Slonim. The biographical overlap is also unmistakable: Mereminski was aided in her escape by a doctor she met at a transit camp in Poland, whom she assumed to have died after she married and emigrated to the United States. Later, she received letters from him in South America, to which she never responded, 'choosing not to complicate her devotion to her new family', as Marsh puts it.³⁶⁵ Alma Mereminski, likewise, marries after emigrating to the USA, and, although she bore Leo's child, refuses to maintain contact with him, focusing instead on her new life. Thus, like the inclusion of Krauss's grandparents' photographs, these details serve to ground Krauss's multilevel—and, as I shall emphasise throughout this section, consciously *literary*—engagement with the Holocaust past in *The History of Love*.

While the preoccupation with the literary is staged most obviously in the central role of the inset 'The History of Love', as a piece of fiction that, in essence, drives the narrative of Krauss's novel, Krauss imbues the narrative with references to and reflections on the importance of language, especially in the wake of trauma. In particular, Leo's new writing project is a manuscript ironically entitled 'Words for Everything', a title which implies that a direct correlation between the world and language—the signified and the signifiers—is possible, something that he himself denies as a result of his experiences during the Holocaust: following a passage consisting of a series of short, fragmentary sentences that represent the fragmentary nature of traumatic memory, describing hiding in the forest while the inhabitants of Slonim are murdered, he states that '[w]hen I got up again, I'd shed the only part of me that had ever thought I'd find words for even the smallest bit of life' (8). His belief in

³⁶⁵ Ann Marsh, 'The Emergence of Nicole Krauss', *Stanford Magazine*, September/October 2005 <<https://stanfordmag.org/contents/the-emergence-of-nicole-krauss>> [Accessed 19 May 2021], n.p.

absolute expressibility, in other words, is substituted for absolute inexpressibility in response to the experience of trauma. Although such a notion does not persist unaltered into his old age, the shift in emphasis does. In addition to the aforementioned stunted narration of his trauma, suggesting that it cannot be represented with the same eloquence applied to the rest of his life, his return to the art of writing after many intervening years is predicated on the understanding that '[i]t didn't matter if I found the words, and more than that, I knew it would be impossible to find the right ones' (9). Thus, Krauss posits that representability, especially with regard to writing after trauma, is not a matter of resolving a tension between the signifier and the signified, but rather to consciously *embrace* this tension.

The issue of representation also incorporates another tension: fact and fiction. Before the war, Leo is described as having written two books other than 'The History of Love'; one which is entirely factual, based on the daily workings of Slonim, and another which is wholly imaginary, with 'men who grew wings, and trees with their roots growing into the sky, people who forgot their own names and people who couldn't forget anything; I even made up words' (8). In the case of factual portrayal, in addition to the issues with direct representation discussed above, Alma Mereminski is underwhelmed by the book, implying that documentary representation lacks some of the emotive content characteristic of imaginative writing; a sense of emotional subjectivity is required to elevate objects and events to a status of meaningfulness. By contrast, however, wholly imaginative portrayal provokes Alma's criticism that Leo 'shouldn't make up *everything*, because that made it hard to believe *anything*' (8); a fictional portrayal should have as its foundation something comprehensibly factual. Interaction between these poles can undoubtedly be observed in Leo's chapters in the novel (although the complications Alma highlights are certainly present with regard to Bruno, a point to which I will return in due course), but are also related by Krauss to the consideration of the Holocaust generally. Unbelievability is suggested to be an important factor in the expansion of Nazi persecution, of which Leo explains that '[t]here were rumors of unfathomable things, and because we couldn't fathom them we failed to believe them, until we had no choice and it was too late' (8), once again implying that the Holocaust is beyond comprehension, as a result of a lack of a stable basis in known reality. As noted in the introduction, language, as representative of a network of symbolisation borne of lived experience, is insufficient to contain, or conceptualise in the anterior, the radically discordant nature of trauma.³⁶⁶ This inadequacy is also emphasised through Leo's post-Holocaust

³⁶⁶ See pp. 13-14.

writing. After years spent not writing—not *representing*, in a manner congruous with Theodor W. Adorno’s oft-cited dictum that ‘[t]o write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric’—Leo painstakingly writes 301 pages of text.³⁶⁷ When he attempts to share this achievement over the unpresentability of experience, however, his friend Bruno estimates that he must have written 200,000 pages. Aside from the humour of Bruno’s absurd and unexpected guess, Krauss sets up a dichotomy of possible presentability, juxtaposing Leo’s sense of achievement at having written any pages after the Holocaust, let alone over three hundred, with Bruno’s suggestion that expression must necessitate hundreds of thousands of words, sentences, and pages. Because the relationship between symbol and experience is so indirect, Krauss implies, two responses emerge: that there are no words to adequately describe experience, or that there are not enough words.

The inset ‘The History of Love’ is also concerned with the relationship between life and language. Two chapters in particular, ‘The Age of String’ and ‘The Age of Silence’, imaginatively allegorise this tension through magical realism. In the former, the narrator writes that

So many words get lost. They leave the mouth and lose their courage, wandering aimlessly until they are swept into the gutter like dead leaves. [...] There was a time when it wasn’t uncommon to use a piece of string to guide words that otherwise might falter on the way to their destinations. (111)

However, despite imagining the intervention of a physical object that might render linguistic transmission likewise physical, and therefore less fallible, it is nevertheless acknowledged that ‘[s]ometimes no length of string is long enough to say the thing that needs to be said. In such cases all the string can do, in whatever its form, is conduct a person’s silence’ (111), therefore reasserting the ultimate incompatibility of the signifier and signified, and consolidating the viability of silence as the only acceptable presentation of the unrepresentable. ‘The Age of Silence’ considers silence in a slightly different light, proposing that during this period ‘people communicated more, not less’ (72). Here, communication occurs through movements of the hands rather than speech, and therein

³⁶⁷ Theodor W. Adorno, *Prisms*, trans. by Samuel and Shierry Weber (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981), p. 34.

No distinction was made between the gestures of language and the gestures of life. The labor of building a house, say, or preparing a meal was no less an expression than making the sign for *I love you* or *I feel serious*. When a hand was used to shield one's face when frightened by a loud noise something was being said, and when fingers were used to pick up what someone else has dropped something was being said; and even when the hands were at rest, that, too, was saying something. (72)

By collapsing the distinction between embodied experience and expression, the breach between signifier and signified is imagined, to an extent, as closed; life and expression become two facets of the same object. Interestingly, the idea that resting hands, the equivalent of silence in speech, is also a positive form of expression highlights the third-generation postulation that the absence of representation is, in itself, a form of representation. In both chapters, then, silence is registered as an important part of expression even while alternative and auxiliary modes of communication are considered. Yet, as mentioned before, the tensions between signifier and signified are not completely resolved: the string cannot transmit every sentiment, and, in the Age of Silence, not only were misunderstandings prevalent, but the nuances of the gestures have since been forgotten. Because, as Leo learns from his previous two books, narration is most effective when situated between fact and fiction, 'The History of Love' hence responds creatively and imaginatively to the experiential problem of the inadequacy of language, which finds increased relevance in the aftermath of trauma. It thus resonates with and deeply affects its various readership, who each have their own traumatic burdens, including Alma Singer's second generation parents, Holocaust refugee Zvi, and Alma Singer herself, who lost her father to cancer at a young age.

It is notable that this resonance occurs across cultures and the globe, the most unexpected of these being Chile. Although, as the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum documents, Latin America was an important site of emigration during the rise of Nazi power, officially accepting around 84,000 Jewish refugees between 1933 and 1945 and a further 20,000 between 1947 and 1953, compared to other areas of Holocaust studies this context is not very well known—even the Museum encyclopaedia only has one entry on the entire subject.³⁶⁸ That the character of Zvi is part of this history is of significance because his

³⁶⁸ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 'Refuge in Latin America', *Holocaust Encyclopedia* <<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/refuge-in-latin-america>> [Accessed 12 May 2021], n.p.

Spanish translation of ‘The History of Love’ is the only published copy in the diegesis of the text, and it is this version that is encountered by the majority of its readership. In addition to the transference of the novel’s universal themes—love, loss, and (mis/non)communication—the magical realist style of the text translates effectively into Spanish, suggesting, as with the Trachimbrod narrative of *Everything is Illuminated*, that there is common ground between Yiddish magical realism and Latin American postcolonial magical realism.³⁶⁹ This also proposes, to an extent that is taken further in *Great House* (the subject of the next section of this chapter) and in novels such as Nathan Englander’s *The Ministry of Special Cases*, that productive comparisons can be made between the fear, antisemitism, and upheaval of the Holocaust and of the political turmoil, postcolonialism, and frequent military coups in South America. Relevant to *The History of Love*, the likenesses are also sustainable with the historical distance of second- and third-generation writing. Jordana Blejmar, for example, creates several comparisons with second-generation Holocaust writing in the context of her study on autofiction in post-dictatorship generations in Argentina, noting the oblique writing style, relationship to history and trauma, and playful elements.³⁷⁰ Krauss herself also draws explicit parallels, recalling that when she studied *One Hundred Years of Solitude* in school, the teacher identified it as a book about nostalgia, which resonated with her as ‘[a] word for the thing I feel.’ She goes on to explain this feeling, submitting that

it has something to do with—or everything to do with—the fact that my grandparents came from these places that we could never go back to, because they’d been lost [...] And people were lost. My great-grandparents and lots of great-uncles and aunts died in the Holocaust. I don’t know; maybe it’s something that’s inherited in the blood, a sense of a loss of that thing and a longing for it.³⁷¹

Indeed, the vanished worlds described in each chapter of ‘The History of Love’ have affinity with the vanished worlds of Macondo and some Eastern European shtetls, and the magical realist style of the text not only facilitates productive parallels and analogies between experiences in these two cultural contexts, but participates in a form of language usage that is

³⁶⁹ See pp. 76-79.

³⁷⁰ Jordana Blejmar, *Playful Memories: The Autofictional Turn in Post-Dictatorship Argentina* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), esp. pp. 30-31, 34-36.

³⁷¹ Gaby Wood, ‘Have a heart’, *Guardian*, 15 May 2005

<<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2005/may/15/fiction.features3>> [Accessed 19 May 2021], n.p.

effective in confronting and addressing some of the problems, especially of narratability, faced by each; something which functions across both the diegetic level of 'The History of Love' and the level of Krauss's writing of *The History of Love*.

The fact that 'The History of Love' is literally translated into a new context, exchanging Yiddish for Spanish, also highlights another key concern of *The History of Love*: the use of language in translation, and the interaction between different languages. In addition to the fact that the titular novel exists, as Lang notes, in four different versions (Krauss's, Leo's Yiddish original, Zvi's Spanish translation, and Charlotte Singer's English translation), the linguistic map of Krauss's novel includes, over and above the three languages already mentioned, Hebrew and Russian.³⁷² Beyond 'The History of Love', global languages are central to the lives of each of Krauss's narrators. Alma remarks, for example, that '[i]t took seven languages to make me' (141).³⁷³ This unusual interpretation of genealogy, focusing on intangible rather than physical means of connection, underlines the importance of communication and language as a shared social space to interpersonal connection. This is emphasised equally in moments of its absence. At university, for example, Charlotte seeks out a Hebrew tutor because 'she wanted to be able to understand [Alma's] father' (40), suggesting a deeper form of understanding given that they have previously been able to literally communicate, one grounded in the ways that one's own language (as a means of expression and narrativization) is integral to self-identity; while Alma observes that '[a] thought crossed [her Russian friend Misha's] face in a language [she] couldn't understand' (142), once again referring to the linguistic specificity of an individual's interiority, and implying that she could perhaps better understand his gestures and body language—understand *him*—if only she understood his native language. This idea is also foregrounded in the characterisation of Leo. Following his move to the USA from Slonim, Leo explains that when he and his childhood friend Bruno 'talk, we never speak in Yiddish. The words of our childhood became strangers to us—we couldn't use them in the same way and so we chose not to use them at all. Life demanded a new language' (6). Like the separation enacted by Oskar's grandmother in Foer's *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*, the two languages here represent two different identities and ways of perceiving the world: the pre-Holocaust world, which could be understood and symbolised in Yiddish, and the post-Holocaust world that Yiddish symbolisation cannot contain.

³⁷² Lang, p. 49.

³⁷³ Although these languages are not specified within the text, it is reasonable to assume that they are Russian, Hungarian, Polish, and German as the languages of her grandparents; English and Hebrew of her parents; and Spanish from the book that brought her parents together and named her.

Holocaust survivorship for Leo requires a different conceptualisation of the world, rather than integration.

Krauss's depiction of Leo's perspective is also significant because, alongside *From a Sealed Room* and unlike the other texts studied in this thesis, it gives substantial narrative voice to a Holocaust survivor character. Although not providing significant attention to his experiences during the Holocaust, his perspective contravenes the normally oblique and distanced approach taken towards the Holocaust by the third generation. Leo, an elderly man at the point of narration, occasionally recounts harrowing vignettes pertaining to his escape from the Nazis, such as the aforementioned slaughter of his hometown, near-starvation in the forests of Europe, or his near discovery in a potato cellar by the SS. More frequently, however, his chapters detail aspects important to his life *after* the Holocaust, such as his renewed interest in writing, his longing for his son (a connection with whom he is denied largely as a consequence of the events of the Holocaust), and his need, akin to Krauss's grandparents' refusal to disappear, 'not to die on a day when I went unseen' (4). Indeed, opposite to the photos of Krauss's grandparents, Leo recounts how, when he moved to the US, he did not initially show up in photographs, having in the same way that 'others had lost a leg or an arm, [...] lost whatever the thing is that makes people indelible' (81).³⁷⁴ As a result, even after he begins to show up in pictures, he makes a point of being noticed every day, effectuating humorous mishaps and spectacles in public spaces to draw attention to himself, from deliberately spilling change all over the floor to signing up for a position as a nude model in an art class, which 'seemed too good to be true. To have so much looked at. By so many' (4). The humour of these instances, narrated wryly from Leo's point of view, plays an important role in the positioning of *The History of Love* as a third generation novel. As Lang observes, these 'traces of laughter connect survival and the present', highlighting, while declining to glorify, the continuation of his life beyond the Holocaust.³⁷⁵ While this certainly constitutes a third generation challenge to traditional representation of the Holocaust and its survivors, according to the tendency elucidated in the introduction, its deployment from the subjectivity of a survivor character adds further nuance.³⁷⁶ The humour can, for example, be considered a defence against an appalling psychological reality, regarding both memories of the Holocaust and Leo's profound loneliness as an old man with no one to care for him, and

³⁷⁴ Although this would appear to be a moment of magical realism, as with the passages described above, I am disinclined to apply the same label here, due to the non-magical explanation for the events of Leo's chapters alluded to by Leo in the closing pages of the novel; a point elucidated later in this section.

³⁷⁵ Lang, p. 51.

³⁷⁶ See pp. 51-52.

who fears that when he dies his body will lie undiscovered for days, as was the fate of one of his neighbours. This aspect differentiates the psychological function of the humour from that used by a third-generation character perspective, who have no direct access to the trauma of the Holocaust, or whose humour, like in Foer's *Everything is Illuminated*, targets the nihilistic absence the Holocaust presents to the third generation.³⁷⁷

The melancholy undertone generated by the humour of *The History of Love* is also consolidated by the type of humour used, which is very much of the European Jewish comic tradition as outlined by the likes of Sarah Blacher Cohen. Taking on a self-deprecating tone, this type of humour functions to empower Jewish people from the near-consistent adversity faced in Central and Eastern Europe. 'It is as if they had to tell their oppressor,' Cohen imagines, 'You don't have to injure us. We'll take charge of our own persecution. And we'll do it more thoroughly than you ever could.'³⁷⁸ Yet, as Roberta Rosenberg argues, this form of humour is somewhat incongruous with an American context, where 'contemporary Jews are more likely to suffer from "affluenza" than antisemitism.'³⁷⁹ While Leo is not depicted as being particularly wealthy, it is true that he does not experience active victimisation in the US. Therefore, his humour, associating him more closely with prewar Yiddish culture than the 'trickster persona that maneuvers across cultures, side-stepping both suffering and martyrdom in favor of a new "diasporic" heroism that may call into question the very nature of victors and losers' identified by Rosenberg as a possible effective alternative comic persona, emphasises simultaneously the distance between his contemporary American context and his European past, and the ways in which his cultural adherence to the latter indicates a kind of stasis therein that prevents his full assimilation into the present.³⁸⁰ In other words, his humour—in addition to his relentless love for his childhood sweetheart and longing for the life they believed they would share together—problematizes the extent to which he can be considered to be focusing on life *beyond* the Holocaust, instead suggesting a life *in spite of*—or even *in rejection of*—the Holocaust. Krauss thus indicates that Leo's focus on his post-Holocaust life is more Holocaust-focused than it perhaps first appears.

Leo's emotional, if not literal, denial of the Holocaust is emphasised most clearly through the character of Bruno, however. Bruno appears at first to be Leo's only source of

³⁷⁷ See pp. 76-77.

³⁷⁸ Sarah Blacher Cohen, 'Introduction: The Varieties of Jewish Humor', in *Jewish Wry: Essays on Jewish Humor*, ed. by Sarah Blacher Cohen (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1987), pp. 1-15 (p. 4).

³⁷⁹ Roberta Rosenberg, 'Jewish "Diasporic Humor" and Contemporary Jewish-American Identity', *Shofar*, 33:3 (2015), 110-138 (p. 111).

³⁸⁰ *Ibid*, p. 115.

company and meaningful interpersonal interaction, until it is revealed in the closing pages of the novel that he is '*the greatest character [Leo] ever wrote*' (249), the real Bruno having died during the Holocaust. His resurrection in Leo's imagination can be considered as an attempt to undo the effects of the Holocaust, to reverse his death. This is further allegorised in the spectacles Leo describes Bruno as wearing, which come from a 'box of old eyeglasses' (20) kept in Leo's closet. The image of a box of miscellaneous spectacles is one strongly associated with Auschwitz and the Holocaust, recalling the piles of eyewear removed from victims of the gas chambers. Bruno's retrieval of a pair, then, represents an imaginative denial of the permanent effects of the Nazi genocide, wherein the spectacles are returned to their status as a personal effect, rather than a memorial to the destroyed bodies of those murdered. Bruno's imaginary resurrection, however, has implications on the rest of the narrative of *The History of Love*. Because it is only revealed at the conclusion of the novel that the character of elderly Bruno is imaginary (despite him earlier being described as having agency and influence over objects and events in the narrative) alongside the dismantling of other imaginary aspects of the story, such as the elephant Leo claims to have seen in Slonim or his wilful forgetting that Alma 'told [him] she couldn't love [him]. When she said goodbye, she was saying goodbye forever' (226), the reliability of the rest of Leo's narrative is cast under doubt, recalling once again Alma Mereminski's criticism that fiction problematises the search for factual truth.

Codde, in his analysis of the novel, takes this further. Considering the omniscient narrator of the chapters concerning Litvinoff, he writes that '[s]uch an omniscient perspective seems highly problematic and inconsistent in a book by a third-generation author in light of the radical inaccessibility of a past mediated via narratives', going on to identify that '[t]he question is, however, whether this narrator is really omniscient.'³⁸¹ Drawing upon evidence such as Leo's use of the request '[f]orgive me' (6) when introducing Bruno, which corresponds to the title of the first Litvinoff chapter (also 'FORGIVE ME' (65)); the use of a book as the avatar of these chapters, suggesting the authorship of the author-character in *The History of Love*; and the presence of Leo's obituary at the end of *The History of Love*, consistent with Litvinoff's inclusion of the obituary as the final chapter of the published 'The History of Love' so that '[a]ll anyone had to do was turn to the last page, and there they would find, spelled out in black and white, the name of the true author of *The History of Love*' (189); Codde compellingly argues that this 'is Krauss's own way of indicating that the

³⁸¹ Codde, 'Keeping History at Bay', pp. 687-688.

true author of *The History of Love* is indeed Leopold.’³⁸² The result is that ‘[i]nstead of revealing a knowable past via an omniscient narrator, Krauss leaves her readers in complete uncertainty about the truth value of every single account in the novel’, including Alma’s and her brother’s.³⁸³ It becomes impossible to reliably differentiate between what happens in Leo’s life and what is a product of his imagination. Extending this to Krauss’s meta-engagement with the Holocaust as a member of the third generation herself, she thus emphasises the tensions between fact and fiction in investigations into the historical past: while documentary evidence lacks the necessary emotional register, personal evidence is always formed through a process of subjective interpretation and is viewed through a subjective lens, with variable deviation from objective reality. The deliberate (given the explicit consideration given to factual versus fictional representation mentioned earlier in this section) construction and deconstruction of a highly imaginative and fictional account of post-Holocaust survivorship thus not only portrays a psychological avoidance of a horrifying reality, but also stages this conflict clearly, problematising assumptions that one can truly know the past.

The characters of Leo and Bruno are also implicated in Krauss’s intertextual rendering of *The History of Love*, adding a literary layer to her consideration of the Holocaust. In addition to the evocation of two other magical realist writers—Jorge Luis Borges, who is stated within the text to have lived near the bookshop in which the copy of ‘The History of Love’ purchased by Alma’s father ended up, and who is identified by Joost Krijnen as a possible influence on the ‘dreamy’ style of ‘The History of Love’; and Kafka, whose obituary is written by Leo in a manner reminiscent of Kafka’s own writing in ‘A Hunger Artist’, in which, as Kirstin Gwyer puts it, Kafka ‘cannot stop performing, even in [the crowd’s] absence, yet in their absence, his performance, and his life, cease to be [...] creating the expectation of a parable but frustrating exegesis’—*The History of Love* constitutes, Gwyer argues, ‘an extended and complex conjuring of Bruno Schulz’.³⁸⁴ Schulz, like Kafka, elicits oblique Holocaust associations, though neither are writers of the Holocaust. While Schulz was murdered during the Holocaust, meaning that his surviving literary works are often read alongside a spectral sense of those of his that were destroyed during Nazi reign, Kafka’s

³⁸² Philippe Codde, ‘On the Problematic Omniscient Narrator in Nicole Krauss’s THE HISTORY OF LOVE’, *The Explicator*, 69:1 (2011), 48-50 (p. 49); Codde, ‘Keeping History at Bay’, p. 688.

³⁸³ Codde, ‘On the Problematic Omniscient Narrator in Nicole Krauss’s THE HISTORY OF LOVE’, p. 50.

³⁸⁴ Joost Krijnen, *Holocaust Impiety in Jewish American Literature: Memory, Identity, (Post-)Postmodernism* (Leiden: Brill Rodopi, 2016), p. 208; Kirstin Gwyer, “‘You think your writing belongs to you?’: Intertextuality in Contemporary Jewish Post-Holocaust Literature”, *Humanities*, 7:20 (2018), 1-18 (p. 12).

death preceded the Holocaust, although comparisons are still made in criticism: as George Steiner notes in his introduction to *The Trial*, the ‘foresight’ of the novel ‘into the inferno of modern bureaucracy, into imputed guilt, into torture and the anonymities of death as these characterize twentieth-century totalitarian régimes, has been made a cliché.’³⁸⁵ In Krauss’s novel, as Codde notes, not only is Schulz’s influence noticeable in the style of ‘The History of Love’, but in the character of Leo, who, as ‘a Polish Jewish author who is believed to have died during the war, but who suddenly pops up again in New York, alive and in possession of the manuscript that everyone assumed was lost’, represents ‘an alternative history for Schulz’ and his rumoured lost novel *The Messiah*.³⁸⁶ Much like the ‘Bruno’ chapter of David Grossman’s *See Under: Love*, in which Schulz is imagined to have escaped the Holocaust, and indeed Krauss’s own rewriting of Kafka’s fate in *Forest Dark*, Krauss’s imagining of a different fate for a Schulz-like character not only once again recalls the idea of literary resurrection (both Krauss and Leo resurrect a Schulz-figure; Leo in the form of Bruno, who shares a name with the deceased author, and Krauss through Leo), but creates another reference point to the Holocaust. By imagining what might have survived, what did not is equally, unavoidably, invoked.

However, as Krijnen summarises,

the real concern of Krauss’s *The History of Love* is not the history of the Holocaust in a narrow sense; it is, rather, to investigate the possibilities and significance of restoration, interhuman connection, and love in the face of trauma and loss, across time and distance, and to suggest that such delicate, fragile connections are facilitated especially by (imaginative) writing. ³⁸⁷

Certainly, this is what ‘The History of Love’ achieves in Krauss’s novel. From memorialising the love between Leo and Alma Mereminski, to facilitating that between Zvi and his wife, Rosa; to bringing together Alma’s parents, indicating to Isaac Moritz (Leo’s son) the identity of his biological father, and drawing Alma and Leo together, Leo’s manuscript resonates with individuals across the globe, and grants him a legacy (even if anonymous) that is concerned not with trauma, but its survival. Like his self-written obituary, which, in the words of Lang, ‘emphasizes death, love, life—universal and even ordinary components that are part of all

³⁸⁵ George Steiner, ‘Introduction’, in *The Trial* by Franz Kafka, trans. by Willa and Edwin Muir (London: Everyman’s Library, 1992), pp. v-xviii (p. xviii).

³⁸⁶ Codde, ‘Keeping History at Bay’, p. 686.

³⁸⁷ Krijnen, p. 67.

people's lives', 'The History of Love' (and Krauss's *The History of Love*) speak to the communal experience of living, and of attempting to share that experience with others.³⁸⁸ And indeed, this is the half of the dualism of loss and survival considered throughout this section that ultimately transcends in *The History of Love*. Although critics such as Karolina Krasuska, Berger and Asher Z. Milbauer have commented upon the importance of bearing children and generationality to Krauss's oeuvre, in *The History of Love* it is not through genetic lines that legacy is transmitted, but through writing.³⁸⁹ Alma, who, as previously noted, is little interested in her biological family Holocaust history, instead embarks on a kind of third-generation quest to find the woman who gave her her name, the Alma in 'The History of Love'. When she finally meets Leo at the conclusion of the novel, he expresses his joy that 'in some small way it was my love that named her' (252). While it is revealed that Isaac had been very close to discovering Leo at the time of his death, and thus restoring the connection with him that Leo craves, it is through the reach of 'The History of Love' that an intergenerational connection is successfully established. Herein, instead of passing on a family name, it is the name of his childhood love and the characters he wrote from her that is transmitted. In this way, Alma's name memorialises their love, but in a manner nuanced by shades of interpretative meaning that prevent Alma from becoming a simple memorial candle—it also carries reference and connects her to her own parents' relationship, and to the friendship between Zvi and Leo, out of respect to which the former felt unable to rename Alma in his transcription of Leo's manuscript. Writing, in a metaphorical sense, is thus suggested to be able to birth such intergenerational and interpersonal connections, in a manner equally as binding—or perhaps even more so—than progeny. It is, Krauss proposes, of vital importance to the sharing of experience and creation of bonds across distance and time.

Great House

In many ways, Krauss's third novel, *Great House* (2010), acts as a useful counterpart to *The History of Love*, expanding and transforming several of its themes, from the role of literature and writing in the wake of trauma to the global landscape of Krauss's fiction. Narrated from five perspectives—a middle-aged American novelist named Nadia; a judge named Aaron; Arthur Bender, husband of reserved Holocaust refugee Lotte Berg; student

³⁸⁸ Lang, p. 52.

³⁸⁹ Karolina Krasuska, 'Narratives of generationality in 21st-century North American Jewish literature: Krauss, Bezmozgis, Kalman', *East European Jewish Affairs*, 46:3 (2016), 285-310 (p. 287); Alan L. Berger and Asher Z. Milbauer, 'The Burden of Inheritance', *Shofar*, 31:3 (2013), 64-85 (p. 82).

Izzy, who engages in a relationship with second-generation descendant Yoav Weisz; and Yoav's father, George Weisz, an antiques dealer—*Great House* orbits around a single object: the writing desk of Chilean poet Daniel Varsky. 'I suppose it's no accident', Krauss explains of the desk and the inset 'History of Love' in her previous novel, 'that these two objects stand for literature. I think literature became a character, almost, in these past two novels that I wrote.'³⁹⁰ Indeed, as in *The History of Love*, literature and the literary play a central role in the text, from the array of writer-characters such as Nadia and Lotte to the different ends towards which literature is used, including the confessional nature of Aaron's chapters, Aaron's son Dov's novel about a shark who absorbs the (increasingly uncontrollable) nightmares of sleeping humans as an allegory for his pain, and the therapeutic and posttraumatic writings of Lotte and Nadia. In addition, the novel contains allusions to other pieces of work in Krauss's oeuvre, such as the elaborations of Leah Weisz's experience in boarding school in Switzerland and Lotte's story about a corrupt landscape architect in Krauss's short stories 'Switzerland' and 'In the Garden' respectively (*To Be a Man*, 2020). As well as contributing to this focus on the literary, the writing desk is further symbolically associated with the Holocaust, having originally been owned by Weisz's father before being seized by the Nazis during the Second World War. From then, it comes into Lotte's possession, which she describes as a 'gift' but refuses to elaborate further.³⁹¹ Later, she donates the desk to Daniel, who leaves it in Nadia's care while he returns to Chile to fight against the Pinochet regime. Finally, the desk is obtained by Leah to prevent her father from repossessing it after years of searching. The desk thus acts as a connector between these disparate characters and their personal stories, imbuing their narratives with associations of literature and what Berger and Milbauer call 'the burden of history'.³⁹² Such associations and parallels between histories will be explored throughout this section, focusing especially on Weisz, Lotte, and Daniel.

The desk hence becomes, in a sense, the principal piece of furniture in the eponymous 'great house' of Krauss's novel. The title, as explained in an anecdote by Weisz towards the end of the novel, is a reference to a passage from the Book of Kings describing the destruction of Jerusalem: '*He burned the house of God, the king's house, and all the houses of Jerusalem; even every great house he burned with fire*' (279). The significance of this passage to *Great House* is twofold. Firstly, as Berger and Milbauer note, the task of rebuilding that follows the

³⁹⁰ Gritz, n.p.

³⁹¹ Nicole Krauss, *Great House* (London: Penguin, 2011), p. 84. All further references are to this edition, and are given after quotations in the text. Unless otherwise specified, all italics occur in the original.

³⁹² Berger and Milbauer, p. 74.

razing of Jerusalem is given a problematic new dimension following the history of the Holocaust, which is central to the novel's narrative. They write that '[i]n classical Jewish thought destruction is never complete and is always followed by redemption. It is this paradigm that the Shoah threatens to topple.'³⁹³ Yet, secondly, the form of the reconstruction is significant to Krauss's third-generation writing: rather than referring to a literal rebuild of the destroyed buildings, the solution is instead presented in the injunction to '[t]urn Jerusalem into an idea. Turn the Temple into a book, a book as vast and holy and intricate as the city itself. Bend a people around the shape of what they lost, and let everything mirror its absent form' (279). As with the postmodern third-generation approach to the Holocaust explored in the introduction, direct reconstruction, an impossible endeavour, is eschewed in favour of an oblique rendering of the tragedy that highlights, rather than replaces, the absent original.³⁹⁴ In Krauss's own words, 'the answer to catastrophic loss was absolute reimagination', applicable both in form of representation and in the inventive leaps taken by those surrounding a survivor in reconstructing their past.³⁹⁵ Indeed, such reimaginations are prevalent in all four of *Great House*'s households, through which Krauss evokes the fragmented and polyphonous nature of historical memory. Just as in Weisz's father's elucidation of the above biblical passage, wherein he explains that 'every Jewish soul is built around the house that burned in that fire, so vast that we can, each one of us, only recall the tiniest fragment: a pattern on the wall, a knot in the wood of the door, a memory of how light fell across the floor' and that 'if every Jewish memory were put together, every last fragment joined up again as one, the House would be built again' (279), each encounter with the desk in *Great House* illuminates new facets of the novel's hidden history of trauma. Through the exhumation of the histories of Weisz, Lotte, and Daniel, as this section will demonstrate, Krauss not only fictionalises the processes by which concealed traumas might be revealed (insights brought to the fore by Krauss's third-generation presence) but also the ways in which a greater sense of history is predicated on individual lives and perspectives.

The most obvious—and, arguably, central—historical trauma evoked in *Great House* is the Holocaust, the event which facilitates the desk's transfer between the characters of the novel. The role of the desk as a Holocaust artifact is also significant because it represents an epistemological shift in the study of Holocaust memory pertinent to the third generation: a move away from direct testimony, where it is rendered inaccessible by chosen silence or

³⁹³ Ibid, p. 75.

³⁹⁴ See pp. 52-53.

³⁹⁵ Gritz, n.p.

death, with an increasing focus on objectified memory through artifacts. Relevantly, in *Great House*, Weisz's life's work involves reuniting clients with pieces of furniture stolen by the Nazis, because although he 'can't bring the dead back to life', he can 'bring back the chair they once sat in, the bed where they slept' (275), the objects bearing a mnemonic trace of their absent owner. Such objects, like Lista's archive in *Everything is Illuminated*, also serve as an anchor for memories.³⁹⁶ As Weisz explains, clients are amazed when they are presented with the missing piece of furniture because, in a reversal of the reimagination of the destroyed Temple above, '[t]hey've bent their memories around a void, and now the missing thing has appeared' (275). In theory, history and memory are hence reconnected: the subjective and emotional truths of memory are realigned with factual historical traces; the impermanent and plastic with its timeless, tangible counterpart. There is a sense of stability and permanence in an object which contrasts with—and with which Weisz attempts to counteract—human mortality. However, Krauss does not lend each half of the dichotomy equal weight in Weisz's perspective. He asserts that 'even if [a piece of furniture] no longer exists, I find it. Do you understand me? I produce it. [...] Because [the client] needs it to be that bed where she once lay with him more than he needs to know the truth' (276). Here, the emotional content of memory, much like Laub's explanation of testimony utilised in the introduction, is granted primacy over fact, suggesting that the successful embodiment of memory is not predicated on an original and contemporaneous connection between the event and object precisely because of this hierarchy.³⁹⁷ In other words, memory is not just granted primacy over history, but to the latter's exclusion; a problematic positioning which not only complicates the ethics of Weisz's trade, but participates in larger issues pertaining to the recording of history, to which accuracy is fundamental, and the absence of which has ramifications for society today.

A second motivation for the recovery of the lost pieces of furniture is the attempted restoration of a world before the Holocaust—a literal rather than imaginative rebuilding, in the language of the 'great house' concept—which is exemplified through Weisz's personal mission to create an exact replica of his father's study as it appeared before the first rock was thrown through their window in a Kristallnacht-esque harbinger of the Holocaust to come. Joye Weisel-Barth reads this imperative in terms of the psychoanalytic fetish, which she describes as 'transforming and reducing a living symbol, reverberate, and evocative of complex people and/or places and/or cultural life, into a fixed idol, a dead thing.' Accordingly, in the case of Weisz, she writes that the desk as 'the last object that Weisz sees

³⁹⁶ See pp. 72-74.

³⁹⁷ See p. 47.

before his world disintegrates, represents the shattered home, the dead father, and the plight of literature, culture, and the life of the mind in the wake of the Holocaust.' Yet, '[a]lthough it promises the restoration of loss and a fulfillment of desire—all the excitement and vitality of pretraumatic life—in fact, it is a lifeless thing that paradoxically abducts both the present and any possibility of affective presence.'³⁹⁸ Indeed, his obsession with the desk comes at the expense of a meaningful relationship with his children, with whom he spends little time, causing them to develop an inauthentic and cold attitude towards him marked by lies and feelings of intimidation; and his absence alongside the frequent relocations required by his work ensure that Yoav and Leah are socially isolated and withdrawn, even consensually perpetuating rumours of incest. Krauss portrays their life with their father as one that must coexist with the omnipresent past. Izzy, for example, registers that

no matter how careless they were, they seemed never to leave behind a mark or trace. At first I took this to be the grace of those brought up to consider such furniture their natural habitat, but once I knew Yoav and Leah better I began to think of their talent, if one can call it that, as something borrowed from ghosts.
(139)

The past's hold over Weisz means that his children are not only induced to likewise live alongside it, but also, in a sense, to integrate with it, to become indistinguishable from these historical spectres that similarly have no material influence or impact on the present. Their lives, in a nonconsensual echo of their father's, are sacrificed to the past.

The circumstances of Yoav and Leah's isolation are furthermore actively compounded by Weisz's behaviour, such as the administration of maladaptive survivor life lessons:

While they slept I rearranged the furniture. I taught them to trust no one but themselves. I taught them not to be afraid when they went to sleep with the chair in one place, and woke with it in another. I taught them that it doesn't matter where you put the table, against which wall you push the bed, so long as you always store the suitcases on top of the closet. I taught them to say, We're leaving tomorrow[.](286-287)

³⁹⁸ Joye Weisel-Barth, 'The Fetish in Nicole Krauss' *Great House* and in Clinical Practice', *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, 23:2 (2013), 180-196 (pp. 180, 184, 189).

The idea that one must be prepared for dislocation is one clearly rooted in Weisz's experience of flight from Nazi persecution, but the force and methods by which the lesson is imparted result in a sense of unrootedness in his children and difficulties developing long-term social connections with anyone other than each other. In fact, Krauss writes that '[t]hey spoke in a pidgin of Hebrew, French, and English that only they understood' (121) as a result of their frequent relocation, highlighting how their very ability to communicate with others is compromised, further ensuring their insularity. Under the auspices of love and heavily influenced by the trauma of his past, Weisz deliberately restricts Yoav and Leah's movements, while any protests were 'crushed [...] with disproportionate power' (120) and 'to ensure that Yoav would never grow confident enough to stand up to him, he found ways to constantly belittle him' (120). These intentional constraints on their lives are also also projected into the future: Izzy remarks that Leah's lack of romantic relationships are likely because '[t]he demands her father [...] made on her loyalty and love left any outside relationship with a man almost impossible' (165-166), and expresses her shock that, in the presence of his father, Yoav, 'the man who only minutes before had been fucking [her] with such force[,] had been transformed into something meek, subdued, almost childlike' (161). Rendered impotent and stripped of his status as an adult, Yoav is denied a sense of agency and, like Leah, is subordinated to his father, who has ensured that they lack the appropriate skills to live without him. As a result, Weisz's dominating presence as the only object of permanence in their life 'threaten[s] to blot everything else, even themselves, from view' (125). Like many survivor households described in the introduction, the traumatic past is granted a central role in daily life, with the survivor's constrictive parenting jeopardising the children's identity; but in the case of Weisz, Krauss conveys the occlusion as calculated and purposeful.³⁹⁹

The difficulties faced by Weisz's children as a result of his obsession are not just related to Weisz's parenting style, however. Leah also, in a letter to Izzy, recounts her early terror at her father's transactions, describing how 'she would sometimes hide in the kitchen when the crates were pried open, in case what popped out were the blackened faces of her dead grandparents' (115). For his children, Weisz's obsession with recuperating the past is not subject to the delusion of the reversal of time, and therefore the material associations with dead relatives become more macabre than nostalgic. While Weisz objectifies the memories of his parents in the desk and study, Leah creates a distinction between the two; the furniture is not a replacement for their (now dead) corporeal bodies, and the imbrication of their

³⁹⁹ See pp. 26-28, 31-32.

personhood and their furniture generates confusion and alarm, as Weisz's search for his parents is treated as literal. The completeness of Weisz's own conflation of the two is demonstrated in the closing pages of the novel, in which he bribes an employee at the storage warehouse where Leah holds the desk in order to sit with it for an hour. There, he describes how '[f]or an instant I almost believed I would find my father stooped over the desk, his pen moving across the page. But the tremendous desk stood alone, mute and uncomprehending' (289). Ultimately, the retrieval of the furniture of his father's study cannot undo the past and revive his pre-Holocaust life. The furniture, in the present, is not animated by the memories of the past as it is in its ideal form. In fact, like Eli in Foer's *Everything is Illuminated*, Krauss depicts Weisz as taking his own life months later, unable to continue living with the collapse of his illusion of the recuperation of the past.⁴⁰⁰

Yet, the traumatic and historical burden represented by the desk is not neutralised with Weisz's death. In the aforementioned letter to Izzy, after she secures the desk in New York, Leah writes that

I thought I'd killed him with what I'd done. But it was just the opposite. When I read his [suicide] letter, [...] I understood that my father had won. That at last he'd found a way to make it impossible for us ever to escape him. (116)

By sequestering the desk, Leah intended to prevent her father's completion of the reconstructed study, and by extension, deny the consolidation of the past's presence in the present; an obsession which, as previously mentioned, had numerous negative impacts on her life and limited her personal freedom. However, Weisz's suicide transforms his survivor's mission into a generational mission, unable as he was to complete it in his lifetime—in this context it is significant, as Berger and Milbauer note, that '[i]t took Weisz forty years, a biblical generation, to reassemble in his Jerusalem study the contents of his father's Budapest study.'⁴⁰¹ The dedication of an entire generational period to his project not only leaves his personal life empty, but his failure to complete it transmits the unfinished business to the next generation, and, as Berger and Milbauer suggest, the third generation: Weisz predicts that while Leah will have no children of her own, Yoav and Izzy will have a son, to whom Leah will leave the key to the storage room containing the desk, with its 'inherent burden of

⁴⁰⁰ See pp. 92-93.

⁴⁰¹ Berger and Milbauer, p. 82.

memory'.⁴⁰² In this way, the desk maintains its hold over the family, symbolising a quest that can never be completed and a past that cannot be undone.

Krauss attributes a similarly all-encompassing quality to the desk when it is in the possession of Arthur and Lotte. This is something that is projected onto the physicality of the piece. Arthur, intimidated by the desk, describes how 'it overshadowed everything else like some sort of grotesque, threatening monster, clinging to most of one wall and bullying the other pathetic bits of furniture to the far corner, where they seemed to cling together, as if under some sinister magnetic force' (83). Although also tinted with a 'strange, inexplicable jealousy' (84) that relates in part to Arthur's conviction that the desk was a gift from a former lover, the imposing nature of the desk represents equally the absent presence of Lotte's own traumatic history—is it known to Arthur that she escaped Nazi Germany, under whose authority her parents were murdered, as a chaperone on a Kindertransport—a subject on which she is silent. Both because it is an object from her past, details of which she refuses to divulge, and because it is where she allegorises her trauma in her writing, the menacing size and darkness (both literal and figurative) of the desk 'threaten[n] to swallow [Lotte] up' (84), dominating her entire living space, and, by metaphorical extension, her life and Arthur's. Similar to the common experiences of the transmission of traumatic silences in the families of survivors reported by the second and third generations, Lotte's past, as symbolised by and embodied in the desk, is something which is not spoken about but is perceived as omnipresent. Arthur's jealousy, therefore, is twofold. In addition to sexual/romantic jealousy, the desk is something with which he competes for Lotte herself, representing a tension between the oppressive past and Arthur's attempts to share a life with her in the present. Krauss suggests that the desk's hold over Lotte presents a threat to Arthur's presence in her lifeworld, and a source of envy as it is capable of maintaining a closeness and complicity with her inner life in which he himself is unable to participate.

In addition to the desk, the inaccessibility of Lotte's private life and history is frequently allegorised in her daily swimming practice, where at Hampstead Heath Arthur 'stood by and watched her disappear into the cold, black depths' (281), wondering, '[w]hat was it that slept there on the soft, slimy bottom that drew Lotte back down day after day? Every morning she would go, as Persephone went down, to touch again that dark thing, vanishing into the black depths.' (267). Combined with explicit metaphorical comparison to her mind (Arthur meditates, for example, on 'the possibility of other chapters of her life she might have chosen

⁴⁰² Ibid, p. 83.

to withhold from me, to sink deeply into herself like a wrecked ship' (245)), the reference to Persephone imbues the contents of her inner life and memories with connotations of loss and death. As queen of the underworld in classic Greek mythology, Persephone performs a comparably bifurcated role, dividing her time between the two regions, just as Lotte exists between her traumatic past and the present. Such metaphorical, almost thalassophobic associations between water and Lotte's psyche (and, indeed, of the desk, which appears 'like a ship [...] riding a pitch-black sea in the dead of a moonless night with no hope of land in any direction' (83)) is suggestive of a lack of solidity or certainty to Lotte, of the spectral presence of hidden things below the surface and a disorienting inability to navigate her mind, to the extent that Krauss describes their home as one 'of two different species [...] one on land and one in the water' (103), suggesting that in some ways, because of Lotte's trauma, Arthur feels completely other and separate from her. These depths, moreover, are something into which Arthur feels he cannot follow, and thus becomes complicit in her silence. Towards the end of the novel, it is revealed that Arthur 'pretended not to know how to swim' (281) during their trips to the swimming hole. This deception represents an explicit assurance of the upkeep of Lotte's privacy; of a choice not to follow that is made in spite of ability. As Arthur similarly chooses not to read the name of the person who gifted the Lotte the desk, despite coming into its possession, Krauss depicts Lotte's silence not as something entirely involuntary or circumstantial—implying that her trauma is directly and solely responsible for an *inability* to verbalise her experiences, as opposed to finding serious difficulty in the endeavour—but something that is actively upheld and aided by others. Consequently, in a manner comparable to (but potentially different from, in terms of optionality) the third generation, Arthur consents to a life of uncertainty: both live without full knowledge of the survivor's past. As Krauss puts it, 'all of us—me, and you as the reader, and these characters that we share—[...] have to think about what it is to make a life, without knowing... to commit to our lives, all the while being uncertain about so many things.'⁴⁰³ This uncertainty is something that Krauss identifies as a common concern in the proximity to a silent survivor, whether a grandparent or spouse.

Yet, despite the efforts of both Lotte and Arthur to preserve the secrecy surrounding her past, Krauss also inserts oblique glimpses and insights into this history, parallel to the ways in which the third generation often glean information regarding their familial pasts. In addition to assumptions connecting symptoms to known elements of the past ('when she woke up

⁴⁰³ Mary Louise Kelly, 'Krauss' "Great House" Built On "Willful Uncertainty", *NPR*, 14 October 2010 <<https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=130564695&t=1623332896324>> [Accessed 10 June 2021], n.p.

crying it was about her [murdered] parents, and when she lost her temper at me and went cold for days, it was also, I believed, about her parents in some way' (99)), this is achieved in two primary ways: through Lotte's writing efforts, and in her development of Alzheimer's disease. In terms of the former, Lotte writes '[s]trange and often disturbing stories that she left out, [Arthur] assumed, for [him] to read' (84). Arthur's presumption that Lotte intends him to read the stories is suggestive of an alternative, indirect form of communication that will allow him to understand her better. This is substantiated by the content of the works, which, although making no direct reference to the Holocaust and Lotte's experiences of persecution as a Jew, present viable analogies. The most detailed synopsis provided is for a short story entitled 'Children Are Terrible for Gardens', in which 'an egoist [is] so taken with his own talent that he is willing to collaborate with the officials of the country's brutal regime in order to see that a large park he has designed is built near the center of the city', to the extent that '[w]hen the secret police begin to bury the bodies of murdered children under the park's foundations in the middle of the night, he turns a blind eye' (88). Here, obvious associations with the political and social gain offered by the Nazi party, combined with an indifference to the horrors committed in concordance, are created, alongside a familiar juxtaposition between the leisurely and prosperous life that National Socialism brought to many Germans and the genocidal barbarity that lay beneath. Similarly, two more of Lotte's stories concern, respectively,

Two children who take the life of a third child because they covet his shoes, and only after he is dead discover that the shoes don't fit, and pawn them off to another child, whom the shoes fit, and who wears them with joy. A bereaved family out for a drive in an unnamed country at war, who accidentally drive across enemy lines and discover an empty house, in which they take up residence, oblivious to the horrific crimes of its former owner. (84)

While not based in a parallel historical occurrence, like the military dictatorships that emerged across Latin America during the latter half of the twentieth century sketched out in 'Children Are Terrible for Gardens' (and to which further comparisons are made with regard to Daniel, a point to which I will return shortly), both of these stories concern the obliviousness of their characters to the horrors of the past; embodied in the shoes and the house, as indeed in the desk of *Great House*, are histories of violence and murder, unknown to their owners. The relationship to the Holocaust is once again clear, not just through the parallel with the desk,

but through well-known historical issues such as the redistribution of stolen Jewish property and the inhabitation of homes from which they were displaced. The content of these stories is hence suggestive of some of the fears and ordeals to which Lotte may have been subject in her youth, presented obliquely in allegorical form, in addition to accurately describing how the desk in her possession was seized from its original owner. Its origins are hence not so hidden from Arthur as first appears, and Krauss's inclusion of these microcosmic parables serve as a useful frame through which to understand the history of the desk, and historical atrocity, in *Great House*.

The second, and most consequential, way in which insights into Lotte's past are revealed is through neurodegenerative disease. The relationship between Alzheimer's and trauma has been the subject of recent interest. Catherine Malabou, for example, in her work on 'the new wounded', considers Alzheimer's as a 'psychic attack' that 'impinges upon the identity of the subject and overturns his affective economy' in a manner that is comparable to trauma. She asks

How would it be possible not to be struck by the incontestable similarity between the behaviours of [Alzheimer's] patients and those of soldiers suffering from PTSD [...] In particular, they all display the same affective coolness, the same desertion, the same indifference associated with a total metamorphosis of identity.⁴⁰⁴

Similarly, from a perspective of cultural trauma, Linda S. Kauffman suggests that 'Alzheimer's is a metaphor for the post-9/11 condition. That condition is progressing exponentially: history is receding more and more rapidly from us—along with our will, imagination, and power to anchor it in anything approaching the familiar', while Vice, in her studies of literary representations of Holocaust survivors with dementia, observes that 'dementia is presented as the ultimate expression of trauma, by showing it to share the same symptomatology of forgetting, acting out and intrusive flashbacks.'⁴⁰⁵ Indeed, in *Great House*, Krauss treats Lotte's dementia similarly to her trauma, by extending the water metaphors to this new disease; from Arthur's perspective, for example, she writes that

⁴⁰⁴ Catherine Malabou, *The New Wounded: From Neurosis to Brain Damage*, trans. by Steven Miller (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), pp. xiii, xviii.

⁴⁰⁵ Linda S. Kauffman, 'The Wake of Terror: Don DeLillo's "In the Ruins of the Future," "Baader-Meinhof," and *Falling Man*', *MFS*, 54:2 (2008), 353-377 (p. 368); Sue Vice, "'Never forget': fictionalising the Holocaust survivor with dementia', *Medical Humanities*, 46:2 (2020), 107-114 (p. 107).

I would remind her of one of these memories and she would say, Of course, of course, but I could see in her eyes that beneath those words there was nothing, just an abyss, like the black-water pond she disappeared into every morning no matter the weather. (99)

The figurative void into which Lotte retreats is thus associated both with her buried past and the things that she involuntary forgets. Krauss thus draws a comparison between the losses of trauma and the memory loss associated with neurodegenerative disease, demonstrating the ways in which both effectuate a withdrawal or unmooring from known reality, isolation from others, and a sense of absence within oneself. Like with trauma, Krauss suggests, a loss of memory generates a crisis of identity.

Importantly, this comparison between trauma and dementia goes beyond a simple correlation of symptomatology, as Lotte's dementia also acts as a kind of contradictory retrieval of the traumatic memories she buried. In this way, Alzheimer's is presented as a mirror form of trauma, destroying more recent memories whilst making those of the past that are difficult to access much more available. Because of the implosion of temporal awareness caused by the dementia (also comparable with the experience of trauma examined in the introduction, and, concomitantly, demanding of a disrupted chronology in narrative structure), Lotte begins to experience the buried past in the present, and makes her way to the courthouse to report the 'crime' (101) of giving her baby up for adoption.⁴⁰⁶ While the relationships between the neuroscientific processes involved in trauma and dementia have not yet been explored in significant detail, clinical counsellors such as Susan D. Russell have observed that dementia patients appear to act out previous traumas. Russell, describing one patient who tried to forcibly remove a group of carolling schoolchildren from the room at Christmas, writes that 'almost without exception, I came to the conclusion that much of [dementia patients'] repetitive, often violent behaviour was the result of previously experienced traumatic events': in her past, this patient had witnessed the bombing of a bridge carrying a teacher and a group of children, killing them all, and Russell believes that the patient, in her confusion, was trying to keep the carollers safe from this fate.⁴⁰⁷ Krauss, in depicting a similar interaction between posttraumatic and neurodegenerative symptoms, invites the reader (as in *Man Walks into a Room*) to consider the ways in which memory is implicated in the

⁴⁰⁶ See pp. 17-18.

⁴⁰⁷ Susan D. Russell, 'Dementia and history of trauma', *CMAJ*, 185:10 (2013), 899 (p. 899).

constitution of identity and self. The revealing and concealing (or destruction) of different memories engendered by both conditions effectuate different personas in the individual and affect others' perceptions of them. In *Great House*, Lotte must create a new self in the wake of her Holocaust trauma, in which she dissociates herself from certain memories—and, like many of the survivors portrayed in the books studied in this thesis, her native tongue—in order to live her new life in England. Arthur's understanding of Lotte, based on the few details supplied to him supplemented with imaginative and empathic guesswork, builds a clear picture of sympathetic victimhood. 'When her chaperone visa came through, it must have felt like a miracle', Arthur speculates. 'Of course it would have been unimaginable not to take it and go. But it must have been equally unimaginable to leave her parents. I don't think Lotte ever forgave herself for it' (98). This (re)construction of Lotte's character leads Arthur to believe that Lotte's coldness is a result of an impossible decision and unavoidable loss, from which she withdraws to protect herself. However, Krauss depicts that the resurfacing of the memory of her adopted child, given up with no outward show of emotion, completely alters this perception: 'What she had done, the cold-bloodedness of it, filled me with horror, a horror amplified by the fact that I had lived with her for so long without having the faintest idea of what she was capable' (271). That she might 'coolly giv[e] her child away to a stranger' after 'put[ting] an advertisement in the paper for her own baby—*her own baby*—as one advertises an item of furniture for sale' (266) is anathema to Arthur, the willfulness of her loss suggesting that the coldness he perceives in her is a quality of character rather than a response to her traumatic memories. The new insights into her memories made accessible by Alzheimer's are hence used by Krauss to highlight both the ways in which different memory processes reveal and conceal different aspects of an individual's life, and the impacts that such facets may have on their personal and public identity. Notably, this process of revelation is incomplete: although further information is revealed about Lotte's past, further uncertainty emerges concomitantly. Rather than simply increasing his understanding of Lotte, Arthur is left with new unanswerable questions, such as what it was that induced Lotte to relinquish guardianship of her son. The knowability of a person is hence suggested to not only be complicated by different pathologies of memory and choices concerning disclosure, but also to be fundamentally impossible in full.

The Holocaust survivor with dementia is further significant on a cultural level, because, as Vice observes, they reflect '21st-century anxiety at the vanishing of the eyewitness

generation, through the image of survivors who are still alive but can no longer remember.’⁴⁰⁸ Lotte’s Alzheimer’s, and subsequent death, enact this anxiety, and, regardless of Arthur’s complicity during her lifetime, consolidate her silence on her past as much as they help reveal it—it is, after all, only because of her disease and death that Arthur learns of her son and is free to locate the woman who adopted him. However, such anxieties at the loss of testimony are reflected more strongly and contextualised through the character of Daniel, whose experiences under the Pinochet military dictatorship in Chile are mostly unknown both due to his death and the collective silence surrounding the atrocities committed during that period. While Daniel’s story is unrelated to the Holocaust, his presence as a Chilean Jew in a novel that substantially concerns the Holocaust invites consideration of analogical parallels between the two atrocities. In a manner similar to that of Nathan Englander’s *The Ministry of Special Cases*, in which, as Krijnen notes, ‘the Holocaust offers a largely implicit though unmistakable interpretative grid to a more or less “grounded” historical fiction’ set during the Argentine ‘Dirty War’, the fates of the previous owners of the desk in *Great House* during the Holocaust give interpretative insights and meaning into Daniel’s death under Pinochet.⁴⁰⁹ In an adaptation of Saúl Sosnowski’s argument concerning approaches to Latin American-Jewish writing, wherein he suggests that

to be Jewish and Latin American adds an experiential dimension that no other can evoke with equal force and, at the same time, with the fragile disdain of one who has experienced and survived human hell. The all too easily used words *genocide* and *holocaust* weigh heavily in the analogies to current facts and shed a historical perspective on the processes of the arrogance of power[.]⁴¹⁰

Daniel’s Jewishness combined with a strong Holocaust presence in *Great House* imply similar perspectives on issues such as fascism, fear, political violence, and unchecked human rights abuses. As in *The Ministry of Special Cases*, in which Englander includes several oblique references to the Holocaust, such as the yellow star United Congregations president Feigenblum keeps near his desk and Kaddish’s warning that ‘if they want to start slitting

⁴⁰⁸ Vice, ‘Never Forget’, p. 112.

⁴⁰⁹ Krijnen, p. 123.

⁴¹⁰ Saúl Sosnowski, ‘Latin American-Jewish Writers: Protecting the Hyphen’, in *The Jewish Presence in Latin America*, ed. by Judith Laikin Elkin and Gilbert W. Merx (London: Routledge, 1987), pp. 297-307 (p. 303).

Jewish throats, they won't bother drumming up an excuse', the Holocaust story at the heart of *Great House* provides a clear parallel to Daniel's: like Weisz's parents, Daniel is arrested suddenly as part of a fascist political agenda and murdered, leaving behind the desk that becomes mnemonically associated with him and a mystery surrounding the exact nature of his fate.⁴¹¹ In fact, the similarities of certain experiences under the Nazi and Pinochet regimes are highlighted by the fact that Daniel is the only person Lotte seems willing to talk to intimately, even going so far as to gift him the desk. Her vague explanation that '[h]e is alone here, that's all' (90) not only excludes Arthur in its evasiveness, but mirrors the solitariness of both Lotte's literal and mental life following her arrival in England, creating a sense of kindred experience.⁴¹²

However, despite these similarities, there are notable differences in the two contexts, and especially with regards to testimony. Yvonne S. Unnold summarises the disparities with regard to autobiography as follows:

The sociopolitical purpose of Holocaust representations is to supplement an existing representation of the Holocaust, which is considered valid yet incomplete because of the multiplicity of experiences entailed. By way of literary representation of personal experiences, Holocaust survivor autobiographies hence aim at facilitating an approximation to the actual dimensions of the event. In contrast, survivors of the Chilean dictatorship assign their autobiographical writings the sociopolitical function of serving as alternative mediums of communication to rectify as much as contradict an existing official representation. Although both forms of writings share the goal to represent a non-represented experience (Holocaust autobiography in the sense of supplementation, dictatorship autobiography in the sense of contradiction), Chilean autobiography moreover assumes the function of a literary tool of resistance.⁴¹³

In Daniel's case, his death renders autobiography or testimony unavailable, literally unrepresentable, which is analogically relevant to anxieties relating to Holocaust testimony

⁴¹¹ Nathan Englander, *The Ministry of Special Cases* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2020), pp. 291, 14.

⁴¹² It is interesting, given this connection, that Nadia remembers that Daniel's hair smells of 'a dirty river' (12), lending him the same associations with water applied to Lotte.

⁴¹³ Yvonne S. Unnold, *Representing the Unrepresentable: Literature of Trauma under Pinochet in Chile* (New York: Peter Lang, 2002), pp. 87-88.

and the incompleteness therein. Somewhat like the problem of the gas chambers which which Lyotard opens *The Differend*—an interrogation of Holocaust denier Robert Faurisson’s argument that there are no eyewitnesses who could testify to the existence of the gas chambers, casting doubt over the very existence of those gas chambers—Daniel’s eyewitness testimony is negated by his murder, and, to an extent greater than that in the Holocaust, the lack of documentary evidence.⁴¹⁴ The issue of contradicting official and commonplace narratives is also lightly prefigured in his complaint that ‘why is it [...] that wherever a Chilean goes in the world, [Pablo] Neruda and his fucking seashells have already been there and set up a monopoly?’ (8); a grievance which highlights the ways in which ignorance regarding Chilean culture, especially in western Europe and North America, equates to a reduction of its cultural outputs to its most famous poet. This tendency is further staged by Krauss through Arthur’s jealous imagining of Daniel as ‘this swaggering youth with his leather and his tight jeans and his lines from Neruda, which no doubt he tossed off breathlessly with his face inches from hers’ (91), a surmising that not only reaffirms Neruda’s cultural dominance and metonymy with Chile, but effaces Daniel’s own voice as a poet. This suppression—ultimately realised through the text by the fact that, following Daniel’s return to Chile, little of his movements are represented or even known by the characters—gains historical significance as a result of the coup, wherein, as Unnold documents, ‘cultural production did not cease, but the military junta censored, “corrected,” and destroyed works which they deemed unworthy or not in accord with the fascist sociopolitical agenda’, and, accordingly, in *Great House*, Nadia’s attempts to memorialise Daniel through the publication of some of his poems are thwarted by his Chilean friends, whom it is implied are too fearful of a similar fate to acknowledge Daniel’s existence.⁴¹⁵ As a result, although Daniel is in many ways the centrepiece of *Great House* (the novel even being based on an earlier short story by Krauss entitled ‘From the Desk of Daniel Varsky’), his presence is largely silent.⁴¹⁶ In fact, that which comes from his desk, as implied in the short story’s title, is not actually his own writing, but Nadia’s.

Relevantly, Krauss considers the ethics of representing an experience that is not one’s own, and especially an unknowable experience wherein the individual has died, through Nadia’s writing. In addition to the fact that Nadia writes her first and every subsequent novel at the desk, thus in effect launching her writing career from a piece of furniture that comes

⁴¹⁴ Lyotard, *The Differend*, pp. 3-4.

⁴¹⁵ Unnold, p. 5.

⁴¹⁶ Gritz, n.p.

into her possession as a result of the atrocities in Chile, much of Nadia's inspiration stems from real-life events that she finds psychologically unsettling. For example, she transforms the tragic story of the childhood friend of a friend, whose mother drugged both him and his sister before driving them out into the woods and setting fire to the vehicle, killing all three of them, into a published piece of literature. Although she has qualms about the ethics of such a narrative ('[my friend] lived through it, and I made use of it, embellishing it as I saw fit. [...] I did wonder for a moment if [he] would see it and how it would make him feel. But I did not spend very long on the thought' (27)), her choice to proceed with the writing and publication leaves her open to the charge that she 'make[s] good use of death' (35). While Krauss does not suggest that Nadia is unaffected by the horrors she writes about—she is plagued by thoughts of the mother and the children that are only halted when her story is published, 'as if by writing about them [she] had made them disappear' (27), and, when she learns more information about the torture practices to which Daniel was subject in Chile, she suffers from nightmares and bouts of depression—the fact that these stories are not part of her own experience leads her to experience anxieties regarding profiting off tragedy, and using the pain of others for her personal gain. This tension is further allegorised in a dream she has after Leah calls her about the desk, in which, she describes, a man

asked me to pull a red thread that was hanging from his mouth. I obliged, bullied by the pressure of charity, but as I pulled the thread continued to pile up at my feet. When my arms tired the man barked at me to keep pulling, until over a passage of time, compressed as it only can be in dreams, he and I became joined in the conviction that something crucial lay at the end of that string; or maybe it was only I who had the luxury to believe or not, while for him it was a matter of life and death. (19)

The visceral image of the red string that she is compelled to extract from the body of the other finds clear metaphorical resonance with the act of writing others' personal memories, tragedies, and internal worlds; something which is undoubtedly relevant to the writings of Krauss and other members of the third generation who reconstruct the lives of Holocaust victims and survivors and are subject to questions, as explored in the introduction to this thesis, of trauma transmission and victimhood.⁴¹⁷ Central to this conflict is Nadia's own

⁴¹⁷ See pp. 21-33.

reflection on the dream, in which she realises that she, as the writer at a remove from the individual in question, is able to find and imbue the situation with a sense of meaning and greater significance, whereas, from the perspective of the individual in crisis, the experience is coded on a more base level of mortality and survival. Thus, not only is indirect experience shown to be fundamentally incomparable to direct experience in the ways that it registers symbolically, but the ethics regarding the privilege of the removed stance called into question through the suggestion of the imposition of symbolic coherence.

Yet, as Krijnen notes, not only does Nadia's narration of her life story, including these ethical issues, initiate a 'moral component' to her narrative in that 'she is able for the first time to reach a sense of critical perspective on her life, effectively judging herself and assuming responsibility', including differentiating herself from those whose stories she writes, but, alongside the other characters of *Great House*, represents the 'pragmatic capacity of literature to (re)construct meaningful connections between histories and people, to forge or restore a sense of moral order, and to work through losses in ways that are valuable precisely because they are imaginative'.⁴¹⁸ Nadia's story, as well as the stories of every other character, exhibits the beneficial effects of narrativization, in addition to the difficulties arising from intimate association with someone affected by tragedy. Moreover, all five strands of Krauss's narrative constitute fragments, per the interpretation of the biblical passage that gives *Great House* its name, of a longer and greater cultural-historical narrative of twentieth-century Jewish identity, each intersecting by chance with the others and building a complex, but radically incomplete, portrait of recent Jewish history. These strata of history and historical associations, from the images of Himmler and the associations between the furniture and the image of 'a large group of Jews in Umschlagplatz, adjacent to the Warsaw Ghetto, all of them crouching or sitting on shapeless bags or on the ground, awaiting deportation to Treblinka' (155) conjured by Izzy while helping with Yoav's father's work; to Daniel's claim that the desk was once used by Federico García Lorca, who was assassinated by fascist forces and whose remains, like Daniel's were never found; and from the theft of the desk during the Holocaust and its use by a Holocaust survivor and a future victim of Pinochet, to Weisz's attempts to rebuild his father's office in a house that was previously the property of a now-displaced Palestinian in Israel; all point to the multifaceted and polyphonous experience of history that demonstrates Petar Ramadanovic's aporia of the disaster:

⁴¹⁸ Krijnen, pp. 220, 213.

- a. Each disaster is a singular disaster.
- b. There is no singular disaster.⁴¹⁹

While each experience represented by Krauss maintains its singularity, the analogical parallels that can be constructed between them deny exceptionalist claims applied to tragedies, and especially those frequently attributed to the Holocaust. In this way, Krauss and her writer characters not only, as Berger and Milbauer suggest, provide ‘a refutation of the argument that enough has been said and written about the Holocaust’, but consider the ways in which the history of the Holocaust and totalitarian threat exist on a global stage.⁴²⁰ Through creating such connections, she implies, not only do we gain a greater understanding of our own cultural histories through a process of defamiliarisation, but also find familiarity in other, global issues. As the desk represents, with all its different (historical) meanings for its various owners, a singular, unified sense of history does not, fundamentally, exist.

Forest Dark

While in both *The History of Love* and *Great House* Krauss directs her attention towards writing and representation in the wake of history and trauma, her most recent novel, *Forest Dark* (2017), is the first in which Krauss writes ‘closer to what [readers] perceive as [her] reality’, she explains in an interview with Catherine Conroy.⁴²¹ Yet the novel, of whose two narrative strands one is autofictional, concerning the experiences and meditations of a Jewish American writer named Nicole, is equally moving away from that reality, both through the magical realist turn of the latter half of the book and in the questioning of our preoccupation with reality itself: ‘[t]he question’, Krauss elaborates, ‘is why do we value what we think of as real so deeply when everything we know about science and the world tells us that what we perceive as reality, isn’t.’⁴²² The result is a cerebral and philosophical text that is concerned, in addition to such questions, with issues such as cultural memory and an individual’s relationship with it; rupture; writing and convention; and Israel, alongside intellectual and artistic discourse with Kafka and Freud. Its two narrative strands follow, respectively, wealthy second-generation descendant Jules Epstein, an older man who, following the deaths of his

⁴¹⁹ Petar Ramadanovic, ‘From Haunting to Trauma: Nietzsche’s Active Forgetting and Blanchot’s Writing of the Disaster’, *Postmodern Culture*, 11:2 (2001) <<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/27733>> [Accessed 11 June 2018], n.p.

⁴²⁰ Berger and Milbauer p. 83.

⁴²¹ Conroy, n.p.

⁴²² Ibid.

parents, has taken to giving away his fortune and valuable possessions; and third-generation Nicole, on whom this section will focus, and who, in the midst of a disintegrating marriage, travels to Israel with the intention of writing a book based on the Tel Aviv Hilton. There, she is enlisted by the enigmatic, potentially former Mossad, Friedman, to write the ending to one of Kafka's unfinished plays. The narratives run parallel, with the ruptures experienced by both characters drawing them to the Israeli desert, and where both confront the duties imparted by the past. Although Nicole is the descendant of Holocaust survivors, her personal connection to history is largely overshadowed by cultural trauma narratives, and the interactions and tensions between the two, especially in the contexts of writing history and reality, will constitute the majority of my analysis throughout this section.

Before proceeding, attention must first be placed on Freud's concept of the uncanny, which is explicitly presented as one of the novel's main thematic concerns when Nicole provides a reading of the original text. Articulated in a 1919 essay of the same name, Freud defines the uncanny (in German, *unheimlich*, or un-homely) as that which 'is nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression', and therefore becomes unsettling or frightening. Operating under the psychoanalytic premise that 'every affect belonging to an emotional impulse, whatever its kind, is transformed, if it is repressed, into anxiety,' Freud describes the uncanny as 'one class [of anxiety] in which the frightening element can be shown to be something repressed which *recurs*.'⁴²³ Aside from well-known examples of this phenomenon of that which is simultaneously familiar and alien, such as corpses and lifelike dolls, of particular relevance to *Forest Dark* are three additional aspects associated with the uncanny: the idea of encountering one's double (with which, in fact, Krauss opens Nicole's part of the narrative); that an experience of the uncanny is stimulated when, as Freud writes, 'the distinction between imagination and reality is effaced', explaining the lack of a sense of uncanniness in fairytales (even when it might be expected, such as in the reanimation of Snow White's corpse) and the strong sense of uncanniness produced in Krauss's autofictional tale; and, most importantly for this thesis, the role of repetition.⁴²⁴ Briefly relating his analysis of the uncanny to his work with those suffering 'neuroses,' Freud explains that 'whatever reminds us of this inner "compulsion to repeat" is perceived as uncanny.'⁴²⁵ As outlined in the

⁴²³ Sigmund Freud, 'The "Uncanny"', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 17, ed. by James Strachey, trans. by James Strachey and Anna Freud (London: Hogarth Press, 1955), pp. 217-256 (p. 241).

⁴²⁴ Ibid, p. 244.

⁴²⁵ Ibid, p. 238.

introduction, repetition is highlighted both by Freud and contemporary trauma theory as an integral component and symptom of trauma, and, therefore, it is at this point that the two concepts intersect.⁴²⁶ Marita Nadal, in an examination of the works of Edgar Allan Poe, similarly argues for the compatibility of the concepts, noting in particular that ‘[l]ike trauma, the uncanny implies fear, haunting, possession, uncertainty, repetition, a tension between the known and the unknown—the familiar and the unfamiliar, *heimlich* and *unheimlich*, in Freud’s terms’ and that ‘both trauma and the uncanny evoke an elusive event of the past that cannot be fully remembered and keeps haunting the present.’⁴²⁷ In both the cases of trauma and the uncanny, a memory of the past is triggered and resurfaces in the present, with an unsettling to strongly distressing effect. In this way, theoretically, the two concepts can be said to function through comparable processes and create similar effects, excepting, of course, in degree. Trauma and the uncanny are therefore, while not identical, in some ways kindred. As in Nadal’s analysis of ‘Ligeia’ and ‘Fall of the House of Usher’, the compatibility of the concepts finds relevance in the gothic genre, where ghosts and other supernatural beings represent a threatening return of past secrets which are often traumatic in nature. In the case of third generation literature, as I will demonstrate, such ghosts of the past, although more metaphorical and associated with intergenerational memory than the gothic supernatural, likewise denote the infiltration of the traumatic past into the present, such as the ‘the par-for-the-Jewish-course nightmares [...] about trying to hide my children under the floorboards or carry them in my arms on a death march’ experienced by Nicole.⁴²⁸

Another illustrative extension of the concept of the uncanny also arises here: the historical uncanny. Brian Norman elucidates the concept in the context of segregation signage in post-civil rights USA, writing that the notion ‘stretches the concept of the uncanny beyond the realm of the individual so that it enters the domain of public, collective memory.’ The segregation sign, he argues, is demonstrative of the historical uncanny in that it is ‘both a familiar object and an insistently strange artifact as it signifies an era to which we are ineluctably drawn and yet resist returning’; the histories of segregation and Jim Crow, ostensibly buried (or ‘repressed’) by the gaining of civil rights, recur and threaten to resurface through the historical signage.⁴²⁹ In keeping with the close affinity between trauma and the

⁴²⁶ See especially pp. 11-13, 17-18.

⁴²⁷ Marita Nadal, ‘Trauma and the Uncanny in Edgar Allan Poe’s “Ligeia” and “The Fall of the House of Usher”’, *The Edgar Allan Poe Review*, 17:2 (2016), 178-192 (pp. 180-181).

⁴²⁸ Nicole Krauss, *Forest Dark* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), p. 131. All further references are to this edition, and are given after quotations in the text. Unless otherwise specified, all italics occur in the original.

⁴²⁹ Brian Norman, ‘The Historical Uncanny: Segregation Signs in “Getting Mother’s Body,” a Post-Civil Rights American Novel’, *African American Review*, 43:2/3 (2009), 443-456 (pp. 450, 451).

uncanny, it is perhaps no coincidence that Norman selects a cultural trauma for his analysis. While trauma and the uncanny suggest similar processes of a repressed or inaccessible past resurfacing in the present in terms of individuals, it would appear that the connection is much more prominent on a cultural level, due largely to the fact that, as noted in the introduction, cultural memory is an active rather than autonomic psychological process: complete cultural denial of a trauma is impossible, and, in the case of attempted cultural amnesia, voices of dissent from those oppressed by the dominant culture maintain the memory and prevent erasure.⁴³⁰ This is supplemented by historical traces on the landscape, such as, for example, the signage mentioned above, plots of land containing derelict or razed buildings, or discarded paraphernalia of warfare. As such, public memory of past traumas imbues such traces with meaning, creating a simultaneously familiar and alien (uncanny) environment associated with traumatic memories, even if those memories are ancestral rather than personal. The historical uncanny is thus strongly implicated in historical cultural trauma, because the associated reminders of the past invite anxiety of recurrence, especially when the contemporary climate itself is characterised by ongoing social injustice.

The Israel depicted by Krauss in *Forest Dark* is exemplar of the historical uncanny, encompassing millennia of history, but focusing on two particular periods: the lifetime of King David and the resettlement of Holocaust refugees. The former is staged primarily through Epstein's strand of the narrative, and the latter through Nicole's. Through her third-generation perspective, the Israel of *Forest Dark* contains numerous traces of the Holocaust, through the lives of its resident Holocaust refugees, 'whose apartment doors opened in Tel Aviv but whose hallways led to lost corners of Nuremberg and Berlin' (72). The close association between the survivors' new apartments and their destroyed European homes suggests a slippage in time, an uncanny doubling between the present and past. Although physically located in Israel, the pre-Holocaust past with its associations of rupture and trauma resurfaces in the homes of the survivors, in a pleasingly literal transformation of the *heimlich* into the *unheimlich*. The spectral omnipresence of the Holocaust in Nicole's narration—she is very aware, for example, of the Holocaust-related connotations of several sights and gestures, such as the shorn hairstyle of many local women which a friend refers to as 'Kibbutznik hair', but to Nicole 'channel[s] the concentration camp' (169); or when she attempts to communicate her question about a man's death by drawing her 'finger across [her] throat like the Polish brute in *Shoah* who demonstrated for Claude Lanzmann how, from the side of the

⁴³⁰ See p. 37.

train tracks, he would give the Jews a sign that they were careening toward their murder' (117-118)—also engenders other nonexplicit allusions to the Second World War in contemporary Israel. References to the conflict with the Palestinians are provided with a disconcerting nonchalance, and include the roar of fighter jets and the use of an air raid siren, prompting a retreat into a basement shelter; a location which in itself is evocative of World War II to the Euro-American perspective. As with the (especially German) context of the Second World War, civilian experiences related to the conflict are associated with willful ignorance: when a second siren sounds, Nicole remarks that '[a]lmost everyone around us had remained in place, too, either because they believed in the impenetrable dome above or because acknowledging the danger would also require acknowledging many other things that would make their lives less possible' (79-80). Viewed with the ignorance of the atrocities committed by the Nazis during the Second World War in mind, Krauss thus creates a parallel that emphasises the insidiousness of ignoring the human rights abuses inflicted upon the Palestinians by the state of Israel, in a distinctly unbalanced conflict that allows most Israelis, unlike their Palestinian neighbours, to enjoy a fairly high standard of living. The uncanny parallels between the two conflicts therefore create a sense of danger of the resurfacing of the type of hatred and political abuse that characterised the Holocaust.

However, it is important to note that evidence of the historical uncanny evoked in Nicole's part of the narrative is also attributable to her own perception regarding the prevalence of the Holocaust as a result of her family's Holocaust history. Interestingly, this is something which is also imposed on her from without. She narrates that

In Sweden or Japan they didn't care much about what I wrote, but in Israel I was stopped in the street. On my last trip, an elderly woman in a sun hat secured with a strap under her chubby chin had cornered me at the supermarket. Gripping my wrist between her meaty fingers, she'd backed me into the dairy section to tell me that reading my books was, for her, as good as spitting on Hitler's grave[.] (76)

The juxtaposition between the unremarkable location of the dairy aisle and the suffocating, borderline-aggressive fervour of the woman creates a sense of absurdity in the notion that Nicole's writing is inherently related to the Holocaust, and especially in the hijacking of her writings (which, given the autofictional nature of Nicole's narrative and certain references to her novels, it is fair to suggest are, or are based on, Krauss's previous novels, and which, as

discussed earlier in this chapter, contain obviously personal elements) towards a triumphalist, post-Holocaust public narrative agenda. There is a sense of expectation that the purpose of Nicole's writing is this very confirmation of Hitler's ultimate failure to annihilate the Jewish people and their culture, appropriating and negating her own personal concerns and agendas: notably, the woman at no point mentions the content or themes of Nicole's work, instead focusing on the books as objects that, by virtue of their existence, symbolise for her resilience in the face of cultural trauma. A similar tension between Nicole's public and private encounters with the Holocaust is demonstrated in an incident at the International Writers Festival, in which Nicole is given a tour of Yad Vashem, before being 'presented with photocopied papers concerning [her] murdered great-grandparents, along with a bag from the museum gift shop' (77). The contrast between the papers, presumably outlining some of the horrors and trauma Nicole's great-grandparents were subject to prior to their deaths, and the commercialised memorabilia from the gift shop once again highlights an almost crass interaction between real, personal traumas and their absorption into a public agenda. This is further emphasised through the contents: 'a blank notebook commemorating the sixty-fifth anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz' (77). 'Could the message have been any clearer[?]' (77) Nicole asks herself, referring to the duty, symbolically imparted, to contribute to Jewish culture in defiance of the Holocaust. Moreover, this perceived duty is something that Nicole has internalised, as she feels 'overcome with guilt' (77) when she tries to reject the obligation by throwing the notebook away. Krauss hence, through Nicole, illuminates the pressures both internal (from her experience as a member of the third generation) and external when writing after the Holocaust, which complicate her search for an individuated identity.

The claiming of an individual identity is also reflected in the use of the autofictional 'I'. In fact, the name 'Nicole' only appears once in the novel; in every other instance, the character in question is self-defined in the first person. This is significant for several reasons. Firstly, in individuating the experience, it is wrested from a collective narrative as a singular, *embodied* perspective. The importance of the corporeal presence is further evinced through the portrayal of the body in crisis, of which in *Forest Dark* there are two significant instances. The first is Nicole's memory of the experience of childbirth, a physical trauma on the body which, in the causation of overwhelming pain that 'shred[s]' the 'filaments of [her] mind' (263) allows her to feel like 'I had met myself in a dark valley' (263); it is only through this intensely embodied experience that she is able to find and recognise her self, as opposed to through her rational and cultural meditations. The second, complementary bodily experience described is that of illness, on the subject of which Nicole writes:

When I'm sick, it's as if the walls between myself and the outside become more permeable—in fact they have, since whatever has made me ill has found a way to slip in, breaching the usual protective mechanisms the body employs, and as if mirroring the body, my mind too becomes more absorbent, and the things I normally keep at bay because they are too difficult or intense to think about begin to pour in. (45)

This semi-physiological view of the mind, concordant with Ian Hacking's observation that the study of '[p]sychology patterned itself on physiology,' that '[i]ts domain and its model, in terms of Foucault's poles, was the body' and that 'we get at the soul [...] through knowledges of the body, through physiology and anatomy', again emphasises the negotiations present between individuals and different culturally-determined realities.⁴³¹ In this case, what Krauss references is Nicole's realisation of the imposition of form (a point to which I will turn in more detail in due course) upon an essentially disordered and incomprehensible universe. The facilitative powers of illness in this regard culminate towards the end of *Forest Dark* in which Nicole lies fevered in Kafka's house in the desert, and notes that 'maybe I was not afraid of the pain because I believed that my illness, whatever it was, was also a form of health, the continuation of a transformation already under way' (264). The word 'transformation' is evocative of Gregor Samsa in Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, whose titular metamorphosis is likewise referred to as an 'illness', one whose causes are similarly unknown and unable to be treated medically. In addition to bolstering the connection between Kafka's work and Krauss's, the reference to illness is important because, as Iris Bruce points out, unlike 'physical diseases which require medical attention,' illnesses have 'manifold' causes; that is, involving physical and social environs. Kafka's protagonists, Bruce argues, 'are involved in a similar struggle for personal integrity which is time and again frustrated by repressive and exploitative societal norms and presuppositions', a struggle which is certainly also applicable to Nicole.⁴³² Nicole's illness, like Gregor's, highlights this conflict: while the immediate aftermath of Gregor's transformation is concerned primarily on his ability to get to work as normal (even the chief clerk suggests that not to simply overcome his ailment is indicative of a lack of integrity on his part, his worth defined by his professional productivity), Nicole's

⁴³¹ Hacking, p. 217.

⁴³² Iris Bruce, 'Mysterious Illnesses of Human Commodities in Woody Allen and Franz Kafka', *Studies in 20th Century Literature*, 22:1 (1998), 173-203 (pp. 177, 174).

illness catalyses her final rejection of conventional forms of life, including her separation from her husband and traditional family structure, noncompletion of Kafka's play, and dismissal of the concept of a knowable world, illustrated effectively in Nicole's observation that '[i]t struck [the hospital nurse] as odd that I didn't appear more interested in getting to the bottom of what had infected me; she saw it as a symptom, and marked it down as apathy' (287). Therefore, the crisis of the body precipitated by (and exposing of) the incompatibility of an individual and their experience with the dominant social climate acts as a counterpart to the imminent bodily crisis of pain: while the former implies an infiltration of the embodied self from without, the latter suggests a demand for present awareness from within, and both thus illuminate the importance of embodied experience over intangible, and often sanitised and aestheticised, cultural narratives.

The embodied experience emphasised within the autofictional 'I' of *Forest Dark* is further significant because it represents a marginalised perspective: that of women. As Olivia Sudjic explores in her essay, 'Exposure', 'many authors agonise over which perspective to write from. [...] I don't imagine, however, many white, male authors deliberate too much about the legitimacy of their having a perspective at all', a question that frequently affects groups such as people of colour and women.⁴³³ This has especial implications on the subject of autofiction, in which the relationship between the writer and narrator is deliberately and playfully confused. In the words of Sudjic, '[f]or men used to being seen and heard in public life, getting taken so seriously evidently becomes a bore. A male writer who uses masks is an impersonator, lauded for the verisimilitude, a female is made to feel like an imposter.'⁴³⁴ This is something that Krauss herself has commented on. In the Conroy interview, she explains that

When you are a young writer coming into the world, to write in a voice that hews closer to your own, ie a young woman's, is to put yourself in a position, because of the world we live in, where you don't have as much authority as if you were to choose a male voice.⁴³⁵

Krauss's use of a female voice, sharing her name, in *Forest Dark* therefore further represents a reclaiming of experience from the dominant (masculine) cultural narrative. To these thoughts it might be added that, as Maria Takolander and Jo Langdon note, 'there is a

⁴³³ Sudjic, pp. 99-100.

⁴³⁴ Ibid, p. 111.

⁴³⁵ Conroy, n.p.

tendency in trauma studies to neglect the “private” traumas of women’s experience in favor of a “public”—nationalist and historical—vision of trauma’.⁴³⁶ An example of this is the trauma of childbirth. Although rarely acknowledged in favour of conventional public perception of childbirth as a normal and affirming life experience, psychologists and health care professionals such as Susanne Peeler, Jacqui Stedmon, Man Cheung Chung, and Heather Skirton have recorded that an estimated 45% of those who have given birth would describe it as ‘traumatic’, and between 1-30% develop postnatal PTSD as a result of the experience. In *Forest Dark*, parallel to Takolander and Langdon’s analysis, the experience of childbirth is of the greatest significance to Nicole, moreso than such nationalist and historical public traumas as the Holocaust, as demonstrated above.⁴³⁷ Although Nicole is not described in terms of being traumatised herself by childbirth, and in fact regards the experience overall in a positively meaningful light, it is important not to dismiss that it is also conveyed with a graphic intensity of language that is both denotative and suggestive of violence and psychological stress, such as the allusions to the ‘shredd[ing]’ of her mind cited above and one to ‘the valley of hell’ (263), and reference to the literal ‘blood lost from all the tearing’ (263). Like with the tensions outlined above between sanitised cultural narratives and individual experience—the notebook proffered at Yad Vashem versus the realities of the deaths of Nicole’s great-grandparents; the treatment of the Palestinians in Israeli public discourse against allusions to their plight; the co-opting of Nicole’s writing into an Israeli nationalist agenda—Krauss’s centering of the embodied experience of a woman, including that of childbirth, in her narrative not only disrupts dominant masculine cultural narratives that elide or diminish the experiences of other genders, but underscores again the external imposition and determination of identity-defining traumas. Although Nicole, as previously discussed, constructs her worldview to an extent around the Holocaust, her status as a member of the third generation and as a Jewish woman is used to define her from an external vantage point, and the Holocaust is thus positioned both as the most significant event associated with her life and with the cultural trauma narrative in which she is considered a key contemporary player, to the exclusion of her own self-defined nexus in childbirth. Nicole’s first-person narrative thus serves a corrective function.

Finally, Krauss’s use of autofiction plays an important role in her exploration of the nature of reality. Because autofiction blurs the boundaries between autobiography and fiction,

⁴³⁶ Maria Takolander and Jo Langdon, ‘Shifting the “Vantage Point” to Women: Reconceptualizing Magical Realism and Trauma’, *Critique*, 58:1 (2017), 41-52, p. 41.

⁴³⁷ Susanne Peeler, Jacqui Stedmon, Man Cheung Chung, and Heather Skirton, ‘Women’s experiences of living with postnatal PTSD’, *Midwifery*, 56 (2018), 70-78 (p. 70).

using details from the author's own life, an uncanny effect is produced in relation to extraordinary and magical realist events depicted. Not only does this undermine the common patriarchal impulse identified by Sudjic to read all women's writing as nonfiction—as she writes of Rachel Cusk, '[t]o refuse categorisation defies assumption. It makes readers anxious about the rightness of their approach and evades the hypocrisy of "women's fiction" being read as life story while personal accounts of lived experience are assumed to be lies'—but it also encourages the reader to question what is accepted as reality and where and how this information has been gathered.⁴³⁸ The narrative is supplemented by four personal photographs (three of the Tel Aviv Hilton, emphasising its repetitive, structured brutalist form (54-56), and one of Eva Hoffe's apartment (174)) which lend a further sense of documentary authenticity to the narrative, as the photographs testify to the photographer Nicole's *having been there*, as Barthes would put it.⁴³⁹ However, Krauss deliberately applies these traces to Nicole's account in a manner comparable to that of the third generation's investigations into the past. Aside from the fact that the images have no human subject and therefore Nicole's presence is only implied by the existence of the photograph itself, the images and verifiable facts incorporated into the narrative are used as the foundations for imaginative construction, somewhat like the (re)construction of Trachimbrod in *Everything is Illuminated*.⁴⁴⁰ Yet in this case, the result is less a rejection of Nazi dominion over Jewish history, and more a broader question of the process of composition, and indeed fallibility, of reality itself, as any attempt to draw a clear boundary between fact, speculation, and fiction in *Forest Dark* will be confounded.

Krauss, moreover, questions why 'we value what we think of as real so deeply when everything we know about science and the world tells us that what we perceive as reality, isn't.'⁴⁴¹ She uses Nicole to lament our devotion to 'the practice of knowing everything, and believing that knowledge is concrete, and always arrived at through the faculties of the intellect' (47), and criticises René Descartes's mind-body dualism and privileging of reason:

The more he talks about following a straight line out of the forest, the more appealing it sounds to me to get lost in that forest, where once we lived in

⁴³⁸ Sudjic, pp. 112-113.

⁴³⁹ Barthes, pp. 76-77.

In reality, Krauss's father took the photographs.

Alex Dueben, 'WHAT APPEARS TO BE FICTION: A CONVERSATION WITH NICOLE KRAUSS', *Rumpus*, 25 September 2017

<<https://therumpus.net/2017/09/the-rumpus-interview-with-nicole-krauss/>> [Accessed 5 November 2021], n.p.

⁴⁴⁰ See pp. 74-80.

⁴⁴¹ Conroy, n.p.

wonder, and understood it to be a prerequisite for an authentic awareness of being and the world. Now we have little choice but to live in the arid fields of reason, and as for the unknown, which once lay glittering at the farthest edge of our gaze, channeling our fear but also our hope and longing, we can only regard it with aversion. (47)

This juxtaposition between the forest, associated with ‘wonder,’ and the ‘arid fields of reason’ emphasises the idea that the quest for fact can be reductive. In particular, there is a loss of emotional and embodied experience in the intangibility of the intellect, as is perceptible in cultural narratives of trauma. To take this further, a preoccupation with knowable reality is historically associated with the Enlightenment, something that has been problematised by the Holocaust. Not only, as noted in the introduction, does the Holocaust suggest the failure of Enlightenment ideals of progress and the fragmentation of truth associated with the naissance of postmodernism, but also precipitated epistemological questions relating to testimony, such as those raised by Holocaust denier Faurisson with regard to the irrefutable lack of eyewitness testimony to the gas chambers.⁴⁴² These issues, of which Krauss is most certainly aware, demonstrate some of the pitfalls of an overemphasis on reason and knowable reality. Such an exclusionary focus and aversion to the unknown is also connected to the marginalisation and silencing of nondominant groups, including those affected by trauma and oppression, as the dominant cultural narrative, with its predilection towards intangible rather than embodied experience and inherent tendency towards homogeneity, can be so reductive as to be an inaccurate representation of the entire group’s experience. In this regard, the hegemonic discourse, as a formative framework for individual worldviews, is largely responsible for the definition and delineation of accepted reality; that is, the interpretation of evidence and events into a socially-mediated sense of reality, truth, and fiction. The lack of representation for everyone in the collective, therefore, demands a subversion of convention, which, in the context of literature, often takes forms such as magical realism like that in *Forest Dark*. As Takolander and Langdon argue, ‘magical realism can be better theorized as a fundamentally ironic narrative strategy that works to destabilize what is discursively understood as real in ways that are commensurate with a feminist as much as with a postcolonial agenda.’⁴⁴³ Both Krauss’s explicit questioning of known reality and her manipulation and subversion of our expectations of that reality through the autofiction and magical realism of *Forest Dark*

⁴⁴² See p. 50; Lyotard, *The Differend*, pp. 3-4.

⁴⁴³ Takolander and Langdon, p. 42.

therefore serve several purposes. The breakdown of the boundaries between reality and fiction, creating an unsettling and uncanny textual environment, undermines the sense of certainty surrounding accepted reality. This creates space for othered voices and the grounds for exploring embodied experience that is not contained in dominant cultural narratives. Lastly, contained here is the narrativization of traumatic experience, both immediate and transgenerational, wherein familiar events such as childbirth are rendered unfamiliar in their graphic depiction.

The defamiliarisation of known reality is also implicated in the novel's treatment of Kafka, especially in its imaginative rewriting of Kafka's biography. In Krauss's novel, Kafka's death is faked and he instead escapes anonymously to Palestine, thus evading both his historical death to tuberculosis and his murder during the Holocaust, which would likely have been his fate alongside his sisters had he survived and remained in Prague. In addition to recalling several literary antecedents in the work of Philip Roth, including the counterhistory of *The Plot Against America*, the survival of Anne Frank in *The Ghost Writer*, and a similar resurrection of Kafka in "I Always Wanted You to Admire My Fasting"; or, Looking at Kafka', Krauss's evocation of Kafka highlights several important facets of *Forest Dark*. For example, as Theodore Weinberger observes, 'Kafka's fact is no stranger than his fiction. By invoking Kafka, Roth's protagonists assert that their fiction is as credible as fact', something which is certainly also the case for Krauss and her reality-defying autofiction.⁴⁴⁴ As with Roth's reading of Kafka, his depiction in *Forest Dark* effaces the distinction between his biography and fiction. While Roth questions 'Kafka escaping? It seems unlikely for one so fascinated by entrapment and careers that culminate in anguished death', and asserts that 'it is simply not in the cards for Kafka to become *the* Kafka—why, that would be stranger even than a man turning into an insect. No one would believe it, Kafka least of all', it becomes apparent in *Forest Dark* that the play Nicole is asked to complete is not a work of Kafka's fiction, but rather Kafka's legacy, 'to write the real end of his life' (198).⁴⁴⁵ This has important ramifications not only for the relationship between fiction and reality—'[i]f narrative seeks to deceive us as an artful imitation of life, in Nicole's formulation it is life that begins to imitate

⁴⁴⁴ Theodore Weinberger, 'Philip Roth, Franz Kafka, and Jewish Writing', *Literature and Theology*, 7:3 (1993), 248-258 (p. 251).

⁴⁴⁵ Philip Roth, "I Always Wanted You to Admire My Fasting"; or, Looking at Kafka', in *Reading Myself and Others*, ed. by Philip Roth (London: Vintage, 2016), pp. 281-302 (pp. 282, 302).

the black magic of reading', Francesca Segal writes—but for the relationship between author, writing, and culture.⁴⁴⁶

In *Forest Dark*, four different perspectives on this relationship are propounded. Firstly, that one's writing is the self, as implied by metonymic associations such as 'Kafka in the trunk' (176), which literally refers to a suitcase containing a collection of his original, unreleased writings that had been in the possession of Eva Hoffe. The conflation of the two here suggests that the self is constituted by the writing; that to apprehend an individual's writing is to get at their self, meaning that some truth pertaining to Kafka himself must be contained within the suitcase. The second perspective is complementary to the first, and implies that the self is one's writing, which encompasses the tendency to confuse a writer's fiction and biography. This is especially common with regard to Kafka, as demonstrated above with both Krauss and Roth. In particular, Kafka's fame is heavily attributable to his tragic history, including his unusual request that his work be burned after his death, a story with which many people are more familiar than any of his fiction. In fact, so prominent is this conflation of Kafka's self and writing that one unimpressed reviewer of *Forest Dark* asks in the title of his article 'What Is Kafka Doing in This Most Un-Kafkaesque Novel?'⁴⁴⁷ Aside from the fact that *Forest Dark* does contain distinctly Kafkaesque plot elements, such as an echo of the anxiety of *The Trial* when Nicole is stopped under the authority of the military and abandoned, without communication, in a remote location in the desert to complete a task for which she has never received explicit instruction, the review's title implies that the mere mention of Kafka is appropriate only in a sufficiently Kafkaesque context. In this way, Kafka the person and the adjective Kafkaesque are treated as synonymous, including—and perhaps especially—in the context of his own biography. Meanwhile, the third and fourth perspectives contend, respectively, that one's writing *belongs* to the self, and that one's writing *belongs* to one's culture. These perspectives, as previously intimated, are depicted in opposition. This is highlighted in an exchange between Nicole and Friedman regarding his request that she finish Kafka's play, to which Nicole insists that '[e]ven if [she] could get past the intimidation, the sense of transgression would be intolerable' (124-125):

⁴⁴⁶ Francesca Segal, 'Forest Dark by Nicole Krauss—reality checked', *Financial Times*, 18 August 2017 <<https://www.ft.com/content/423a83ec-7dbb-11e7-ab01-a13271d1ee9c>> [Accessed 16 August 2021], n.p.

⁴⁴⁷ Christian Lorentzen, 'Nicole Krauss's Forest Dark: What Is Kafka Doing in This Most Un-Kafkaesque Novel?', *Vulture*, 13 September 2017 <<https://www.vulture.com/2017/09/what-is-kafka-doing-in-nicole-krauss-new-novel.html>> [Accessed 11 August 2021].

a little smile tugged at the corners of [Friedman's] dry lips, the inward smile that the wise give themselves in the face of other people's foolishness.

'You think your writing belongs to you?' he asked softly.

'Who else?'

'To the Jews.'

I broke into laughter. (125)

Here, Krauss (espousing the view that one's writing belongs to oneself) and Friedman (who attributes ownership to one's culture) both express a feeling of absurdity with regard to the other's perspective, situating the two views at poles. In addition to, once again, the attempted co-opting of Nicole's writing into a cultural agenda, this exchange also incorporates and parallels similar, recent debates surrounding Kafka's legacy. While Nicole's feeling of 'transgression' in writing the end of his play clearly confers ownership of the work to Kafka, the real-life trial involving Eva Hoffe, alluded to within and providing a backdrop for the text of *Forest Dark*, has at its heart the question of whether Kafka's work belongs to himself (which, even when granted, contains further contention, regarding Kafka's own wishes for its destruction versus its inheritance by Eva Hoffe) or to certain national or cultural interests, as represented by the German Literature Archive in Marbach and the National Library of Israel. This debate, similar to the issues faced by Nicole, seeks to categorise Kafka's work as personal, belonging to German literature, or belonging to Jewish literature, without regard for his own wishes; as Krauss points out in *Forest Dark*, Kafka himself asked '*What do I have in common with the Jews? I have hardly anything in common with myself*' (125). The impulse to classify, in this way, puts into question the concept of singular ownership, or whether, by virtue of belonging to a certain group, all art created is at least partially constitutive and representative of that group's experience. In other words, that the individual is considered inseparable from their cultural environs.

This sense of inseparability is given more weight in light of the Holocaust. I have already covered some of the ways in which Krauss depicts Nicole and her writing as having been absorbed into discourse surrounding the cultural trauma of the Holocaust, but her engagement with Kafka, especially in the context of the defamiliarisation of reality, is also influenced by the status of the Holocaust in public discourse. In his explanation of Kafka's history as depicted in *Forest Dark*, Friedman tells Nicole that

as the time [for Kafka's emigration to Palestine to join Hugo Bergmann] drew near, Bergmann supposedly had a change of heart. Fearing that Kafka would infect his children with tuberculosis, and that it would be too much to have such a sick person on his wife's hands, he rescinded the invitation. That no one has ever questioned the likelihood of such a sudden and callous turn in someone who for over twenty years had been one of Kafka's closest friends [...] can perhaps be attributed to the fact that by then the Holocaust had inured the world to stories of the countless many who refused safe harbor to even those closest to them for fear of putting themselves at risk. (190)

On both the levels of the diegesis of the text and the construction of *Forest Dark*, Kafka's (counter)history is thus made possible only through the lens of the Holocaust, and, notably, retrospectively: Kafka's emigration was planned during the 1920s. Kafka's well-known history is therefore defamiliarised in its rewriting, while the alternative biography is rendered somewhat familiar by its integration with familiar details from the Holocaust. Even further, this process appears to take on the character of the historical uncanny, but in reverse, as the culturally-familiar history of the Holocaust threatens to surface in the retrospective interpretation of events that actually happened prior. As I have mentioned elsewhere, this imperative is not uncommon with regard to Kafka, whose work is often viewed as almost prophetic of the Holocaust, especially in terms of the bureaucracy and anonymity of death that characterised the Nazi genocide.⁴⁴⁸ By making use of a reverse historical uncanny, Krauss not only indicates a reciprocity in the interchange between individual and cultural narratives—in her imagined history for Kafka, his success and livelihood are facilitated by the deliberate creation of the mythology surrounding him by Max Brod, through the manipulation of cultural narratives as above—but essentially reinvents Kafka with a clear post-Holocaust slant. *Forest Dark* is consequently itself a Kafkaesque story imagined through a distinctly post-Holocaust lens. The alternative ending Nicole is asked to write for Kafka's life is constructed thusly, highlighting the ways in which history is composed through the interpretation of its author and cultural context.

The post-Holocaust slant Krauss applies to Kafka is also discernible in other fantastic, and uncanny, aspects of the narrative. The theme of a spectral alternative life, implied in Kafka's counterhistory, is reified in Nicole's magical realist and uncanny doubling, which

⁴⁴⁸ See p. 153-154.

itself finds resonance with the context of the Holocaust: one cannot help but imagine how individual lives would have panned out had they not been disrupted or lost in the Holocaust. The theme of doubling is one reprised from *Man Walks into a Room*, in which Samson ‘caught sight of himself on the screen’ whilst watching a television show as a child, and becomes convinced that ‘he had been in two places at the same time, and for many years he was faintly aware of the presence of that other self carrying on somewhere.’⁴⁴⁹ Of this theme, which is continued in the two discrete lives lived by Samson before and after the loss of his memory, Krauss elucidates how ‘it was my own response to my familial history—this history of surviving real catastrophe during the Second World War and the need to start a second life.’⁴⁵⁰ The scene of Samson’s doubling, repeated nearly identically and attributed to Nicole in *Forest Dark*, conveys this sense of dual realities and lives associated with surviving a life-altering catastrophe such as the Holocaust. For Krauss and the third generation, this dualism is linked to the concept of nostalgia, a sense of loss and longing related to the fact that one’s family ‘came from these places that we could never go back to, because they’d been lost [...] [a]nd people were lost.’⁴⁵¹ In *Forest Dark*, Krauss describes a similar feeling from the perspective of Nicole:

Though never so acute, the longing for something I felt divided from, which was neither a time nor a place but something formless and unnamed, had been with me since I was a child. Though now I want to say that the division I felt was, in a sense, within me: the division of being both here and not here, but rather *there*. (127)

This division, illustrated concretely by the depiction of Nicole’s doubles, creates representation for the different ways in which Nicole’s life could have been constituted, allowing each to exist within the narrative simultaneously. The embodiment of these life directions, furthermore, allows for a separation of different bodily codifications, such as the womanly, professional, sexual, and motherly, distinguishing between Nicole as an independent writer and Nicole as the mother-figure in a conventional family system. Notably, the antidote to this sense of internal separation is also an embodied experience: ‘the only true cure I ever found for it had also been physical: first intimacy with the bodies of men who’d

⁴⁴⁹ Krauss, *Man Walks into a Room*, pp. 23-24.

⁴⁵⁰ Gritz, n.p.

⁴⁵¹ Wood, n.p.

loved me, and later with my children' (127). As with childbirth, the bodies of her children make Nicole feel present within her own singular body and life, while also underscoring the importance of progeny to Krauss's third-generation perspective. Significantly, after the breakdown of her marriage (and the traditional and conventional forms of reality implied therein, espoused in her husband's 'priz[ing] of facts above the impalpable' (44) and view that 'the world was always what it appeared to be' (121)), Nicole describes a sexual experience with a man wherein he binds her with black ropes. He recalls to Nicole a conversation he had whilst purchasing them:

What did you tell them it was for when you bought it? I asked. For tying someone up, he replied. And do you know what they asked me? I shook my head. A woman or a child? he told me [...] What did you say? I asked, shivering. Both, he whispered, and the gentleness with which he touched me, and understood this simple thing, filled me with peace and made me want to weep. (286)

The joy Krauss conveys here stems from the ambiguity of the sign, as Nicole is not constrained to any one form; she, in this passage, is considered as a sexual being, a woman, and a child simultaneously. This rejection of restrictive and reductive forms, it is suggested, is conducive to a more nuanced and balanced understanding of individual experience, and, resultantly, meaningful interpersonal connection. Not only does this have implications for ethical interactions on a personal level, but within the context of societies and cultures, too. To relate this once again to a Holocaust context, the codification of bodies in the 1930s and 40s with exclusive labels such as Jewish, Romani, homosexual, and disabled, to name but a few, facilitated political oppression and genocide. In a contemporary context, a similar impulse can be discerned in numerous issues, ranging from the relatively banal and benign, such as the conventions imposed on children through 'the story of Noah again, or Jonah, or Odysseus' (139) which, 'as beautiful as they may be, also serve to shape our conventions about who we think we are or should be'; to the dangerous, such as the treatment of the Palestinians alluded to in *Forest Dark* under a Zionist cultural narrative.⁴⁵²

Ultimately, the interrogation of different realities and the tension between culture and the individual in Nicole's narrative strand comprise a rejection of conventional forms of

⁴⁵² Luke Neima, 'Nicole Krauss in Conversation', *Granta*, 24 August 2017
<<https://granta.com/nicole-krauss-conversation/>> [Accessed 11 August 2021], n.p.

reality and their inhibiting power. In addition to the ways in which this is conveyed already mentioned, two further disruptions emerge that are particularly pertinent to a study of the third generation: the form of time, and the form of the novel. In the case of the former, Krauss highlights both explicitly and implicitly that time itself is a convention. Within the context of the text, she identifies that the definition of the word ‘time’ in English is vague and restrictive, and uses ancient Greek to distinguish between two important facets of the experience of time: ‘*chronos*, which referred to chronological time, and *kairos*, used to signify an indeterminate period in which something of great significance happens, a time that is not quantitative but rather has a permanent nature, and contains what might be called “the supreme moment.”’ (259). Such a distinction allows for better representation of the weight of different experiences within one’s life narrative, which, in their radicality, can be described as a trauma per the definition established in the introduction, and thus Krauss reassigns some control over the perception of time to the individual subjectivity.⁴⁵³ The concept of time as a construct is also staged through the magical realist turn of the novel. Just as Nicole is able to inhabit two places and two bodies at once, so too is she able to ‘fa[ll] out of time’ (259) and experience it in a nonlinear way. She, for example, ‘recall[s] an afternoon the following winter’ (286) while in hospital, and is concerned with the story of a man’s death by falling from the balcony of the Hilton before it actually happens during her final days in Israel, to the confusion of the Israelis she asks about the incident. The repetition of the incident in the text creates an uncanny effect, and resembles the way in which traumas disrupt a sense of chronology and infiltrate the present. As a member of the third generation, Krauss’s proximity to Holocaust trauma suggests a familiarity with the ways in which time and memory are not always experienced in concordance with an even, linear understanding of time, and this is a concept that is hence reflected in her prose in the context of decrying the hegemony of form.

Krauss also applies such abstractions of the third generation experience, including the problem of representation, to the concept of the novel, again with the purpose of problematising form. The departure point of Krauss’s autofiction is the idea of writing a novel based on the Tel Aviv Hilton. In addition to the preoccupation with form contained within its appearance, which, in its Brutalist design is extremely and geometrically structured, the hotel, which Nicole identifies as a kind of spiritual centre in her life (‘if I was dreaming my life from anywhere, it was the Tel Aviv Hilton’ (48)) is also symbolic of psychoanalytic structures of the mind, often metaphorised in the format of a house or building. By associating the hotel

⁴⁵³ See pp. 44-45.

with Nicole's psyche, Krauss furthermore conveys a dual impulse towards the structuring and ordering of the psyche as practised in the psychological sciences—and, indeed, it is not coincidental that the hotel is situated in Israel, the epicentre of those Jewish cultural narratives with which Nicole has an uneasy relationship—whilst the transience insinuated in the temporary residencies offered by the hotel is also suggestive of flexibility, of being able to move between and occupy different locations. Nicole's failure to write a 'novel about the Hilton, or in some way modeled on the structure of the Hilton' (118), therefore represents the failure of such externally-imposed structures, including cultural (trauma) narratives and the conventions of writing, to adequately contain the complexities, nuances, and contradictions of individual experience; as noted in the introduction in relation to trauma literature and testimony, language, and by extension the novel, are systems which cannot adequately encapsulate in and of themselves the realities of emotional experience.⁴⁵⁴ Nicole, likewise, is described as having become 'distrustful of all the possible shapes that [she] might give things' (167), even as pressure mounts from other sources (as implied by and vocalised through Friedman, the woman in the grocery store, and the organisers at Yad Vashem) to create and contribute to such forms. Notably, as with the incident with her lover described above, the climax of the novel involves the generation of a sense of ambiguity and reference to the imperfection of representation. Following Krauss's interest in reassembled rooms, such as Freud's study or Francis Bacon's studio, the former of which is even a frequent haunt of Izzy in *Great House* and reflects Weisz's occupation with the recreation of his father's Nazi-destroyed office, Nicole removes and repositions the furniture of Kafka's Middle Eastern abode, presumably untouched since his death, outside in the desert. Hence, 'toward some inexpressible perfection' (266), she recreates Kafka's room not in a doomed attempt at exactitude as in Krauss's previous works, but with attention placed on it as counterfeit through the absence of a room itself. More importantly, this involves the symbolic exit from the 'tiny' (252), or constrictive, bounds of the house that contains the task to rewrite Kafka into a new cultural narrative into the 'vastness' (252) of the desert. Hence, Krauss depicts a subversion of convention that entails the opening of new possibilities, rather than a radical destruction of those prior, restrictive forms, in her third generation fiction.

Although *Forest Dark* is not overwhelmingly experimental in structure or style, it does notably diverge from convention through the depiction of its characters, with both Epstein and Nicole moving against the pressures of cultural narratives. 'In a story,' Nicole explains, 'a

⁴⁵⁴ See p. 49-50.

person always needs a reason for the things she does' (67). But, as Sarah Hughes argues in her review of the novel, 'Krauss delights in overturning that wisdom. *Forest Dark* is barely if at all concerned with the why of its protagonists' actions, instead this is a novel about how the unconscious drives us in ways which we may never entirely understand.'⁴⁵⁵ The novel is open to the unknown and the unknowable, propounding an ethics that is based less on fact and more on the complexity of individual experience. The spectres of the past, evoked through intergenerational memories and the historical uncanny, are consciously and unconsciously repeated in the present in identity and writing, problematising a conventional understanding of reality and the primacy of reason. Even more so than in *The History of Love* or *Great House*, the possibility of a totalised historical narrative is denied, and the tensions between fact and fiction in representational ethics are intensified. Instead, in *Forest Dark* Krauss turns her attention to that which is often occluded in systematic forms of epistemology and socio-political narratives: the soul. She therefore advocates migrating beyond the paths set by culture, as suggested by the lines of Dante from which the title *Forest Dark* was taken:

*Midway upon the journey of our life
I found myself within a forest dark,
For the straightforward pathway had been lost.* (291)

While Freud in 'The "Uncanny"' describes the unsettling effect of an experience when 'caught in a mist perhaps, one has lost one's way in a mountain forest, every attempt to find the marked or familiar path may bring one back again and again to one and the same spot, which one can identify by some particular landmark', Nicole proposes 'get[ting] lost in that forest,' 'liv[ing] in wonder' with 'an authentic awareness of being and the world' (47), and Epstein, as part of his redemption, chooses to plant a forest in memory of his parents with his remaining capital, recalling a dream of a forest in which he finally felt at peace, 'protected, safe', and childlike (203).⁴⁵⁶ A celebration of ambiguity, complexity, and authenticity, *Forest Dark* endorses the subversion of convention not only in terms of writing after the Holocaust, but in the ethical consideration of the individual, both interpersonally and culturally.

⁴⁵⁵ Sarah Hughes, 'Nicole Krauss' *"Forest Dark"*: a novel of ideas that is impossible to put down', *Independent*, 4 September 2017 [updated 16 July 2020] <<https://inews.co.uk/essentials/nicole-krauss-forest-dark-novel-ideas-impossible-put-88810>> [Accessed 11 August 2021], n.p.

⁴⁵⁶ Freud, 'The "Uncanny"', p. 237.

Summary

Throughout this chapter, I have considered the ways in which Krauss represents imbricating layers of personal, transgenerational, and cultural traumas in the novels *The History of Love*, *Great House*, and *Forest Dark*. Closely linked with debates surrounding trauma representation and representability underscored in the introduction, interrogation of these texts has revealed a multitude of different, and unresolved, perspectives on representational ethics and the question of authorship, from Leo's confrontation of the breach between signifier and signified for the traumatic past in *The History of Love*, to Nadia's writings on the tragedies of others in *Great House* and Nicole's meditations on ghostwriting for Kafka in *Forest Dark*. These perspectives—often in dialogue across the oeuvre, such as the echo of Leo's authorial negotiation of fact and fancy in Krauss's challenging of commonly-accepted reality within the very text of autofictional *Forest Dark*—also reflect and enhance our understanding of several third-generation concerns, including the blurring of personal and ancestral identities, the omnipresence of historical traces, and the role of objects in the (re)construction of memory, as demonstrated in the eponymous novel of *The History of Love* and the writing desk of *Great House*. Yet, crucially, these issues are not presented simplistically; just as the inset 'The History of Love' has different meanings for each of its owners, so too does the desk represent different fragmentary histories from the Holocaust to post-dictatorship Chile. With this theme furthered in *Forest Dark*, wherein the individual is placed at odds with dominant historical and cultural narratives, Krauss's oeuvre thus increasingly reflects the complexities and ambiguities of individual, and especially third generation, experience that are excised from these narratives. This is also a key issue in Kadish's work, discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter Three: On History

Rachel Kadish

The purpose of historical fiction isn't just to add a pleasing emotional embroidery to what we already know about history. It's to tell the dangerous stories—the human truths that fly in the face of propriety or power.

- Rachel Kadish, 'Writing the Lives of Forgotten Women' ⁴⁵⁷

Introduction

Of the three writers considered in this thesis, Rachel Kadish is perhaps the least well known. Yet, a lack of celebrity status is by no means a reflection on the significance or intricacy of her work, which, in addition to receiving several awards, including the Association of Jewish Libraries Fiction Award, the John Gardner Fiction Award, and the prestigious National Jewish Book Award, spans an impressive range of genres and contexts, from a novella set in a small Catholic town considering the community's response to one girl's rape, to the romantic comedy of *Tolstoy Lied: A Love Story* (2006), and the streets of seventeenth-century London as depicted in the sweeping historical novel of *The Weight of Ink*. Moreover, despite a relatively quiet arrival into the literary scene, her first novel, *From a Sealed Room*, has endorsements on its cover from prominent writers such as Toni Morrison, Russell Banks, and Elie Wiesel, praising her 'gifted' writing, and the 'poignancy of [her narrative] voice', as well as her adept 'blend[ing of] history, religion, family, and eros.' Indeed, Kadish's work, in addition to boasting a high quality of writing, is certainly concerned with the complexities of the lives, relationships, histories, and politics of her characters, creating a sense of narrative that is deeply grounded in its particular cultural context.

A member of the third generation, Kadish frequently includes the Holocaust as one such context, not only for her novels' characters—in addition to the depiction of Holocaust survivors and refugees in both novels discussed in this chapter, such as Fanya, Smhuel and Shifra in *From a Sealed Room* and Dror and his fellow soldiers in *The Weight of Ink*, even

⁴⁵⁷ Rachel Kadish, 'Writing the Lives of Forgotten Women', *Paris Review*, 26 April 2018 <<https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2018/04/26/writing-the-lives-of-forgotten-women/>> [Accessed 18 April 2022], n.p.

Tolstoy Lied, the romantic comedy, includes reference to a Yiddish-speaking grandmother, who is most likely an immigrant whose arrival in the US chronologically dates to the mid-twentieth century—but also part of a historical backdrop that affects those characters in interesting and subtle ways.⁴⁵⁸ The centrality of the Holocaust is, furthermore, something which is reflected in Kadish's writings on her own life; she has written numerous articles exploring the subject, from an account of meeting the granddaughter of Chiune Sugihara, the man who, by granting illicit visas, ensured the survival of Kadish's family, to her correspondence with Wiesel regarding the 'tightrope between good for the Jews and artistic freedom'.⁴⁵⁹ Intrinsic to this is not only the issue of access to the past, both via indirect allusions that betray '[e]normous losses' (for example, Kadish notes that 'if I asked my great-aunt, "How old were you when you got your ears pierced?" the answer might be, "Which time do you mean? Because the holes closed up when I couldn't wear earrings for years"') and the inherently intertwined nature of the personal and the political, such as 'the earring lost in the snow that meant an official couldn't be bribed', but also in 'the idea of responsibility: What do we do with all of this? What does that history demand of us, moving forward?'⁴⁶⁰

These demands, furthermore, often for Kadish take the form of an awareness of current social issues, such as sexism, racism, homophobia, and rising antisemitism, all of which feature in her novels in at least one instance. It is also an issue on which she is outspoken, from the feminist subject-matter of multiple interviews and essays following the publication of *The Weight of Ink*, noting that the oppressive issues faced by Ester (which I will discuss in more detail in *The Weight of Ink* section) are 'often still [present] today[;] women are asked to choose between a life of the mind and life of the body'; to her own grappling with the issue of being a Jewish writer in the midst of the problem of antisemitism.⁴⁶¹ In particular, she

⁴⁵⁸ Rachel Kadish, *Tolstoy Lied: A Love Story* (Boston, MA: Mariner, 2007), p. 35.

⁴⁵⁹ Rachel Kadish, 'A Japanese stranger saved my family from the Holocaust. How can I repay him?', *Quartz*, 6 June 2017

<<https://qz.com/999151/a-japanese-stranger-saved-my-family-from-the-holocaust-how-can-i-repay-him/>> [Accessed 10 December 2021]; Rachel Kadish, 'What Elie Wiesel Taught Me About Being a Writer', *Forward*, 30 September 2016

<<https://forward.com/culture/349318/what-elie-wiesel-taught-me-about-being-a-writer/>> [Accessed 10 December 2021], n.p.

⁴⁶⁰ Rachel Kadish and Jessica Shattuck, 'On Nazis, family and the question of forgiveness: 2 novelists confront the legacies of their families', *Salon*, 5 June 2017

<<https://www.salon.com/2017/06/05/on-nazis-family-and-the-question-of-forgiveness-two-novelists-confront-the-legacies-of-their-families/>> [Accessed 24 May 2022]; Rachel Kadish, 'Q&A with Rachel Kadish', in *The Weight of Ink* (Boston, MA: Mariner, 2018), pp. 571-575 (p. 572).

⁴⁶¹ Caroline Heller, 'Women, History, and The Weight of Ink with Rachel Kadish', *Why We Write* <<https://lesley.edu/podcasts/why-we-write/women-history-and-the-weight-of-ink-with-rachel-kadish>> [Accessed 16 May 2022]. Podcast. See also, for example, Kadish, 'Writing the Lives of Forgotten Women'; and Skye Cleary, 'On Asking Dangerous Questions about Spinoza', *Blog of the APA*, 26

recounts her internal conflict when writing *From a Sealed Room*, an earlier draft of which included ‘a throwaway one-line reference to a Jew who happened to be greedy’, because ‘[i]f we’re to treat Jews as full human beings [...] then we need to assume that because humanity exists on a bell curve, every ethnic group contains people who are smart and dumb, loving and gentle and hateful and violent... and yes, even greedy.’⁴⁶² Yet, while editing the novel in her family’s ancestral home of Krakow, she recalls that she ‘kept imagining someone in Germany or Poland reading my one tiny sentence and thinking “aha, I always suspected Jews were that way, and now she’s confirmed it”. Suddenly my experiment in free speech seemed self-indulgent, and risked “confirming” false stereotypes.’⁴⁶³ Ultimately, she deleted the line. Kadish’s commitment to representation of complex, human characters is thus also influenced by a clear ethical impulse to the society in which we live, tempered with a keen awareness of the importance of stories over the dynamics of our social structures. Which stories we tell, and how we tell them, she suggests, is both important and powerful.

Fundamentally, these ethics are strongly intertwined with a strong sense of history, which will underline my analysis throughout this chapter. In addition to Kadish’s meticulous historical research—notably, *The Weight of Ink* took her twelve years to research and write, the former, in her own words, carried out ‘to sometimes absurd lengths’, with attention to even the minutest detail, such as ‘what utensils might be on a seventeenth century table, what foods would be on the platters, what the table manners would be’—history is not presented as something separable from the lives of her novels’ characters.⁴⁶⁴ History, in this sense, ‘[is]n’t an abstract fact in a textbook. It [is] something personal and urgent’, and, as I will explore, something which is concerned as much, if not more, with the present and the future than the past.⁴⁶⁵ This chapter, focusing on Kadish’s depictions of the intersections between individual, transgenerational, and cultural traumas in her novels *From a Sealed Room* and *The Weight of Ink*, will use elements of the trauma theory of the introduction such the verbal and literal expressibility of trauma, the communication of traumatic ‘life lessons,’ and the processes involved in the inscription of cultural traumas and the historical narrative, in order to

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<<https://blog.apaonline.org/2017/09/26/on-asking-dangerous-questions-about-spinoza/>> [Accessed 18 April 2022].

⁴⁶² Kadish, ‘What Elie Wiesel Taught Me About Being a Writer’, n.p.

⁴⁶³ Kadish and Shattuck, n.p.

⁴⁶⁴ Kadish, ‘Writing the Lives of Forgotten Women’, n.p.; Amy Shearn, ‘Summoning 17th-Century Scholars: Researching *The Weight of Ink*’, *JSTOR Daily*, 10 October 2017

<<https://daily.jstor.org/summoning-17th-century-scholars-researching-the-weight-of-ink/>> [Accessed 5 April 2022], n.p.

⁴⁶⁵ Kadish, ‘Q&A with Rachel Kadish’, p. 572.

investigate the relationship between history and its human constituent parts. Through particular engagement with third generation knowledges such as the fallibility of the archive, this analysis will therefore be significant both in the context of third generation understanding of the interrelatedness of the individual and history, and through its critical engagement with a writer on whom scholarship is, to date, almost nonexistent.

From a Sealed Room

‘Love, what kind of love can you have in a sealed room?’ asks Shmuel, an aging Holocaust camp survivor in Rachel Kadish’s first novel, *From a Sealed Room* (1998).⁴⁶⁶ Although this sealed room, which gives the novel its title and provides the opening location of its narrative—ironically, beginning with the statement that ‘[l]ong after the war was over they made love in the sealed room’ (3)—literally refers to the sealed rooms used in Israel as protection throughout the Gulf War, Kadish’s text is full of other, metaphorical sealed rooms. The narrative centres on Maya, an American student spending a semester in Israel, navigating a troubled relationship with her mother, the development of an abusive relationship with artist Gil, and difficulties adapting to cultural differences between the US and Israel. Interlinked throughout is a sense of the importance of history, which not only contextualises Kadish’s attentiveness towards fact and detail—in an article in *Forward* she recalls, for example, her frustration with a creative writing workshop in which she was not allowed to respond to critiques of an earlier version of *From a Sealed Room* made by her classmates that were founded on stereotypes and other misconceptions—but also represents, alongside tragedy and war, a formative force in the development of identities and, therefore, relationships with others, to the extent that the two are inseparable.⁴⁶⁷ In fact, ‘I feel like I’m always writing about history’, Kadish explains in an interview with Janice Weizman. ‘All of my characters are from somewhere.’⁴⁶⁸ In the context of *From a Sealed Room* this ‘somewhere’ is furthermore largely connected with the Holocaust, both thematically, ‘locate[d] [...] against the backdrop of other, more contemporary moments: the Gulf War, racial tensions and poverty in America, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict [...] as a fearful measure of what was

⁴⁶⁶ Rachel Kadish, *From a Sealed Room* (Boston, MA: Mariner, 2006), p. 25. All further references are to this edition, and are given after quotations in the text. Unless otherwise specified, all italics occur in the original.

⁴⁶⁷ Kadish, ‘What Elie Wiesel Taught Me About Being a Writer’, n.p.

⁴⁶⁸ Janice Weizman, ‘Interview with Rachel Kadish’, *Ilanot Review* <<http://www.ilanotreview.com/sacred-words/interview-with-rachel-kadish/>> [Accessed 10 December 2021], n.p.

possible', as Aarons and Berger put it; and as an integral component of the lives of its characters, including Fanya, an unwitting Holocaust refugee, and Shifra, a survivor of Dachau who binds herself to Maya.⁴⁶⁹ The relationship between the novel's characters, their ethics, and this traumatic history will constitute the main thrust of this section, exploring how Kadish situates and highlights the role of history across cultural, transgenerational, and personal traumas, and especially through three key relationships: the Americans with the Israelis; and Maya with Gil and Shifra.

The Israel depicted by Kadish is itself culturally structured around different historical and recent traumas. This is made especially evident in two contexts relevant to this thesis: Israel's military service and political attitudes towards it, to which I will turn in my exploration of Maya's relationship with Gil; and in the minutiae of daily life, which are highlighted and contrasted by a comparison with life in the USA. The latter is primarily evoked through Maya's American first-person perspective on life in Israel, and through explicit political discussion between the novel's characters, including the issue of American intervention in Israeli politics. In the first part of the narrative, focusing on cousin Tami's Israeli family, Kadish immediately establishes some of the differences between these two cultural contexts in her portrayal of the Shachar household during the Gulf War. Much like the use of humour in Holocaust representation noted in the introduction, Kadish makes use of incongruity to highlight the disturbing realities of normalised warfare in Israel.⁴⁷⁰ One striking image is that of Tami and Nachum's young child Ariela's gas mask, decorated with purple ribbons (3-4), which juxtaposes the terrors implied in its function—the filtering of air to prevent her inhalation of toxic gases deployed during potential attacks—with the childish innocence implied by the ribbons. Similar juxtapositions are described in the sealed room itself, which contains 'pictures of coral reefs cut from scuba-diving magazines', Tami's son 'Dov's high school yearbook and a snapshot of a girl Tami didn't recognize' and 'Ariela's dolls and books to distract the girl from too much fear,' alongside windows 'edged with tape to ward off chemical death,' and a 'shelf piled with boxes of baking soda and gauze pads to make into poultices for chemical burns' (3). Once again, these artifacts, each suggestive of aspects of daily life familiar to an American readership—hobbies and interests, the importance of work or school, romantic pursuits—stand in contrast with those associated with an unfamiliar threat. The absence of any explicit comment on the latter objects suggestive of their abnormality or that the circumstances they symbolise is alarming (consider, for example,

⁴⁶⁹ Aarons and Berger, p. 35.

⁴⁷⁰ See p. 52.

the fact that Ariela's dolls are designed to 'distract [her] from *too* much fear' [emphasis added] rather than from fear itself) increases this sense of incongruity, and thus further draws attention to the potent role warfare and the fear of attack plays in life in Israel. The traumatic potential of these circumstances is, moreover, similarly integrated into daily life. In addition to the obvious issues associated with combat, Kadish includes references to the lasting impacts of warfare on the Shachars. Ariela, for example, exhibits a significant amount of distress at the prospect of using the bathroom with the door shut while Maya is visiting, which Tami explains, 'with a backhanded gesture', that '[i]t's just since the last war. [...] She doesn't like being shut in' (133). Not only is this remark inserted casually in a dialogue consisting mainly of small talk, but Kadish makes clear both from Tami's language and gestures that the woman is dismissive of the young girl's trauma. From this, two possible interpretations emerge, both connected to the prevalence of traumatogenic circumstances in Israel: firstly, that Tami's experiences with Holocaust refugee Fanya's trauma-informed parenting are being repeated with her own children in an intergenerational cycle of emotional unavailability and the disregard of the child's negative experiences, in a similar fashion to that reported by Scharf and Mayseless; or, secondly, that Ariela's difficulties are not treated as extraordinary precisely because they are not uncommon in the environment.⁴⁷¹ Her difficulties are 'just' a result of the 'last war', as Tami puts it, the idea of the 'last war' suggestive that wars are commonplace and further conflicts are to be expected. Such traumas, Kadish implies, are not outstanding in the cultural environment of Israel, and are in fact integrated into daily life, in contrast with generally combat-free life on American soil.

The contrast between American and Israeli cultural contexts are rendered more explicitly through interactions between *From a Sealed Room's* American and Israeli characters, however. The tone for the interchange between these contexts is developed throughout Part One of the novel, in which scenes from life during and after the Gulf War are interpolated with mention of phone calls from 'the American cousin'—that is, Maya's mother, Hope—enquiring if 'there anything they needed, anything she could send them?' (4), until, at the end of the war, '[t]he noise from the [celebrations in the] street all but obscured the sound of the telephone: the American cousin calling to congratulate them for enduring, her voice brimming with relief' (5). The distance between Hope and the Shachars is emphasised not only by her physical absence, communicating across the ocean via telephone, but in her impersonal designation as 'the American cousin', and in the gulf between her

⁴⁷¹ Scharf and Mayseless, pp. 1547-1549.

well-intentioned but ineffectual attempts to offer aid and solidarity for their wartime experiences and the depictions of those experiences themselves; even as her voice ‘brim[s] with relief’, suggesting an empathic identification with the fear, ‘half-shadows and silent urgency’ (4) that characterise the Gulf War in the Shachars’ residence, her obvious absence from the actual ordeal precludes an authentic participation in the shared cultural (and personal) trauma. Similarly, when the news arrives of the death of Dov’s best friend during military training, Tami finds ‘the letter the American cousin had written to Fanya but generously addressed to Tami as well: dense pages of stilted Hebrew about another world; policies and progress and someone named Rodney King’ (33). As before, the grief and trauma Kadish depicts in the Shachar household is contrasted with the irrelevancies of Hope’s letter, to the extent that it registers as that of ‘another world’, unrecognisable and completely disconnected from their contemporaneous life in Israel. Notably, these juxtapositions also generate a sense of gravity with regard to the issues present in Israel and are suggestive of the opposite with regard to the US. This creates a sense of dismissal which Kadish develops further in the treatment of Maya, with ramifications on the possibility of dialogue between the two national contexts on the subject of trauma; even in the above example of Hope’s letter, a reference to Rodney King, with whom Tami is clearly unfamiliar, is overlooked and disregarded alongside Hope’s writings on ‘progress’, despite King being a Black victim of racialised police brutality. The traumas associated with racism and other concurrent social issues are therefore ignored, even though the comparability of the social issues in Israel and Brooklyn are explored later in *From a Sealed Room*.

This sense of comparative dismissal also forms a reciprocal influence on Maya’s relationship with Israel and its citizens. Maya, like Tami, who feels excluded from her peers because, unlike them, she is neither the child of a Holocaust survivor nor of Israeli natives, considers the Israelis as possessing ‘something [she] lacked. Confidence, maybe. But something else too: authenticity’ (43-44). Importantly, for Maya this is related to the military, with its associations of high-stake decision-making and mortal risk, noting in particular that a classmate, ‘only one or two years older than I, had already been a soldier. She lived in a world of practical choices, she knew what it took to seize a corner of the world and push’ (44), in contrast to her own life in the USA, wherein

I didn’t have to think about life and death and sacrifice, or even my French history midterm. In America, I chose to think about dance routines instead. I chose not to attend the local political rallies my mother called from New York

to notify me about or, on my infrequent trips to Brooklyn, to join the volunteers stuffing envelopes in her apartment through the night. (44)

The immediacy and immutability of the issues faced by her Israeli peers, denoted above with the imperative verb ‘to have’, as opposed to the less conspicuous difficulties experienced by Maya as a white, middle-class American—and indeed her privileged position that allows her to *choose* not to engage with the hardships and oppression experienced by others—is also impressed from without. Gil, for example, teases Maya for her translation of the name of their neighbourhood, Emek Refaim, as ‘Valley of Ghosts’: “‘Maya. *Ghosts?*’ His eyes tease. “Must be nice to be an American. Americans have no real worries, they get to invent.” (41). Although it is important to note that Gil’s relationship with Maya is increasingly abusive throughout the novel, and therefore this dismissal—a hallmark of emotional abuse—can be attributed to the unbalanced power dynamic of their relationship, the idea that Maya and other Americans do not, and cannot, understand the difficulties experienced in Israel is a common refrain in Kadish’s narrative.⁴⁷² Maya’s attempts to engage with the politics of Israel are frequently met with responses such as ‘You don’t have any idea what you’re talking about’ (266) and ‘*You’ll* never understand [...] You’re just an American girl’ (279). From this, two related but opposite concerns emerge. Firstly, Kadish provides a criticism of Americans’ attempted involvement in (particularly global) issues without adequate knowledge and engagement with the actual lived realities and complexities of the situation in question, exemplified in Maya’s naïveté and the ‘American Jews who have gone on maybe one bus tour [and think they] know a damn thing about what it means to live here’ (149) identified by Dov. In other words, interaction with cultural trauma and politics on a theoretical level, without appropriate appreciation and understanding of individual experiences of that same issue, is highlighted as problematic. This is reinforced in the dialogue between the social issues of the US and Israel discussed below. Secondly, however, the automatic dismissal of Maya’s

⁴⁷² The criteria for emotional abuse, as Lauren Francis and Dominic Pearson note, are rather unclear and somewhat controversial. However, there is a general consensus on multiple associated behaviours, which can be perceived across online public resources for information and help pertaining to abuse. See, for example, Psychology Today, ‘Emotional Abuse’, *Psychology Today* <<https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb/basics/emotional-abuse>> [Accessed 9 February 2022]; Ann Pietrangelo and Crystal Raypole, ‘How to Recognize the Signs of Emotional Abuse’, *healthline*, 28 January 2022 [Accessed 9 February 2022]; NHS, ‘Domestic violence and abuse’, *NHS*, 30 December 2019 <<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-body/getting-help-for-domestic-violence/>> [Accessed 9 February 2022].

Lauren Francis and Dominic Pearson, ‘The Recognition of Emotional Abuse: Adolescents’ Responses to Warning Signs in Romantic Relationships’, *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 36:17-18 (2021), 8289-8313 (p. 8291).

thoughts on the situation *preclude* the possibility of meaningful dialogue. Not only does it constitute a refusal to educate Maya on the issues at hand, or to allow her the opportunity to generate a bank of experiences that may aid her understanding, but also reinforces the notion, already held by Maya, that suffering is inherently linked to authenticity. As Rina challenges Dov in defence of Maya, ‘I suppose that makes us bigger than everyone else [...] I suppose we’re better, nobler people because we have hardship?’ (266). Here, in the context of Israeli cultural traumas, a discourse comparable to that surrounding the trauma of the Holocaust emerges, with a similarly uncomfortable suggestion of the ennoblement of suffering. It is through personal engagement with other traumas, and especially with Shifra, as I shall later explore, that Maya is able to interrogate and reassess this conflation.

As previously intimated, despite the implication that life in Israel is significantly more fraught, and traumatogenic, than life in the USA, Kadish’s comparisons between the two reveal certain parallels in social issues that in turn reframe our understanding of each, whilst critiquing the hypocrisy of American attitudes towards Israel’s social problems. In fact, even some of the above criticisms, such as the intrusion of ill-informed parties on sensitive issues, are mirrored between the two contexts. For example, Dov’s contempt for the Jewish Americans indicated above, who, after touring Israel, ‘tak[e] opinion polls in America about how to make peace’ (149), is fairly directly paralleled by a portion of one of Hope’s letters, in which she expresses anger at ‘[a]ll those political analysts who have never set a foot in a neighborhood like [Crown Heights] speculating on why children end up in jail’ (154). Hope, whose work with the predominantly Black and underprivileged community in Crown Heights places her in a position where she is exposed to some of the serious manifestations of systemic racism in the United States, faces a similar struggle against unnuanced commentary by those who are experientially disparate from the plight of those upon whom they comment. Further points of semblance emerge from the correspondence between Maya and Hope, such as the frictions between different ethnic groups. Hope reports ‘the usual tension between some of the African-American groups here and the Hasidic Jews’, noting the ‘ironic coincidence’ that the latter are referred to as ‘blacks’ in Israel (89), which can be read productively alongside the tensions involving the Orthodox Maya witnesses in Israel. The uneasy relationship between the secular and Haredi populations in Israel is well known. A recent study by Ori Katzin, evaluating whether the tensions depicted in the media are founded, reports that only 43% of high schoolers surveyed could be described as ‘tolerant’ of the Haredim, with 29% and 28% expressing ‘disapproval’ and ‘reservation’ respectively, and, notably, that ‘[n]one of the 14 teenagers in the disapproval group expressed any positive

emotion or attitude toward Haredim in the interviews'.⁴⁷³ Meanwhile, Calvin Goldscheider cites a survey in which 'the relationship between the religious and the secular subgroups is perceived to be "not very good" (47%) or "not at all good" (11%)' among Israeli Jews, while 'only 2% consider the relationship very good and 35% as good.'⁴⁷⁴ This is reflected in *From a Sealed Room*. When Maya announces her move into Emek Refaim with Gil, a friend protests, 'But isn't that the black part of the neighborhood? [...] why would you want to live right in the middle of those people?' (53). Fanya, likewise, cites the Orthodox as one of the reasons that Jerusalem 'wear[s] on [her]', complaining about 'all the religious fanatics spilling into the modern neighborhoods. Those black hats make me itch' (29), reflecting a very familiar pattern of ethnic social insularity. It is, in fact, the recognisability of these patterns within each country that enable Maya to later consider replicating her mother's community-based work in Brooklyn within Israel.

It is in the comparisons between the treatment and social status of African Americans in the USA and that of the Palestinians in Israel that Kadish's consideration of the ramifications of the similarities of the two contexts is most clearly developed, however. In a conversation between Maya and Nachum, the latter provides an extended argument for the parallelism of the two, asking 'why do Americans want to judge us for our problems?' (127), when

we [the Israelis] seal off territories after terror attacks. But you [the Americans] seal your neighborhoods too, when you're afraid—all right, so maybe you don't do it with soldiers and barricades, but still, there must be a reason black people don't like to go to white people's neighborhoods in America. Here, we suspect strangers in our neighbourhood because they're Arab, there you do because they're black. (128)

The appeal for empathic identification through the shared experience of fear here reframes the American perspective on Israeli prejudice, implying that America's own social ills—in this case, racism—are not fundamentally or radically different from Israel's, as they are founded on the same reactionary emotional premises. Similarly, he refers to 'people warring' in America, 'black people and white people fighting' (127). Such use of the defamiliarising

⁴⁷³ Ori Katzin, 'Mainstream Israeli Teenagers Conceptions of Ultra-Orthodox Jews: Humanism, Criticism and Resentfulness', in *Conservative Religion and Mainstream Culture: Opposition, Negotiation, and Adaptation*, ed. by Stefan Gelfgren and Daniel Lindmark (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), pp. 171-187 (pp. 177-178).

⁴⁷⁴ Calvin Goldscheider, *Israeli Society in the Twenty-First Century: Immigration, Inequality, and Religious Conflict* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2015), p. 124.

language of military combat to describe the Los Angeles riots—that is, making use of language normally applied to Israel by the United States, and from which the US is normally exempt—further likens the two contexts, simultaneously defamiliarising the American context and familiarising the situation in Israel, by means of exchanging linguistic applications. The hierarchical shift embodied here, wherein American moralising over Israel's treatment of Palestinians is destabilised by claims of hypocrisy, is emphasised further through Maya's repeated insistence that 'it's not that simple' (128), protests that are consistently ignored or interrupted by Nachum. Not only does this denial of her voice in favour of Nachum's own perspective on the situation reverse and mirror the way in which the USA imposes a unilateral and unnuanced view on Middle Eastern politics, once again unsettling its unquestioned moral hierarchy, but is used by Kadish to preempt, challenge, and deny space for common inadequate defences. Maya begins, for example, to differentiate between the two contexts by reference to the fact that 'black people are American and have the same rights as white people' (127), but before she can further elaborate, Nachum interrupts to point out that the riots are not 'what people do when they think they have rights' (127). This important distinction between *de jure* and *de facto* rights, which underpins the issue of ongoing systemic inequality, undermines Maya's claim to a more progressive society in her homeland, and therefore a position of political moral superiority. While it is, of course, important to note that the two contexts are *not* identical, each emerging from a distinct set of politico-cultural conditions and maintained by different means of oppression and unique historical and contemporary circumstances, Kadish's model of mutual familiarisation and defamiliarisation, augmented by the unfamiliarity of the Israeli context established above, invites interrogation of the reader's implicitly held biases regarding both American and Israeli cultural traumas, politics, and moral binaries.

One cultural trauma that is not easily comparable between the two contexts is service in the IDF, however. A contentious subject, Israel's military is arguably both a product and a source of trauma, which is reflected in some of the debates Kadish includes amongst the soldier-characters of *From a Sealed Room*. Particularly, in discussing the military two different cultural traumas are invoked. 'Faith never stopped a terrorist. Only security. Haven't you read their charter, did you miss the bit about wiping out our country?' (269) asks one, referencing the ongoing antisemitic hostility of Israel's neighbouring nations, creating a constant sense of threat, while another invokes 'the name of all the survivors of the Shoah' (269), going on to suggest that '[f]or the sake of the Six Million, this country has to remember the danger' (270). Whilst the opinions Kadish conveys here are clearly presented in a

rhetorical rather than informative fashion, such perspectives do highlight two distinct cultural traumas that underpin the importance of the military for many Israelis, and are informed by very real traumas regarding fear of attack and of personal or familial memories of Jewish persecution during the Holocaust. The IDF can, at least in part, be read in this way as a cultural posttraumatic response, somewhat akin to hyperarousal.⁴⁷⁵ Interestingly, because combat situations are themselves strongly traumatogenic, the soldiers of *From a Sealed Room* are also portrayed with personal trauma-informed motivations for their service—or indeed, in the case of Gil, lack thereof. A comparison between Dov and Gil is particularly productive here. Both men are depicted as experiencing loss in the army, and developing an awareness of mortality as a result of the army at a young age. Yet, while Gil insists that ‘[n]o one understands [...] The fucking army didn’t understand’ (83), and scorns those who serve with the accusation ‘You act like your pointless opinions actually make a difference’ (270), suggestive of a sense of hopelessness as a result of the trauma, Dov responds with motivation to become a good soldier to help prevent future suffering as much as is possible: ‘They tell me what I need from my unit, and I find a way to make it happen and keep my soldiers safe. [...] Is there anything so terrible about that?’ (265). In contrast to Gil’s posttraumatic anger and constriction, discussed further below, Dov’s response is more indicative of posttraumatic growth. The concept, as outlined by Richard G. Tedeschi and Lawrence G. Calhoun, is defined by ‘positive psychological change experienced as a result of the struggle with highly challenging life circumstances’, and is related to the development of a posttraumatic narrative—itsself, as outlined in the introduction, associated with healing from trauma via the reintegration of the traumatic memory—that ‘forces survivors to confront questions of meaning and how it can be reconstructed.’⁴⁷⁶ In *From a Sealed Room*, Dov reappraises the meaning of his military losses, and especially his best friend, Rafi, who died of dehydration during a mishandled training exercise, by determining to take an authoritative position in the army and use his role to carry out exercises with due care and diligence, to prevent another death like Rafi’s. Hence, although both Dov and Gil have experienced loss as a result of the

⁴⁷⁵ Although founded on real trauma, it must be noted that cultural traumas, rather than being an automatic process, are consciously selected and upheld, and can thereby be weaponised to perpetrate nationalist agendas, such as in the oppression of the Palestinians. Therefore, while I wish to acknowledge the traumas that inform Israel’s military policy, and the meaning they may hold for real individuals, I extend caution over the use of these traumas as a justification for military aggression, under the understanding that political strategy based on cultural trauma is often more exploitative than empathic. For more detailed analysis, see pp. 37, 40-42.

⁴⁷⁶ Richard G. Tedeschi and Lawrence G. Calhoun, ‘TARGET ARTICLE: “Posttraumatic Growth: Conceptual Foundations and Empirical Evidence”’, *Psychological Inquiry*, 15:1 (2004), 1-18 (pp. 1, 9). See also pp. 44-45.

army, Kadish depicts two opposing interpretations of the trauma vis-à-vis the IDF, with Dov using his personal trauma, rather than a cultural trauma, as motivation for his service, while Gil disassociates himself from it for the same reason.

Gil's characterisation in terms of both trauma and the IDF is complex. While he initially postures himself as a conscientious objector, claiming that he 'threw the damn tests' (152) that would determine his position in the army, he later reveals that

I walked into that room, Maya, and I was afraid. I sat in a chair and I thought:
I'm sitting inside the machinery of the army. By the time I'd answered a few
questions I could almost hear all the gears grinding around me. My mind froze.
(281)

The oppressive intensity of the experience, exemplified in the short, simple sentence structure and in details such as the claustrophobia of the machinery metaphor, becoming almost audible in its potency, as well as his freeze-response to the perceived threat, is suggestive of the psychological immediacy of the fact of his father's death, for which Gil blames the military. His reaction to the army, then, is tinged by grief and trauma as much as by ethical reasoning. His experience in the exam room is further intensified during the army, eventually leading to his Profile 21 discharge. His detailed description to Maya of the events leading up to his dismissal, wherein he was deployed in Gaza in a haze of smoke from burning tyres, is marked by hyperarousal:

It feels so thick and hot you can't breathe. [...] I'd see the other soldiers
patrolling in that haze and we looked just like the fiends the Palestinian boys
spray-painted on the alley walls. [...] None of us human. Only figures,
stumbling. Stumbling in acrid black smoke [...] And when they weren't burning
tires, you could feel everyone waiting for the next encounter. Every child's
shout, every creaking shutter might be an attack. (280)

The obscuring effects of the smoke, reducing visibility and therefore increasing a sense of vulnerability from an unseen attack, creates a ghostly environment wherein a sense of reality is diminished. Not dissimilar to descriptions of soldiers' experience the Vietnam War, Kadish generates, through a series of fragmented memories, a distinct sense of unease and hypervigilance; the poor stimulus discrimination and habituation characteristic of

hyperarousal (noted in the introduction) here manifest in the heightened responsiveness to innocuous sounds such as children playing.⁴⁷⁷ It is within this context of extreme mental duress, compounded by Gil's earlier trauma of his father's death, that he dangerously opens fire 'just to hear that thick air shake. Just to crack it open' (280), countering the unbearable ambiguity and passivity in waiting for an attack. The resultant Profile 21 discharge, which is used by the IDF to identify '[s]omeone who cannot draft due to severe psychological or medical health issues that cannot be accommodated', is not only a confirmation of the severe impact these two traumatic circumstances have had on Gil's mental health, but is shown by Kadish to have further impact on his posttraumatic life in Israel.⁴⁷⁸ The stigma associated with a Profile 21 is not insignificant. In an opinion piece for *The Jerusalem Post*, Baron Camilo of Fulwood, for example, in reflecting on the death by suicide of one of his son's friends in the IDF, writes that he 'do[es] not think the IDF understands the difference between temporary psychological crises and serious psychiatric disturbance', going on to identify that, in addition to

the more concrete consequences of [a Profile 21] (such as possibly not being able to get a driver's license), many feel they would be perceived as weak, or that people would think they were just trying to get out of a tougher unit or trying to get out of serving altogether—that they just couldn't hack it—when in reality, they are suffering from an illness[.]⁴⁷⁹

Such responses are also mirrored in Kadish's narrative—including, coincidentally, the very same phraseology in Gil's explanation that '[a] Profile 21 means you couldn't hack it' (116)—conveying similar processes of stigmatisation and social isolation: from the very beginning of Maya's narrative, Gil is treated with suspicion and derision. 'Be careful,' a friend warns Maya. 'I don't care for guys who come across so surly. Plus, Yossi says Gil was

⁴⁷⁷ See pp. 16-17. For comparison with the Vietnam War, consider for example the descriptions of combat by veteran Tim O'Brien in the autofictional *The Things They Carried*, in which he writes that '[f]or the common soldier, at least, war has the feel—the spiritual texture—of a great ghostly fog, thick and permanent.' He also develops a similar account of hyperarousal, in the same ambiguous and misty atmosphere of the Vietnam Jungle, surrounding the My Lai massacre in *In the Lake of the Woods*.

O'Brien, *The Things They Carried*, p. 78; Tim O'Brien, *In the Lake of the Woods* (London: Flamingo, 1995).

⁴⁷⁸ Draft IDF, 'Medical Profile', *Draft IDF* <<http://draftidf.co.il/profile/>> [Accessed 22 February 2022], n.p.

⁴⁷⁹ Baron Camilo of Fulwood, 'Suicide in the IDF', *Jerusalem Post*, 3 September 2012 <<https://www.jpost.com/opinion/op-ed-contributors/suicide-in-the-idf>> [Accessed 30 November 2021], n.p.

discharged from the army. Of course, there are reasons for discharge that aren't bad, but it's a little strange that no one seems to know why he didn't complete his service' (50). A similar judgement based on Gil's discharge, used in an equally irrelevant context, is levied later in the novel by the owner of a gallery in which Gil has been offered an exhibition, in which he states that 'he'll have to think about whether [Gil] should be representing the gallery' (116). Hence, in addition to the isolation incurred by trauma, Gil is further isolated as a result of stigma surrounding his condition in Israel, generating a vicious cycle of social withdrawal that is not conducive to traumatic recovery.

Gil's isolation, and indeed his psychological response to his father's death, also affect the ways in which Gil communicates his mental environment. Often, rather than verbalising his experiences, Kadish depicts Gil as making use of the visual arts to express his ideas and emotions. One sketch, for example, represents his father the day before he died, including details such as unlaced boots and a partially untucked shirt, which Gil relates to the event of his death: 'He was called up during the surprise attack. He didn't even have time to find the belt for the uniform' (82). In addition to this factual, but emotionally significant detail, Gil also adds allegorical elements, such as a halo around his father's head. This blend of record and allegory hence draws together in one place several aspects of Gil's emotional relationship with his father, such as the lingering memory and regret surrounding the circumstances of his death, now inextricably integrated into his concept of his father, and the idealisation of his father, as exemplified in his symbolic elevation into holiness by the halo. Importantly, it is not only through this piece of artwork that Gil is able to encapsulate his feelings towards his father; indeed, it also facilitates any communication regarding his relationship with his father at all. When Maya sees the drawing of Gil's father, Gil begins to share some of the pain he feels as a result of his father's death, a subject which Maya notes has merely been 'mentioned' (82) only once before in her entire time knowing him. For Gil, art hence functions as a form of expression that supercedes normal verbal and conversational capacity, encapsulating an experience that cannot be contained within words alone. This is also reflected in his particular penchant for the work of Marc Chagall. 'He understood the world he lived in better than any realist' Gil explains to Maya. 'He showed the truth behind the façades' (51). As the work of an early modernist, with distinct surrealist elements, Chagall's art challenges previously-held beliefs regarding reason and coherence, and experiments with new modes of expression which reflect the rapidly-changing social, political, and intellectual landscapes of the early twentieth century; a cultural climate which, for many modernists, resists direct, realistic representation. Gil, experiencing a similar crisis of faith in the

militaristic narratives of his own country following the trauma of his father's death, likewise seeks alternative modes of indirect representation, with significant use of symbols, for his own artistic communication, culminating in his gallery exhibition. Conveying what he terms the 'hopeless' (272) state of the country and its wars—'[m]y father died for this goddamned promised land and I know things are never going to change' (272), he admonishes Dov's soldier-friends as they discuss the hypotheticals of peace and defence in Israel—his final exhibition depicts the faces of prominent political figures in the dress of the Haredim, utilising the calligraphy and materials associated with Torah scrolls. In this way, he associates the Haredim's faith in and wait for redemption by the Messiah—something which is highlighted throughout Kadish's narrative in the recurring image of the yellow signs welcoming the Messiah seen throughout Maya and Gil's neighbourhood—with what Gil sees as a passive optimism for a peaceful solution to Israel's national problems. The sense of irony created in his illustrations, by means of this symbolism, hence effectively convey Gil's distinctly posttraumatic beliefs about the future of Israel and its conflicts.

Gil is by no means a purely innocent and traumatised victim, however. In addition to the fact that his actions in Gaza endangered the lives of his comrades, Gil is also depicted as a perpetrator of abuse. Throughout the narrative of *From a Sealed Room*, Kadish develops a detailed account of escalating abuse in Gil and Maya's romantic relationship, from early warning signs such as his comment, as Maya moves out her dormitory, that 'in our new neighborhood you won't have to worry about those busybodies anymore' (57)—recognisable in the context of his later behaviour as an attempt to isolate Maya from her friends at the university—to increasing volatility ('I have to be quiet while he's working, because the slightest sound makes his back stiffen with reproof' (79)) and eventually physical attacks, culminating in a severe assault and rape near the end of the novel. In addition to the potentially traumatic effects of his abuse on Maya, it is also interesting to note the ways in which Gil's own trauma may be partially implicated in his abusive behaviour. Studies by both Erin P. Finley et al and Casey T. Taft et al have found strong links between PTSD, anger, and intimate partner violence (IPV) in combat veterans, with the former reporting that 'Veterans with PTSD have consistently been found to perpetuate more frequent and more severe IPV, at rates approaching 2–3 times the national average', while in the latter study '40% of veterans [...] endorsed at least one act of physical assault during their current relationship, and 91% endorsed at least one act of psychological aggression'; both categories in which

PTSD-positive veterans scored significantly higher.⁴⁸⁰ In particular, as Finley et al write, '[g]iven how frequently anger is cited as being central both to experiences of PTSD and to partner violence, it is not surprising that *violence occurring in anger* should emerge as a pattern'. This analysis is certainly applicable to Gil, whose voice, in addition to its frequently aggressive and expletive-riddled content cited above, is described as 'like water splashed on simmering oil' (153), and whose 'anger breaks against the tumbled wall of [Maya's] body' (157), suggesting that his traumatic experiences in the IDF, and the anger therein, are directly related to his treatment of Maya.⁴⁸¹

Moreover, as research by teams such as Áine Travers et al and Jessica Leigh Doyle and Monica McWilliams demonstrate, IPV is prominent in post-conflict societies, wherein there are 'mutually reinforcing relationships between violence in the public and private spheres', as Travers et al put it.⁴⁸² Although both of these studies are contextualised in Northern Ireland, it is feasible that similar mechanisms operate in Israel, suggesting a possible further link between Gil's exposure to traumatogenic circumstances in the Israeli military and his exertion of violent control on Maya; that is, that the received violence, fear, and lack of control that characterise his experience in the military culture of Israel are then projected inversely upon Maya. It is important to note, however, that Gil's behaviour is neither acceptable or the accepted norm either within or outwith the context of the novel. In fact, when Dov's soldier-friends, all of whom have different views on Israel's wars, their necessity and meaning, discover evidence of Gil's abuse, they immediately and unanimously condemn it. As one soldier, Yair, puts it, 'We fight so damn hard to make it safe in this place. This isn't who we are' (298). Thus, beyond a simple contrast with the connotations of violence inherent in the army, the soldiers' response to the abuse is actually interlinked with their military ethics. The purpose of the wars, with their associated violence, is to create a safe environment in Israel, which is not associated with arbitrary violence committed against individuals. While

⁴⁸⁰ Erin P. Finley, Monty Baker, Mary Jo Pugh, and Alan Peterson, 'Patterns and Perceptions of Intimate Partner Violence Committed by Returning Veterans with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder', *Journal of Family Violence*, 25 (2010), 737-743 (p. 738); Casey T. Taft et al, 'Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, Anger, and Partner Abuse Among Vietnam Combat Veterans', *Journal of Family Psychology*, 21:2 (2007), 270-277 (p. 272).

⁴⁸¹ Finley et al, p. 740.

⁴⁸² Áine Travers et al, 'Trauma Exposure and Domestic Violence Offending Severity in a Probation Sample From Post-conflict Northern Ireland', *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* (2020), 1-22 <<https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0886260520922355>> p. 2; Jessica Leigh Doyle and Monica McWilliams, 'Intimate Partner Violence in Conflict and Post-Conflict Societies: Insights and Lessons from Northern Ireland', *Political Settlements Research Programme*, May 2018 <https://pure.ulster.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/12657575/Intimate_Partner_Violence_in_Conflict_and_Post_Conflict_Societies_Insights_and_Lessons_from_Northern_Ireland.pdf> [Accessed 25 February 2022].

Gil hence acts according to the ‘mutually reforc[ed]’ dynamic of violence cited above, the others reject such an influence on their identity; it is not, in the words of Yair, ‘who [they] are.’ Consequently, a distinction is drawn between violence committed in collective and private spheres, demonstrating a similar demarcation of intention: the soldiers exhibit violence as a *collective*, in order to keep safe all in that *collective*, while Gil decries violence as a *collective* and exhibits violence as an *individual*, with the intention of keeping an *individual* (himself) safe from both physical violence and the perceived psychological violences of loss and lack of control. This distinction in intention, Kadish suggests, is important in understanding some of the nuances of violence in Israel.

That is not to suggest, of course, that such prosocial (at least between Israelis) ethics justify the actions of the IDF, and especially Israel’s oppressive policies directed towards Palestinians, or that Kadish condones them. In fact, Gil’s abuse of Maya provides a microcosm for the ways in which such a focus on collective progress occludes the violence and trauma experienced by individuals. After the final attack, Maya observes that

Enough water and makeup will erase the marks of this night, just as they have erased the marks of every other time Gil has raised a hand to me. In the morning I will be hollow-eyed and invisible. The others, eager to be fooled, will look at me and see nothing[.] (284)

The phrase ‘hollow-eyed’, recalling Fanya’s description of the Holocaust survivor refugees as having ‘empty’ eyes, identifies Maya with others in Israel subject to violence. Considering the historical context of Fanya’s comment—as noted in the introduction, it was only in the 1980s that Holocaust survivors were given a significant role in the Israeli cultural narrative, having previously been treated with indifference, as unwanted anomalies in the context of Israeli cultural identity—a parallel is created with the chosen ignorance of certain manifestations of trauma in the interests of creating a cohesive cultural narrative.⁴⁸³ In the context of *From a Sealed Room*, this would entail the erasure of Maya’s suffering in order to uphold an image of Israel without internal or gender-based violence, the latter especially challenging notions of gender equality in Israel, which are otherwise exhibited in areas such as conscription into the military service. Although, as previously noted, the soldiers do notice and condemn Maya’s treatment, Kadish nonetheless highlights, through Maya’s attempts to utilise the deliberate

⁴⁸³ See pp. 39-40.

blindness to unaccepted—and indeed, unacceptable—traumas towards disguising Gil’s abuse, one of the ways in which social imperatives, however ethical in intention, obfuscate and erase incongruent individual counternarratives.

The fact that Maya, like many of those experiencing domestic violence, is actively involved in concealing the abuse also adds complexity to the ways in which she is isolated in Israel, whilst further implicating Gil’s actions in her relationship with the nation. Her relationship with Gil, as I have discussed, is one of the main reasons that Maya is unable to participate in Israeli society, through mechanisms such as her physical and emotional isolation in the apartment Gil chose for the two of them (far from her friends, and in a conservative Orthodox neighbourhood where her being an unmarried secular woman living with her partner puts further pressure on her freedoms; as her friend Michal points out, even her choice of clothing may invoke judgement if it is not modest enough), and the dismissal of her ideas, opinions, and attempts to relate to other Israelis. Gil is also symbolically incorporated in another forms of Maya’s isolation in Israel, such as the language barrier. As with Foer’s *Everything is Illuminated* and *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*, and Krauss’s *The History of Love*, translation between languages is used by Kadish to analogise difficulties in the communication of traumatic circumstances.⁴⁸⁴ Maya, at one point, wishes to explain to her mother that she has difficulties with the Hebrew language specifically, describing how she ‘do[es]n’t know how to live in it’ (108), thus imbuing the language with the property of spatiality; it is given the quality of place. By registering Hebrew as a location rather than a collection of signifiers, Kadish concretises the concept of linguistic worlds that situate the speaker within a specific and unique field of signifiers and symbols, implying the presence of a distinct associated psychological terrain. Congruously, Maya’s use of English and Hebrew denote separate worlds, with the latter representative of the confusion of the domestic abuse to which she is subject. After the first physical assault, Maya ‘sift[s] Hebrew words’, certain that ‘[t]he right combination [...] will explain this’: ‘What I want to say is, *I didn’t mean to make you*. What I want to say is, *You shouldn’t have*’ (117). In the oscillation between these two paralleled sentences and interpretations of the attack, Kadish depicts a process of mapping within the terrain of Hebrew, with implications on how Maya will come to understand—and indeed, ‘live in’—her world in Israel. In one, she understands Gil’s actions as unacceptable, but in the other, she is psychologically manipulated into claiming responsibility for her own abuse, and in doing so normalises the symbols and manifestations of abuse into her

⁴⁸⁴ See pp. 83-85, 107-108, 149-150.

psychological field. In this way, the process of translation between English and Hebrew becomes one not only of vocabulary and grammar, but one of psychological meaning.

Kadish applies similar perspective on language to Shifra. Whilst other texts examined in this thesis have depicted a rupture in the language usage of international refugee characters, wherein the childhood language (now associated with tragedy) is no longer used in the country to which they emigrate, Shifra, a traumatised Polish Holocaust survivor, attempts to communicate with Maya in a confusing farrago of Polish, Yiddish, Hebrew, and English.⁴⁸⁵ A reflection of her own confused psyche, these fragments of speech represent different elements of her fractured lifeworld, which all coexist in the present. As with the imposition of her traumatic memories onto her present environment, her childhood languages and the world of meaning they represent are mingled with the language of her new home and, crucially, the language of the Americans that she continues to believe will provide her salvation. In other words, Shifra's use of language is mimetic of her experience of posttraumatic life. Shifra's personal history, which Kadish narrates in the first person in italicised segments of *From a Sealed Room*, is substantially centred on the nexus of her internment in Dachau, where her family (including her beloved sister Halina) and other residents of her hometown perished. In the camp, prior to its liberation and its infamous fire, Kadish describes the circulation of rumours and a sense of hope founded upon the arrival of the Americans. Both the fire and a persistent faith in salvation by the Americans in particular are, as a result, constant features of her speech and lifeworld, as the traumatic past continues in the present.

Indeed, much of Shifra's narrative is written in a kind of prayer addressed to Maya—the American who becomes, for Shifra, representative of redemption—incorporating elements of the religious discourse and psalms of the Jewish Orthodox who live in the neighbourhood:

I adore You O American, my strength, O American, my crag, my fortress, my rescuer, my matchstick my chocolate my rock in whom I seek refuge, my shield, my Jesse Owens my Gone With the Wind my mighty champion, my haven newspaper soup my new Coca-Cola, my redeemer. (220-221)

This passage, recalling in particular the psalm in the book she gifts Maya, inserts Maya and the Americans she represents into a piece of religious praise. Aspects such as the capitalisation of pronouns, reserved for figures of divinity, elevate Maya into a position of

⁴⁸⁵ Consider, for example, the grandparents of *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*, and Leo and Bruno of *The History of Love*.

holiness. In this way, Shifra has adapted a linguistic model available to her in Israel—notably, one that is strongly associated with awaiting the coming of the Messiah and associated redemption, which underlies much of the treatment of the Haredim in the novel—to contain her own agenda: awaiting the redemption of her traumatic past by the Americans per the disrupted temporality of the experience of trauma. In addition to placing the Americans, and specifically Maya, in the position of God, Shifra also incorporates random English phrases into the psalm, which, when taken literally, are completely nonsensical. In terms of psychological association, however, these fragments, most likely taken from advertisements and similar globalising media, are rendered meaningful in their abstract connections to the proximity of America(n culture). In Shifra's psychological terrain, these objects act like talismans of American rescue, temporally situated simultaneously in the liberation of the camp and in her present posttraumatic context. Such a postmodern fracturing and relativising of meaning by Kadish is also reflected in the grammar of Shifra's psalm. While the breakdown of the use of punctuation is suggestive of emotional stress, it also affects the way in which the words are read within the context of the sentence. Rather than conforming to conventional rules of syntax that render subject-object relationships clear, the role and particular meaning of each word is unclear, and even irrelevant. In this way, communal understanding is eschewed in favour of a very individual, subjective, arrangement of symbols that represent, more abstractly, a unique psycho-linguistic field of memories and desires. Kadish thus suggests simultaneously that Shifra is isolated in her language, as it cannot perform a social function and hence her traumatic testimony cannot be received, and that no single mode of language—including each of the languages she uses in her attempts to communicate with Maya—can effectively encapsulate her radically multifaceted experience of the world.

In addition to the incapacity of any individual language to narrate Shifra's experiences, Kadish also conveys Shifra's narrative using an amalgamation of different generic structures. Known in her childhood as a storyteller, Shifra initially imagines, as an elderly lady, recounting her history to Maya thusly:

Once upon a time there was a river. The river flowed beside several farms and also beside a feather factory and a bank, several stores, and also a forest. All of these things were very beautiful. [...] There were two girls who walked beside the river's shores. One was lovely and the other very ugly. These two girls were, although you would never have guessed it, two princesses who

never had any troubles. None. Until one day they were trapped by a magical spell. Only the fierce angels who lived in the clouds could set them free. After a long time they did. The girls lived happily ever after. (74)

Here, Shifra makes use of the conventions of fairytales, evident in the classic opening and the presence of magic and princesses, alongside biblical allusions such as the ‘*fierce angels*’—once again presenting the American liberators as holy figures—to make sense of the incomprehensibly discordant experience of the Holocaust. Both genres, which highlight the allegorical rather than literal nature of the narrative—that is, self-consciously drawing attention to the disparity between representation and what is represented, to the role of representation itself—present a deliberate effort to mould the experience into a comprehensible narrative, using the respectively familiar symbolic frameworks of children’s stories and religion. The use of these frameworks, as well as the use of a third-person mode of narration, also sets the story at a remove from Shifra’s interiority, and thus the narration of her traumatic history—something which is replete with difficulties inherent to the nature of trauma—becomes more practicable, while also clearly drawing attention to what is left unrepresented. The final lines of the fairytale, which correlate to her imprisonment in the concentration camp and its liberation, are vague and gloss over crucial details on the levels of both the history represented and the diegesis of the fairytale, such as the nature of the ‘magical spell’ that traps them or how the angels come to rescue the princesses, making plain the absence of important information and detail. In this way, even within its allegorical form, the trauma of Shifra’s past acts as an absent presence.

There is, however, an additional, and more important, discrepancy between Shifra’s fictionalisation of her history and the factual history gradually revealed throughout the narrative of *From a Sealed Room*: where, in the fairytale, Shifra and Halina ‘*liv[e] happily ever after*’, the reader later learns that Halina is dead. In isolation, this narrative can thus be understood as an attempt to rewrite, or undo, history. This, as I will elucidate shortly, takes on greater significance given its address to Maya and the quest Shifra wishes her to undertake. However, this interpretation is complicated via comparison with Shifra’s extended narration of her life experiences, and the realities of her past that emerge from it; two narratives that are not always identical. In the former, in direct contradiction of the latter, Halina and another deceased friend, Lilka, maintain an active presence, not only as memories that intrude upon the present, but as participants in the present. Early in the narrative, for example, Shifra’s Jerusalem apartment disappears in a kind of cinematic fade into the forest of her youth, where

she walks with Halina and they discuss, among concerns pertinent to their life in 1930s Poland, the new presence of Maya in the apartment above: “*Don’t trouble with a foolish American girl,*” *Halina advises me*’ (67). Similarly, it is Lilka who informs Shifra of the Los Angeles riots: ‘*America is burning, she whispers. Helpless, she raises a hand and points. At the television. Here, in my apartment. And I look to the television at last, and it is true what Lilka says. America, burning*’ (195). Hence, neither Halina nor Lilka are represented only as memories, operating in the manner of traumatic flashbacks with finite possibilities for action and engagement, but as agents in Shifra’s contemporary life. While this is not an example of magical realism per Faris’s criteria, as a lack of independent corroboration and the clear presence of a ‘real’ narrative offered by Maya are suggestive of a psychological interpretation for the presence of Halina and Lilka, it is also not represented by Kadish as purely imaginary or a denial of history; Shifra, for example, refers explicitly to the deaths of Halina and Lilka, even asking the latter, ‘[w]hen the guard shot you Lilka, did you feel the pain?’ (257).⁴⁸⁶ Instead, the implication is of a subjective experience of nonlinear time, centred on her Holocaust trauma. In addition to certain indicators suggesting that Shifra, like Lista in *Everything is Illuminated*, is trapped in the Holocaust past (such as her suitcase, ready for her rescue (120, 305), and hair, left untouched since the camp (303)), she also experiences highly symbolic, psychosis-like recurrences of the fire just prior to liberation.⁴⁸⁷ In her apartment, Shifra recalls that ‘[t]he Americans are coming, the stranger said as she held me back. [...] The Americans are coming to quench the fire’ (212), a situation which rapidly melds into the present:

And now. Smoke. Rising to the ceiling, feathering to the walls, brushing these shuttered windows. Smoke, curling tendrils under my kerchief, and a rushing noise, flame singeing the air so I can barely breathe. [...] And the American opens the door. [...] I whisper my plea. Fire, I say. Can You smell it? Can You hear, this wind this fire? It is here, oh here come quickly before they destroy what You have come to save, come find us before we blow away on the wind of the flame. (212-213)

This illusion of fire, presented as if it were literally occurring (although Kadish reveals through Maya’s perspective that, when she answers Shifra’s raising of the alarm, there is no

⁴⁸⁶ See p. 77, n223.

⁴⁸⁷ See p. 72.

fire) constitutes not so much a repetition, but a *recreation* of past events in the present; where, in Dachau, she awaited the arrival of the Americans to save her, in present-day Israel she projects that same desire onto Maya. Thus, in a manner parallel to her use of language, Kadish depicts Shifra's trauma-inflected phenomenological experience of the world as one that is itself strongly symbolic, unrepresentable through ordinary modes of apprehension—that is, realism. Rather, her sense of time is nonlinear, and the literal and the figurative are intertwined and interchangeable.

Both Shifra's means of communication and experience of the world affect her ability to make herself understood to Maya, to whom she intends to impart the task of redemption. Maya's role in this is twofold, acting both as representative of American salvation, and as a member of the chronological—as opposed to genetic—third generation post-Holocaust. Although she is unrelated to Shifra, her simultaneous awareness of and distance from the Holocaust places her in a comparable position of balanced historical awareness and sensitivity to the importance and timeliness of Holocaust testimony, even while lacking the personal element of family history. Indeed, both the quest Shifra imparts—to redeem the past—and the means of communication are recognisable as common third generation experiences. Shifra, unable to communicate her trauma due to the reasons outlined above, attempts to convey crucial details of her past via objects, such as a tin of soup mix, likely from her first arrival as a refugee in Israel (181); the psalm book, including the psalm that inspires her address to Maya (205); a newspaper bearing a listing in which Lilka's brother requests information as to her fate (182-183); and a photograph depicting Shifra with her family and friends at a party she threw for Halina (225). Yet, while these items bear obvious significance to Shifra's life, objectifying key moments in her history, they are presented to Maya without context, and their meaning is not grasped. Testimony is hence underscored as crucial to our understanding of history, as documentary and archival evidence requires a coherent narrative to render it meaningful. However, as third generation discourse referenced in the introduction highlights, the availability of Holocaust testimony is threatened by the passage of time and death of survivors, traumatic silence, and, in the case of Shifra, the inability to express trauma in a coherent and comprehensible manner.⁴⁸⁸ When Shifra finally tells Maya her life story, Maya laments that '[i]t's no use. Even when I understand her speech, it makes no sense to me' (235). Hence, the details of Shifra's history are ultimately lost, and, after this failure to communicate, she asserts that '*t]his dry air seals my mouth. I shall not speak again.*' (278).

⁴⁸⁸ See pp. 30-31.

The failure of this social connection is further attributable to two other factors. Firstly, Maya is uncertain as to how to respond ethically to Shifra; how to bear witness. When she infers that Shifra is a Holocaust survivor, she 'tr[ies] to recall what [she] know[s] about survivors; [she] recall[s] slogans', such as '*Never again, never forget*' (234), '*Time heals all. Sharing it with someone is good*' (236), and '*We will remember the six million, we will preserve their memories, in our hearts we keep them alive*' (236). However, these '[t]rite phrases', which seem to Maya 'pallid' and even 'insulting' (236), are, in their automated application, exemplary of the effacement of the signified by the signifier. Emptied of meaning by repeated use, they avoid authentic interpersonal engagement and identification with the survivor, instead providing a scripted, unempathic response that is unsuccessful in restoring the lost social connection common in experiences of trauma. Equally ineffectual is Maya's subsequent attempt to respond to Shifra's testimony using information remembered from a psychology course at university, suggesting a reliance on empirical fact that once more reduces Shifra's personhood to the object of an academic exercise, and again neglecting her individualised interests in disclosing her history. However, it is in fact Shifra's intention behind the telling of her story that constitutes the second factor in the failure of social connection. Her hopes that the American Maya will redeem the past are quite literal: 'Now you will make it whole,' she explains at the conclusion of her testimony, requesting that Maya will '[b]ring [the] future' (236). This imparted quest, with its expected outcome that '*the American will sweep aside all that has passed, right tumbled years and redeem every hour*' (120), is patently impossible; even if Maya understood the purpose of Shifra's message, the task of literally undoing, or erasing, the past is not something that is within her power to achieve. The mission, and the intergenerational social connection its success would secure, are doomed to failure from the outset.

Interestingly, in contravention to more common third generation narratives, Kadish also explicitly depicts a second, opposite intergenerational mission: a quest for redemption tasked of a Holocaust survivor by the younger generation. From Shifra, Maya desires 'some gift to fulfil the promise of that arresting stare. Some powerful wisdom to break the tight rhythm of my days in this incomprehensible city' (182). In particular, she asks for Shifra's help with Gil, confiding in her that he is physically abusive and she 'do[es]n't know what to do' (215). Parallel to the ways in which the survivor generation symbolically associate the third generation with a redemptive future and victory over the traumatic past, Maya regards Shifra with reverence for history, assuming the presence of the wisdom of experience that will explain those aspects of her own life that she is yet to understand, with lessons she could

apply to her present difficult circumstances. Shifra is the first person to whom Maya discloses the abuse, suggesting a particular faith in the ability of the past to illuminate the solution to present-day suffering. In this way, these two missions form a synergetic example of the cultural relationship between history and the present depicted in *From a Sealed Room*, wherein the direction of influence is not unilateral. Moreover, notably, when Shifra proclaims her intent to narrate her history—and therefore impart her task of redemption—Maya interprets her words in terms of her own request. Shifra asserts that ‘when I tell, you will fix. You will make us whole. [...] Then we will be free’ (216), from which Maya postulates that Shifra ‘has pledged her help’ (216). This mutual misunderstanding not only highlights the self-serving insularity of objectifying the Other as a symbol, but also the rather simplistic, dual cultural beliefs that just as the future will save the past, so too will the past save the future.

Kadish does not present these beliefs without critique. Indeed, it is in the very *failure* of these dual missions that the main ethical thrust of the narrative emerges. Central to this failure is the expectation of redemption from an external source. In the beliefs suggested by Maya and Shifra’s respective missions, the concepts of ‘history’ and ‘the future’ are treated in a manner similar to the way in the which the Haredim are depicted as awaiting the coming of the Messiah, or how the politicians parodied by Gil in his exhibition place passive faith in the peace process; in all examples, the individual is disempowered and reliant on an idealised other to end their suffering. Conversely, through *From a Sealed Room* Kadish ultimately highlights three alternative values: the questioning of the role of suffering, its necessity and its uses; the restoration of agency; and the development of a balanced relationship with history, the present, and the future.

The first, questioning the role of suffering, is something which Kadish interrogates, develops, and revises throughout the narrative of *From a Sealed Room*. Both Rina and Fanya, who asks rhetorically if she ‘would [...] have been more noble if I’d sacrificed my life to patching sorrows that are too big to be patched?’ and ‘refuse[s] to be anyone’s monument to tragedy’ (315), denounce the idea of nobility in suffering. Maya, as previously intimated, has a particularly confused relationship with the concept of suffering. Whilst, in Israel, she problematically associates suffering with authenticity, Kadish also describes how, in her youth, Maya remembers ‘quit[ting] Hebrew school without warning one afternoon in the seventh grade, after a guest rabbi lectured on the idea of the chosen people. *Why are we chosen? Because God wants us to repair the world. What are we chosen for? To suffer*’ (142). Her distaste for this concept of determined suffering is maintained into adulthood, wherein

she angrily informs an Orthodox neighbour that the deceased Shifra ‘was looking for a way out of your precious holy suffering. There has to have been a way out for her’, to which he responds, with ‘amusement’, the single word ‘*Americans*’ (306). The neighbour’s dismissal of Maya’s (somewhat reactionary) denial of the inevitability of suffering as naïve highlights a different cultural attitude towards suffering, in which Israeli Orthodox Jewish culture presents it as a theistically-determined ontology, and in American culture an undesirable, but escapable, state. By associating authenticity more with the former, moreover, Maya’s aversion to suffering is something she challenges, with different effects, throughout her stay in Israel. Most significantly, she reinterprets her suffering under Gil’s abuse as something positive, relating it to love—‘Gil did love me. It was a different kind of love, only. A kind I hadn’t seen before: stronger, harder to bear’ (203)—and it is only when she encounters her mother’s suffering in the final stages of cancer that she realises that this suffering has no real meaning:

I offer you all the magic of my suffering. My arms wrap my chest.

But there is no magic. My hands discover the ridges of my ribs, my thin bruised arms, and I’m ashamed at this shape my body has taken. There is nothing redemptive about standing here broken while she fades before me. There has been no purpose, after all, in the path I’ve chosen. It has saved no one. (341)

Thus, the admirability she earlier identifies with suffering is challenged, and ultimately discredited for lack of evidence; the inability of her suffering to improve any individual lives, including her own, clearly demonstrates that there is literally nothing present to admire in her pain. The notion that it might do otherwise is as fantastical as ‘magic.’

Kadish complicates this somewhat in her depiction of Hope’s suffering. When Maya learns of her mother’s impending death, she is angry that Hope did not inform her earlier. Yet, she soon realises that her mother

has ached to have me here. She has denied herself my presence fastidiously hour after hour, in order to give me the gift of another day; now she pleads my forgiveness for not summoning me earlier. She asks humbly that I confirm her reward, the fruit of this last sacrifice in a life of sacrifices—my well-being.’ (339)

The ethics of this choice are complicated. By one measure, Hope's suffering is intended to have a clear, concrete impact on another individual—Maya—by allowing her to enjoy her time in Israel without anxieties surrounding her mother's health. However, not only is this not the case, as, in Israel, Maya suffers under Gil's abuse, and in the US she is pained by the suddenness of the received news and therefore given little time to process it, but, as Maya observes, '[i]f I lie to her, her eyes show me, she will choose to believe' (339). The truth of the impacts of her suffering are thus finally subordinated to her imagination, arguably mitigating the extent to which her suffering can be called admirable in reference to actual effect. Nevertheless, through Hope Kadish introduces another useful facet into Maya's developing understanding of the role of suffering: the importance of a direct relationship between the sacrifice and the intended outcome. Maya's suffering is irrelevant to her other desires, such as her mother's health, Gil's affection, and her integration into Israel; but her mother, whose 'life of sacrifices' is primarily centred on the denial of her comfort in lieu of dedicating her life towards working with the underprivileged community in Crown Heights, succeeds in improving the lives of those with whom she works. Through her mother, therefore, Maya learns that admirability is not inherent to suffering itself, but in the interpersonal connections and compassion that underlie the sacrifice.

This argument against the inherent nobility of suffering is also challenged with regard to Shifra. After the Holocaust survivor's death, Maya objects to the Orthodox neighbour's claim that '[t]here is meaning to suffering. Our souls are tested, strengthened. We must understand, the survivors are proof of God's will to sanctify us' (304), rebutting with '[s]urvivors aren't proof of anything. She wasn't just some symbol, some evidence of God's plan. She was a *person*' (304). Maya's disagreement, importantly, rejects not only the idea of a divine purpose to Shifra's Holocaust ordeal—that is, the suggestion that her suffering is, by its very existence, innately laudable—but also her portrayal as a 'symbol' rather than as a human subjectivity. This objectification highlights the importance of the second of Kadish's principles discussed here: the restoration of agency. The objectification of Shifra, and Holocaust survivors in general, positions them as passive 'evidence' in the creation (by others) of a greater narrative, whether historical, cultural, psychological, or religious. Such an objection therefore also constitutes a reappraisal of Maya's earlier reception of Shifra's testimony. This shift from conformation to a culturally-mandated script to an appreciation of individualised agency prompts Maya to consider not how she is expected to receive Shifra's testimony, but what Shifra's own intent and interests may have been, allowing her to better respond to Shifra's final, haunting assertion of her presence, 'I am here [...] I am here' (236).

Indeed, Kadish later depicts Maya's realisation that Shifra 'didn't need me to remember every detail of her story; that would have mended nothing. Nor did she want me to forget where she'd been. She wanted only that the past be redeemed' (346-347), a notable shift from typical understanding of testimony as a means of transmitting memory, and one that better reflects Shifra's desires and experiences of the world. Yet, as Kadish also writes, 'there is no fixing the past. Only the future' (347). In the inevitable failure of Shifra's imparted mission to undo the past emerges a new imperative for Maya: to shape the future. Such an empowering shift in focus from what is outwith Maya's control to what is within it restores a sense of Maya's agency in influencing the direction of her own life, as opposed to preordainment by external factors such as God or history; or, as implied by Gil when he calls her his 'chosen one' (282), an indeterminate force of fate. As a result, the locus of redemption is moved not only from the past to the future, but from external forces of salvation to internal agency, summarised in Hope's lesson that 'it doesn't hurt if they believe in a redeemer, so long as they also believe we need to work to fix the world. [...] we've got to do at least half of the work of the Messiah' (336). Thus, Kadish emphasises that redemption from the traumas of the past and present is not predicated on passive hope or prayer, but on collective and individual action.

In doing this, a more balanced relationship with history is also established, destabilising it as a deterministic influence on the future, and repositioning it as a valuable site of information and learning; an important, but not *absolute*, influence on contemporary and future events. Shifra and her interactions with Maya are thereby implicated in the optimistic final pages of the novel, wherein Kadish's final principle of the rebalancing of the relationships between past, present, and future is enacted. Written in the future tense, it is unclear whether these final events, in which Maya returns to Israel, leaves Gil, and, symbolically, removes the tape from the windows of the sealed room in the Shachar's apartment, are an exercise in imagination or a recollection from some future moment outlining her actions following the final spatio-temporal location of the narrative. Regardless, this focus on the future highlights possibilities—rather than inevitabilities—that Maya can enact that involve a more self-determined ethics and a focus on restored interpersonal connection over isolation. Kadish suggests that the past is no longer understood by Maya as sacrosanct, to be treated with automatic reverence; it is rather a singular, but not all-encompassing, source of information and inspiration for future action. This is also implicated in her relationship with her mother, and, concordantly, with herself. While her prior relationship with her mother had been strained, characterised by a sense of inescapability—when, for example, she discovers that her mother was aware of her rebellious

use of her time dancing, she feels that her ‘had been deflated once more’ and that ‘[t]here was nowhere [she] could hide from her’ (98)—and of guilt from unmet expectations centred on her mother’s strong political activism, Maya’s stay in Israel constitutes something shared with Hope, who visited many years previously and had always intended to return, and their correspondence during the time brings them closer together. However, this initial attempt at reconciliation is depicted by Kadish as flawed for two reasons: firstly, that their correspondence is filled with fabrications, Hope’s with the omission of her poor health and Maya’s with invented trips sightseeing in Israel; and secondly that the purpose of these fabrications on Maya’s part is still performed out of a sense of obligation to meet the expectations she believes her mother has of her, thus subordinating her own life to a reverence for another’s history. The ‘cloth of stories’ woven from this ‘one loose thread’ extracted from her mother’s life must therefore eventually be ‘unravel[led]’ (330-331). Yet, the balanced relationship with history Maya learns following her interactions with Shifra allows her to ‘hold a second thread drawn from my mother’s life. It’s only a slim filament, a tiny portion of the conviction that drove her all these years. But enough, I tell myself, to weave a new cloth’ (347). This ‘new’ fabric, unlike the previous, is unique in its novelty; rather than trying to recreate her life in her mother’s image, Maya draws upon Hope’s rich history to apply its teachings to her own. In this way, history is implicated in, but not controlling of, Maya’s constructions of her present and future.

Therefore, although one review of *From a Sealed Room* laments that, despite a ‘compelling’ portrait of Maya, ‘[t]he tale doesn’t need, and can’t sustain, the larger geopolitical and historical implications that are added to it’, it is these very geopolitical and historical implications that anchor the narrative.⁴⁸⁹ The histories evoked in *From a Sealed Room* are inseparable from its characters’ motivations, desires, and interpersonal interactions, from the tensions between Maya and her own mother, to Jewish American Maya’s relationship with the Israelis she meets over the course of the novel, and their discussions and ideas surrounding suffering, politics, and hope. It is, however, Maya’s encounters with Holocaust survivors that engender the most profound impact on her worldview. Most notable is Shifra, whose perseverance and belief in Maya as a redemptive force inspire Maya’s own confidence in her abilities to regain her autonomy over her fate:

⁴⁸⁹ Kirkus, ‘From a Sealed Room’, *Kirkus Reviews*, 20 May 2010
 <<https://www.kirkusreviews.com/book-reviews/rachel-kadish/from-a-sealed-room/>> [Accessed 10 December 2021], n.p.

She believed in me. I don't know who this woman was. I'll never know her story. But I know that her spirit held on under the hot sun. I know she didn't give up—she tried and tried to talk to me, even though I failed her. And if she could keep going despite all she survived, surely I can weather whatever comes next. (345)

Yet, also integral is Shmuel, who counsels Maya that '[w]hatever happened yesterday, however bad it was, isn't as important as what could still happen. The most important yesterday isn't as important as tomorrow' (309). A watchmaker by trade, Shmuel 'mend[s] what can be mended; restoring the ticking of precious seconds and hours to silenced faces and stilled hands' (311). The significance of Shmuel's profession to the novel and its wider implications is clear: the hands and faces of both timekeepers and people must be reanimated, prevented from becoming frozen in a single historical moment. The trauma of the past must not dictate the future, silencing the individual's voice or quelling their ability to act, as both of which are the only source of future redemption, whether that be the reopening of metaphorical sealed rooms in personal relationships, or larger sociopolitical issues such as racial disparity in the US or the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the Middle East. As Kadish writes through Shmuel, 'if you let yesterday be bigger than tomorrow [...] then there's no hope for nothing' (309).

The Weight of Ink

While the narrative of *From a Sealed Room* is built on layers of history, historical investigation itself is a key concern of Kadish's third and most recent novel, *The Weight of Ink* (2017). The narrative, split into two distinct strands, centres on Ester Velasquez, a female Jewish scribe living in the mid-seventeenth century whose philosophical pursuits lead her into correspondence with radical thinkers such as Baruch de Spinoza, and the investigation carried out by historian Helen Watt and her postgraduate assistant Aaron Levy, who, reminiscent of A. S. Byatt's *Possession*, are analysing a trove of documents discovered in an old Richmond house at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The interaction between the two strands of the novel highlights not only different and often overlooked periods of Jewish history, such as persecution by the Portuguese Inquisition, but also the ways in which historical issues resonate between different temporal contexts, both within and outwith the diegesis of the novel. From the affinity Helen feels with Ester as a female intellectual in a misogynistic

environment to the question of martyrdom versus survival posed against the contexts of ancient Masada, Inquisition interrogation, and the Holocaust, Kadish's strata of history position history not as a distant, completed series of events, but as something which, in her own words, 'floats into our lives at startling moments', contextualising and recontextualising ongoing individual and cultural issues.⁴⁹⁰ This is something that is implicated in the very writing of the novel; in an interview with Skye Cleary, Kadish explains that, during her research for *The Weight of Ink*,

The more I read about the Portuguese Inquisition refugees of seventeenth century Amsterdam [a community to which both Ester and Spinoza belong], the more they reminded me of the Holocaust refugees I knew as a child (my mother's parents and extended family were survivors, and my mother was born on the run). Those seventeenth century refugees, with their fears and their strengths and their fierce determination, felt familiar in many ways[.] ⁴⁹¹

Indeed, such connections between two different historical contexts in terms of individual psychology point to the ways in which studies in history can create meaning and empathic identification across spatio-temporal bounds, and, as in *From a Sealed Room*, thereby provide lessons and challenges applicable to the present than can consequently inform future action. Yet, as I shall explore throughout this section, through such historical connections *The Weight of Ink* also propounds a multi-directional field of symbolic (re)interpretation, not only expanding the third-generation tendency to interpret post-Holocaust events through a Holocaust lens to include pre-Holocaust events—such as the consideration of Inquisition refugees in comparison to Holocaust refugees as above—and investigating the uses and nature of the historical record, but also reappraising the concept of trauma itself, such as investigating traumas of intersectional oppression, and challenging a common insistence upon negative sequelae.

Despite these (perhaps optimistically) expansive possibilities attributed to historical study, it is important to note that Kadish does not imply that history is wholly accessible, and in fact maintains distinctly third generation post-Holocaust sensibilities towards the presence of gaps in the historical record. This is something that is implicit even in the title of the novel, which is a reference to the iron gall ink used on the documents found in the Richmond house.

⁴⁹⁰ Shearn, n.p.

⁴⁹¹ Cleary, n.p.

This variety of ink, as Aaron explains in an email to Marisa, a young woman with whom he is infatuated, is unpredictable, as '[s]ome varieties stay stable for centuries, and some batches eat through paper'.⁴⁹² The result is '[l]etters and words excised at random, holes eaten through the page over the centuries by the ink itself' (37); the ink literally burns holes into archival evidence, rendering their contents permanently 'irretrievable' (37). In this subversion of the idea of the archive as a stable, infallible store of historical evidence, Kadish emphasises the ultimate inaccessibility of much of history, which is in turn emphasised through comparison between the novel's two narrative strands; while Helen and Aaron are able to learn significant details of Ester's life via careful analysis of the documents (which, incidentally, is only possible due to Ester's husband Alvaro's refusal to destroy her letters, and the record they contain, upon the event of her death), much of her narrative, written in alternating chapters, remains inaccessible to the twenty-first century academics, who must instead conjecture and invent. This, as I shall demonstrate in due course, further highlights the problematic nature of accessing the past; because of the subjective nature of historical interpretation, the narrative constructed is influenced by the interests and agendas of the historian. However, the sustained symbolism of the ink, both marking Ester's hands as an intellectual and scribe and representing the arbitrary (and often permanent) destruction of historical traces, serves to ground the novel's focus on the tension between history and those parts of it that are knowable.

This conflict, for Kadish, also represents a postmodern shift from a totalised historical narrative to that of individuals. This transition, especially in the context of *The Weight of Ink*, has two key effects. Firstly, it acknowledges, as above, the inherent incompleteness of the historical record, with the excision of individual voices either by destruction, or, as in the case of Ester, by concealment. The historical record, as Kadish notes, in addition to being a deliberate cultural construction per the theories of Hutcheon and White used in the introduction, is not only shaped by those pieces of evidence that are preserved by good fortune, but by active structural bias.⁴⁹³ Considering Hilary Mantel's assertion that the record constitutes 'what's left in the sieve when the centuries have run through it', Kadish observes that '[t]he lives that pass unnoticed through history's sieve, in contrast, are the ones no one memorialized, often because the people involved were poor or female or "irrelevant" because

⁴⁹² Rachel Kadish, *The Weight of Ink* (Boston, MA: Mariner, 2018), p. 48. All further references are to this edition, and are given after quotations in the text. Unless otherwise specified, all italics occur in the original.

⁴⁹³ See pp. 54-55.

of race or religion or sexuality'.⁴⁹⁴ In fact, as she explains in the Cleary interview, Ester's characterisation was partially inspired by the question, famously posed by Olivia Schreiner and Virginia Woolf, of 'what if Shakespeare had had an equally talented sister—what would such a woman's fate have been, given the constraints of women's lives in those days?', and Woolf's answer that '*she died without writing a word.*' As a result, she 'couldn't help thinking: what would it have taken for a woman of that era—a woman with a capacious intelligence and no outlet for it— *not* to die without writing a word?'⁴⁹⁵ Indeed, she notes that

Some [women], like the Brontë sisters, wrote under fake identities. Some, like Fanny Mendelssohn, composed music that was performed under the names of men. The further a woman was from a position of privilege, the more daunting the struggle for education and access and the more opaque the necessary disguise. It would be foolish to the point of hubris to believe we've already catalogued all those who masked their identities. Logic tells us there must have been other artists of erasure: women scattered here and there across cultures and centuries who expunged themselves from the record so the work of their hands and minds and hearts could be visible. And if they were good at it—if they succeeded—we've never heard of them.⁴⁹⁶

Ester is a fictionalised example of one such invisible voice, 'every piece' of whose story, thanks to Kadish's assiduous research, is 'factually plausible.'⁴⁹⁷ Historical enquiry, and indeed historical fiction, Kadish argues, can—somewhat like the reconstruction of Holocaust narratives common in the third generation—reinsert such voices into the incomplete dominant narrative by inference or invention, even if documentary traces of their presence are lost. The result is an 'informed lie' that 'can be the only way to get at the overarching human truth', as the exclusion of these voices generates an obviously misrepresentative image of history.⁴⁹⁸ In other words, the misleadingly omniscient and dispassionate voice adopted in the narration of history is replaced by another, more self-consciously omniscient voice that is interested in partial, fragmented, and individual realities.

⁴⁹⁴ Kadish, 'Writing the Lives of Forgotten Women', n.p.

⁴⁹⁵ Cleary, n.p.

⁴⁹⁶ Kadish, 'Writing the Lives of Forgotten Women', n.p.

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid.

The project of a detotalised history also reveals a second ‘human truth’: the existence of individual humanity that is glossed over in the creation of dominant cultural narratives. Such an endeavour is evident not only in terms of postmodern approaches to history as above, but in the project of writing a historical novel, a text which imagines factually historical events through the lives and subjectivities of individual characters. It is also a key sensitivity for the contemporary protagonists of *The Weight of Ink* themselves, who, as opposed to Wilton’s rival team of researchers who are more focused on the uncovered ‘evidence’ of a Sabbatean crisis in Florence, are increasingly invested in Ester’s life as an individual. For both Helen and Aaron, history is inherently predicated on, and inseparable from, individual lives. As Aaron muses when a document, written in iron gall ink, is destroyed upon opening, ‘[s]omething living had just died at his hands’ (37). The document, described in terms of a living organism rather than an inanimate object, and its subsequent ‘death,’ are suggestive of a perspective that treats history not as a static, apathetic object of study, but something that is current and interpretable, and can be engaged with in an intersubjective manner. At the point of destruction, then, the author of the document has a dual death; of body and of memorial endurance, both of which annihilate the possibilities of such intersubjective and transhistorical connection. Similarly, his investigation of the archival material from Richmond leads Aaron to consider historical traces beyond the simple content of the documents. On the subject of iron gall ink, he notes that

Entire words or phrases can just dissolve themselves out of the letter, especially where the writer maybe lingered over a word (dripping extra ink) or wrote with a heavier hand to place added emphasis. If he let a blot form on a word... 300 years later the acids may have excised that word and only that word. (48)

By contrast, in his own email, as a digital record,

showed nothing of where he had hesitated—not where the clock had ticked as his hands lingered on the keyboard, not the unaccustomed indecision that made him drag his mouse back over the entire blocks of text and click them into oblivion. His incapacitating, shameful yearning ate through nothing that was visible. (48)

In addition to raising important questions regarding the types of information that can be gleaned from different types of records, and especially the timely issue of digital records and archives, Kadish thus highlights the inseparability of individual lives and the historical record, as the documentary evidence itself bears physical traces of its author's interiority, even, in the case of corrosion damage, as an absent presence. In this way, therefore, the imagery of the iron gall ink also provides a useful metaphor for traumatic, forbidden, or dangerous testimony; accounts burned from the common visible record, their narratives—and *representation*—destroyed, in a sense, by their very content itself.

Although the records depicted in *The Weight of Ink* are not explicitly traumatic in nature, the issue of trauma, and indeed transgenerational and cultural traumas, is one that is very pertinent to both narrative strands. In the contemporary narrative, to which I will return in due course, Marisa is explicitly identified as a member of the third generation, while Helen, in her youth, encounters numerous Holocaust survivors in the newly-formed state of Israel, who, 'eleven years after liberation and the end of the war, [...] still cried out from their bunkbeds on the army base for gassed brothers, mothers shot and piled in a pit' (146). Although in the cases of most of the survivors, the horrors to which they were subject remain implicit—one soldier, for example, 'survived the war as a child in hiding in Romania and refused to undress in front of the other girl soldiers for a reason no one asked' (149)—Helen's lover, Dror, who lost his mother and sister during the Holocaust, is insistent upon Helen's understanding of the trauma of the Holocaust, and indeed Jewish history as a whole. In Ester's narrative, similarly, she encounters survivors of the Inquisition, the trauma of Polish pogrom survivor Rivka, and, from her own life, the trauma of the deaths of her parents in a house fire and the transgenerational posttraumatic lessons from her refugee mother. The representation of Inquisition survivors in particular, as previously noted, is tinted with parallels to the treatment of Holocaust survivors in contemporary discourse, with a mixture of fear for the horrors for which they have come to represent and a sense of reverence for their martyrdom. (Rabbi HaCoen Mendes, the Inquisition survivor for whom Ester scribes, by contrast, warns the son of a fellow survivor not to 'condemn [...] those who heed the call of fear', as the two survivors 'endured and witnessed what I shall not describe' including 'hear[ing] daily the cries of those burning on the pyre', whose 'words were [not all] holy' (27), thus confirming the incomprehensible horror of the ordeal while countering the idealism applied to the victims with a sense of human compassion.) Further parallels emerge in a conversation between Helen and Aaron. When the latter naïvely assumes that, after Oliver Cromwell legalised the

Jewish community's presence in London in the mid-1650s, the community 'might have started to let go of their caution' (58), Helen explains that

Truth-telling is a luxury for those whose lives aren't at risk. For Inquisition-era Jews, to even *know* the truth of one's Jewish identity could be fatal. Someone detects Jewishness in the way you dress, in your posture, in your fleeting expression when a certain name is mentioned—well, even if there's nothing they can do to you in England except perhaps expel you from the country, still, months later your relatives back in Spain and Portugal might be arrested and die gruesome deaths. (58)

In addition to obvious parallels between the concealed Judaism of London's Jewish community (further consolidated in Ester's narrative with observations such as her friend Mary's meticulously fashionable English dress, including a silver cross pendant) and the attempts of Holocaust-era Jews to evade persecution and death by claiming to be Catholic, this awareness of personal and cultural posttraumatic anxieties in London's Jewish community, wherein the trauma of survivors and refugees spread laterally throughout the community, is, notably, implied by Kadish to be a result of Helen's exposure to Holocaust survivors in Israel.⁴⁹⁹ The reference to 'truth' especially recalls her earlier conversation with Dror, in which she admonishes him for 'confus[ing] truthfulness with heartlessness' (164) after another criticism for allowing his experience under the Nazis to colour his present and future lives. This later acknowledgement of truth as a 'luxury', then, implies a maturing of perspective that understands the problematic nature of 'truth' (in the sense of outward authenticity) as a universal aspirational ideal, taking into account her privileged position with no experience of persecution. In other words, she presents a developing empathy for the posttraumatic effects such as ongoing anxiety that stem from such potent adverse experiences as the Holocaust. Hence, as in Kadish's construction of the novel itself, Helen's understanding of the plight of seventeenth-century Inquisition refugees is distinctly developed through a retrospective post-Holocaust lens.

⁴⁹⁹ For the concealment of Judaism in the seventeenth century, even in the comparably tolerant Amerstam community of Ester's childhood, see Miriam Bodian, "'Liberty of Conscience" and the Jews in the Dutch Republic', *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations*, 6 (2011), CP1-9 <<http://ejournals.bc.edu/ojs/index.php/scjr>> [Accessed 6 April 2022]; and in terms of religious architecture, Natália da Silva Perez and Peter Thule Kristensen, 'Gender, Space, and Religious Privacy in Amsterdam', *TSEG*, 18:3 (2021), 75-106.

Of course, in the service of historical congruity, in Ester's narrative strand there are no explicit or implicit comparisons between survivors of the Inquisition and Holocaust, other than those that may be inferred independently by the reader. Furthermore, as a second- and third-generation descendant of Inquisition refugees herself (Ester's grandmother escaped Inquisition-era Portugal with Ester's mother when the latter was around ten years of age), Ester's relationship with the Inquisition is indirect, and her main interaction with a survivor is the rabbi for whom she scribes.⁵⁰⁰ The main traumatic referent Kadish applies to Ester is rather the fire that killed her parents and displaced her to London. Kadish presents Ester's memories of the fire in short, somatosensory fragments ('In the flaring, crashing dark, the neighbors. Futile pails of water: steam ribboning off windowpanes. Inside, timber and fabric raging untouched. [...] And then, the tip of the roof aglow. [...] A single rending shriek. She'd never known whose it was' (83)) wherein the breakdown of grammatical form mirrors the disrupted subject-object relationships of traumatic memory described in the introduction, highlighted also in the disconnection between the scream and the individual from whom it originated.⁵⁰¹ These flashbacks are also triggered either with clear connection to the original event, such as when Ester 'startle[s]' from '[a] snap from the fire' (195) in the fireplace, or quite suddenly, such as in recounting her mother's ethics on sexual relationships to Mary:

It was the only time Ester would see regret drain her mother's cheeks.

Barely six weeks later, the fire.

Samuel Velasquez, turning now on the stair, his dark eyes seeking the door where his wife slept. Racing the racing flames.

Without meaning to, Ester had lifted her hand as though to call them both back.
(192)

In addition to the disrupted chronology suggested by the use of abrupt paragraph breaks, Kadish's depiction of trauma emphasises the intrusiveness of the memory, as the past imposes itself upon Ester's present, so that she physically reacts to it. The trauma of the fire, therefore, is not simply the catalyst for Ester's move to London where she begins work as a scribe, but acts as a nexus to which she is involuntarily psychologically returned.

⁵⁰⁰ The ambiguity here stems from the fact that Ester is both the child and grandchild of Inquisition survivors. While I have previously classed child-survivors as first-generation survivors in this thesis, it is often the case that they are the oldest surviving member of that family; that is, that their parents perished. In the case of Ester, however, both her mother, who was then a child, and her grandmother survived the Inquisition, with both of whom she had relationships.

⁵⁰¹ See pp. 15-16, 17-18.

Yet, in terms of the multi-directional interpretative exploration embodied in *The Weight of Ink*, more significant than the trauma itself are the meanings Ester attaches to it. Kadish imbues Ester's narrative with repeated and varied imagery pertaining to fire and burning. Fire is firstly, and most obviously, associated with destruction, as in the 'flames of the Inquisition' (55) and the hot irons that blinded the rabbi, and in the razing of Ester's house in Amsterdam and the consequent loss of her life there. In this, the literal fire is allegorised in Ester's perception of her life and self. 'The girl she was in Amsterdam before the fire', Kadish writes, 'was ash now' (131); '[a]sh: the girl who had once existed, with her vague moralities, her posture bent in apology, her desperate trust that virtue might guarantee safety' (131). The duplicated reference to 'ash', a metaphor which clearly relates the loss of Ester's previous sense of self to the fire, suggests that it too was literally acted upon by the flames. Moreover, the description of her prior values and temperament, and specifically the 'trust that virtue might guarantee safety', as also reduced to 'ash', reflects a posttraumatic reappraisal of previously-held conceptions about the world. In this case, the loss of a sense of correlation between virtue and safety both challenges the commonly-held illusion of the world as a benevolent place, per Janoff-Bulman's theory of trauma in terms of 'shattered assumptions,' and, more specifically to *The Weight of Ink*, some of the intergenerational posttraumatic lessons of her family, to which I will return shortly.⁵⁰² The trauma of the fire is hence responsible not only for the literal destruction of Ester's home, but of a radical disruption of her lifeworld. Ester's positive self-characterisation following the fire is similarly constructed. She has been 'forged' by fire into a 'brittle instrumen[t]', because of which, '[s]hould she bend, she would break' (86), and refers to herself as an 'empty vessel' (209). The loss she has experienced, at the heart of which lies the fire, results in an internal sense of absence also; the values of her childhood are replaced with a sense of emptiness, lacking a stable and coherent structure.

However, this void left in the fire's wake also creates space for the development of new values, having 'burned away all pretense' (232), a situation which Kadish likewise depicts using fire imagery. Having lost material and social wealth in the fire, Ester's pursuit of a conventional lifestyle, involving marriage and housework considered appropriate to her status as a Sephardic Jewish woman, such as sewing, would be faced with certain difficulty; yet, as a result of the fire's disruption, which both allows her to question such acceptance of convention and alienates her brother from his Jewish faith and the rabbi's house, she is able to

⁵⁰² See p. 21.

take his place as a scribe, exposing her to philosophy and scholarship. At the writing table, rather than feeling 'brittle' or 'empty', Kadish writes that 'something kindled in [Ester]', and 'her body rush[ed] with a quick heat' (81). In *The Weight of Ink*, then, fire does not only connote destruction and loss, but also dynamism and vitality. Hence, interestingly, fire is not inherently associated with negative affect for Ester as a symbol of traumatic stress; fire itself is neutrally valued, with both positive and negative associations. While still constitutive of the 'threatening rupture' of trauma as defined in the introduction, after which follows a 'crisis of meaning, in which the trauma centres itself as the main point of symbolic reference', the change catalysed by the nexus of the fire is associated as much with loss as its twin, freedom.⁵⁰³ Notably, Ester makes use of fire to destroy letters from Isabella Mendoza notifying her of a potential marriage match—an opportunity that would have deprived her of her scholarship—which Kadish uses to exemplify the harnessing of fire as an agent of change to the purpose of the more freeing aspects of loss. This concern is also reflected in Ester's intellectual pursuits, and especially the radical ideas espoused by the rationalist Spinoza, whose expulsion from Amsterdam's Portuguese community (itself a kind of trauma of cultural displacement) Ester likewise considers a source of freedom.

The freedom offered by intellectual scholarship, moreover, is one from her own body and the traumas to which it is subject as mortal, female, and Jewish. The first and last, threatened by fire, the Inquisition, and antisemitic violence, aid Kadish's intersectionalisation of the historical oppression of women. The imbrication of these forms of oppression is multifold. Peter D. Mathews argues that

The most effective ethical maneuvers in *The Weight of Ink* [...] occur when Kadish mirrors the injustices of Jewish culture back onto itself: the treatment of Ester (as a woman) and Alvaro (as a homosexual) by their fellow Jews hypocritically replicates the pattern of oppression the Jews have suffered at the hands of an anti-Semitic society.⁵⁰⁴

However, in addition to simply exposing the hypocrisies and parallels between different structural injustices (to which might be added the prejudices against Rivka as a 'Tudesco', or Ashkenazi Jew, compared to Ester's Sephardic community, as a result of which she is

⁵⁰³ See p. 44.

⁵⁰⁴ Peter D. Mathews, 'The Ambivalence of Tradition in Rachel Kadish's *The Weight of Ink*', *Concentric: Literary and Cultural Studies*, 46:1 (2020), 159-176 (p. 170).

considered of lower status, assumed to be illiterate, and treated discourteously by the rabbi's students), Kadish explores the ways in which these forms of oppression exist simultaneously against the *same* body. This is exemplified clearly through Ester's encounters with Esteban Bescós, who serves as the primary misogynistic and antisemitic voice in the novel. Upon discovering Ester reading the Royal Society's *Philosophical Transactions*, he questions why 'a woman read[s] what she cannot comprehend', and patronisingly insinuates that she should instead offer 'polite chatter'—'Is there no lady of the court or stage you wish to insult while claiming to praise her? No tale of culinary adventure with which you wish to regale me?' (318)—clearly defining the place of a woman as one involved with housework and malicious gossip. Then, when he learns that Ester does in fact understand the proceedings, he argues that '[t]hey say the Jews steal ideas as well as silver and blood, and now you show me it's the truth' (319), thus explaining Ester's learnedness through antisemitic stereotypes when he cannot under paradigms of traditional gender roles. Similar connections are made between Ester's oppression as a woman and Jewish through the mirrored use of the word 'unnatural' (71, 322) to describe her deviance from the social norms of the dominant culture; the word is applied both to her penchant for reading (associated with male gender roles rather than female in seventeenth century Europe) and to her as a member of the Jewish community, which Bescós blames for its own victimisation ('they seem born martyrs, preparing their whole lives for the moment when they'll be hunted, while conducting themselves so as to provoke the hunters' (322-323)). The intersectionality of misogyny and antisemitism in *The Weight of Ink* is taken to an extreme later in the novel, when Bescós incites a mob against Ester and Rivka for the 'Jewish sorcery' (457) of surviving the plague. Despite Ester's relinquishment of the late Mary's house and its contents to the church, as the two leave, 'a press of bodies pushed them forward, hands hard on Ester's shoulders, on her waist, feeling for her breast through the fabric of her dress, one unseen hand rummaging her skirt to squeeze sharply at her sex' (465). The actions of the mob are, moreover, traumatically familiar to Rivka, who tearfully warns Ester of her experience of pogroms: "'They'll do it," she whispered. "Before they kill us. [...] Or worse"—Rivka squeezed her eyes shut—"they'll do it and leave us alive.'" (459). In addition to providing oblique insight into Rivka's traumatic past, a subject on which she is mostly silent, these two violent encounters demonstrate the ways in which antisemitic violence and gender-based violence become intertwined, despite common personal and legal views—such as those of Bescós—that explicitly condemn sexual contact between Christian and Jewish people. The female Jewish body is thus subjected to specific forms of dehumanising violence that *simultaneously* reduce it to a sexual object and nonhuman object,

subject to the will of Christian and masculine bodies, and mitigated neither by Christian or masculine status.

Ester's philosophical correspondence, however, allows her to escape the constraints of her female Jewish body. Initially inspired by a female player in the theatre, who acts in masculine dress, Ester adopts a masculine *nom de plume*—an implied Christian male body—in order to pursue her intellectual activities. In doing so, two further objectives are achieved. First, in addition to creating a space safe from the overt bodily violence and trauma outlined above, writing under a male pseudonym allows her to escape more subtle cultural traumas related to her gender. As Laura S. Brown argues, the definition of trauma as something 'outside the range of human experience' neglects to account for the manifold daily wounding oppressions experienced by women and other marginalised groups, and in fact she postulates that such traumas ('everyday assaults on integrity and personal safety', including events such as '[u]nfair treatment at work [or] sexual harassment in academia' which are generally considered 'annoying' rather than 'traumatic') can be 'spread laterally throughout an oppressed social group as well when membership in that group means a constant life-time risk of exposure to certain traumata.'⁵⁰⁵ Similarly, Maria P. P. Root has argued for the concept of 'insidious trauma', which, although '[i]t does not typically include physical violence, [...] leaves a distinct threat to psychological safety, security, or survival', wherein sustained dehumanising oppression experienced particularly by minority groups 'devalue[s] or negate[s] their existence as human beings', constituting, in other words, 'a subtle psychological form of annihilation.'⁵⁰⁶ Such 'violence to the soul and spirit', as Brown puts it, is certainly the case for Ester, who in addition to the sexual violence of the mob, experiences exclusion and dismissal from the intellectual community, a repeated denial of her rational mind, and by extension, her humanity and all the social value that is contained therein.⁵⁰⁷ As a result, Ester considers '[a] woman's body [...] a prison in which her mind must wither' (293). As a woman, Kadish suggests, Ester must choose between the personal, financial, and social safety offered by marriage, and philosophy. At any one time, either her psyche or her body must be placed in danger.

Philosophy, and especially that of Ester's most significant correspondent, Spinoza, moreover, not only provides a method of escape from such traumas to which the body is

⁵⁰⁵ Brown, pp. 120, 126, 129.

⁵⁰⁶ Maria P. P. Root, 'Reconstructing the Impact of Trauma on Personality', in *Personality and Psychopathology: Feminist Reappraisals*, ed. by Laura S. Brown and Mary Ballou (New York: Guilford Press, 1992), pp. 229-265 (pp. 241, 246).

⁵⁰⁷ Brown, p. 128.

subject, but, Kadish suggests, can be used as a treatment for the resultant psychological stress. Although such a therapeutic use of philosophy could in theory be applied to the sort of trauma that characterises Ester's relation to the fire, it is to the issue of the insidious trauma of sexism that Kadish depicts Ester's application of the technique.⁵⁰⁸ In contemplation of the troublesome dilemma of an offer of marriage from Manuel HaLevy and the associated tensions between her will and the constraints and dangers of her patriarchal society, Kadish writes that Ester 'would not permit herself another step until she calmed herself with reason' (293), going on to postulate that

Nature gave woman not only a body but also intelligence, and a wish to employ it. Was it then predetermined that one side of Ester's nature must suffocate the other? If two of God's creations were opposed, must it be that God decided in advance that one was more perfect and therefore must be

⁵⁰⁸ Although a full modelling of such therapeutics is certainly beyond the scope of this thesis, I believe there is precedent for the creation of a Spinozist trauma therapy. Most obviously, in addition to those aspects explained in the main text, is the relationship between inadequate ideas and traumatic memory. Since inadequate ideas are ideas that do not sufficiently account for the relationships between different bodies, traumatic memory, existing as disconnected somatosensory fragments that do not cohere with the rest of an individual's narrative memory, can be described as radically inadequate ideas. The application of reason to better understand the relationality between these fragments themselves and the wider contexts of the traumatic event and the individual's life history generally—that is, conversion into more adequate ideas—is thus akin to the process of reintegration or narrativization common to preexisting trauma therapies. As a result, according to Spinoza's theory, affects associated with the inadequate ideas, such as fear, should be mitigated, thus lessening the individual's distress and the 'vicious cycle' of traumatic symptomatology. Such a therapy is also compatible with other forms of treatment, such as medication; as Howard Trachtman argues, pharmaceutical intervention for somatic symptoms would likely be agreeable to Spinoza, as the mitigation of such stressors would better allow, or even augment, the mind's ability to reason through the passions. Finally, as Antonio Damasio demonstrates in his book, *Looking for Spinoza*, Spinoza's theories on affects and passions can be productively synthesised with neuroscientific knowledge. Although, to my knowledge, no such synthesis has been performed with regard to psychopathology, I am optimistic about its applicability, especially as the question of altered bodily capacity is also accounted for by Spinoza's mind-body parallelism; as he explains in 2P7 of *Ethics*, 'The order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things' (35). This could be extended to the physiological changes associated with PTSD, as the physical effects of PTSD would be considered to parallel a damaged cognition—or to constitute another form of expression for it—and vice versa. This metaphysical model therefore suggests that the therapeutic aspects of his philosophy are not accessible only to those with a baseline level of both physical and mental health and associated capabilities.

See pp. 17-18, 45-46; Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*, ed. and trans. by Edwin Curley (London: Penguin, 1996), especially Parts II, III and V; Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, trans. by Robert Hurley (San Francisco, CA: City Lights Books, 1988), p. 36; Colin Marshall, 'Spinoza on Destroying Passions with Reason', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 85:1 (2012), 139-160; Howard Trachtman, 'Spinoza's Passions', *American Journal of Bioethics*, 7:9 (2007), 21-23; Antonio Damasio, *Looking for Spinoza: Joy, Sorrow, and the Feeling Brain* (London: Vintage, 2004). For a concise account of bodily capacity and negation, see Baruch Spinoza, 'Letter 21', in *The Letters*, ed. by Steven Barbone, Lee Rice, and Jacob Adler, trans. by Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1995), pp. 151-158 (pp. 152-154).

victorious? Did God determine before each storm that either the wind or the oak tree must prevail, one being more dear to Him?

Or perhaps, rather, the storm itself was God's most prized creation—and only through it could the contest between wind and oak tree be resolved, and one proven hardier. Perhaps—she trembled at her own heresy—the storm itself was God. And God was only the endless tumult of life proving new truths and eradicating old. (293)

This application of reason to the tension outlined above bears strong resemblance to the techniques advocated by Spinoza in his *Ethics*, wherein, as Colin Marshall explains, '[w]e are to gain control over a passion by thinking about that passion *as* a passion and by contemplating the general truths which that passion exemplifies.'⁵⁰⁹ Passions, in the Spinozist language, are affects associated with inadequate ideas; that is, ideas that do not sufficiently explain the relations between different bodies or events, and are (erroneously) attributed to an external cause acting upon one's body. In this case, the distress experienced by Ester arises from the oppressive effects of patriarchal society upon her own body, and is countered with philosophical inquiry towards the end of a greater understanding of the ways in which biological essentialism is—or, as the case may be, *is not*—accounted for by notions of God, and especially the God-as-Nature principle that is comparable between Ester and Spinoza. This subject is, moreover, drawn into their correspondence. The 'new truths' that Ester suggests must 'eradicate old' in the passage above connects to an earlier questioning of the 'virtue' of the 'rules of female behaviour—gentleness, acquiescence, ever-mindfulness—[that] quickly turned to shackles', suggesting the necessity of 'a new kind of virtue: one that made the throwing off of such rules [...] praiseworthy' (329), an idea that is also propounded in her second letter to Spinoza, where she asks the philosopher, 'What is the nature of man's obligation to the conventions of his society? If those conventions be in error [...] then is a man permitted or even required to act upon his own renegade definition of virtue?' (313). Ester's capacity for reason, therefore, not only allows her to transcend and treat the fallibilities of the body, but to question accepted societal prejudices that are, by nature, contrary to reason, and envision a society free from the insidious traumas that threaten both her bodily and intellectual lives.

⁵⁰⁹ Marshall, p. 154.

However, Ester's privileging of reason, as Mathews argues, supercedes that of her body to the extent that she develops a 'dualistic, Cartesian position on the connection between body and mind.'⁵¹⁰ It is to this that Kadish applies a third instance of burning imagery: the heat of a fever. The burning fever of the plague, 'a heat' the likes of which 'had never gripped her before' (438), draws Ester back into her body, much like the crises of the body experienced by Nicole in Krauss's *Forest Dark*, making her aware of 'every organ and vein—and every blood vessel in her, pulsing' (438).⁵¹¹ The imminence of both pain and death demand her reappraisal of her earlier pursuit of reason as an escape from the body:

How wrong she'd been, to believe a mind could reign over anything. For it did not reign even over itself... and despite all the arguments of all the philosophers, Ester now saw that thought proved nothing. Had Descartes, near his own death, come at last to see his folly? The mind was only an apparatus within the mechanism of the body—and it took little more than a fever to jostle a cog, so that the gear of thought could no longer turn. Philosophy could be severed from life. Blood overmastered ink. And every thin breath she drew told her which ruled her. (443)

The bodily crisis, or trauma, of the fever thus in a sense re-embodies Ester's subjectivity, and indeed causes her to similarly reassess certain aspects of her aversion to her embodiment. In accepting the importance of the body, so too, Kadish suggests, must Ester reevaluate the importance of bodily desires, which, not coincidentally, are also described in terms of 'a flame [that] leapt in her' (133). Crucially, this entails a reassessment of her mother Constantina's trauma-informed 'life lessons' and Ester's own response to them.⁵¹² Earlier in the novel, Ester reacts negatively against Constantina's flirtatious behaviour, her 'disobedience [that] sometimes took the form of coquetry' (123), because '[e]ven a girl like Mary, petty and vain, knew the dangers of risking her reputation' (122). Although Ester attempts to banish desire completely from her life—'It's a danger to a woman even to feel love' (186), she tells Mary—Kadish traces both Ester's and Constantina's sexual ethics to the trauma of the Inquisition. In the case of Constantina, her promiscuity is a response to her mother Lizabeta's decision not to tell Constantina's father, an Englishman who is later revealed to be

⁵¹⁰ Mathews, p. 163.

⁵¹¹ See pp. 178-180.

⁵¹² See p. 28.

Shakespeare, about the danger she and Constantina faced under the Inquisition so that he might rescue them. Lizabeta, who ‘wished not to trap her love into taking her’ as ‘a heart is a free thing, and once enslaved will mutiny’ (191), is perceived by Constantina as making a grave error in judgement, and, as a result, the latter ‘*learned from what befell [her] mother*’, explaining that ‘*I remade my heart. I learned to conduct myself in love so it could not betray me*’ (191). However, while Constantina pursues her sexual desires without love so as to protect herself from future traumas, Ester’s earlier interpretation of the lesson involves the full renunciation of *any* bodily desire, so as to avoid both the fate of Lizabeta and that of socially-derided, alcoholic Constantina. Yet, the crisis of the body enacted by the plague’s fever prompts Ester to reassert both the centrality of the body to lived experience, and also of life and vitality itself. Although ‘she’d thought she understood the world’, Kadish writes, ‘its very essence had been missing from her own philosophy. *The imperative [...] to live*’ (471). In a manner parallel to Spinoza’s notion of God-as-Nature, Ester concludes that

She’d been wrong to think the universe cold, and only the human heart driven by desire. The universe itself was built of naught but desire, and desire was its sole living god. [...] A fish or tree was no god; yet the craving that flickered or surged or pulsed within it was. (579)

Therefore, while fire destroys Ester’s childhood lifeworld, it also facilitates her intellectual curiosity, and later, in the form of fever, refines her philosophy into its mature form and reestablishes the connection between her body and mind that had been broken by societal gender roles. In this sense, Kadish’s fire symbolism conceptualises an idea of trauma that emphasises its nature as a form of rupture, whilst rejecting the idea of negative sequelae as exclusive and inherent.

Kadish also explores Ester’s second/third-generation ethical questioning in the context of Inquisition martyrdom and the treatment of the memory of victims and survivors, such as the rabbi. As with the descendants of survivors of the Holocaust, who, as noted in the introduction, tend to dispute images of idealised passivity applied to Holocaust survivors such as in the common metaphor ‘lambs to the slaughter’—indeed, Kadish herself, in an article for *Slate* entitled ‘On the Search for Victims Who Are Too Perfect to Be Us’, highlights the problematic idealisation of Holocaust survivors such as Anne Frank, which, she argues, undermines their humanity—so too does Ester challenge the concept of ‘the glory of the

martyrs' (82) spoken of in Amsterdam.⁵¹³ Central to this is the question of theism. Interactions with the rabbi, alongside traumatic encounters of her own, catalyse Ester's religious questioning. As a child, Ester begins to challenge the rabbi's teaching that '*[t]he saving of a life is equal in merit to the saving of the world*', prompting her to consider that 'if all worlds are equal, then each world the Jesuits murdered was equal to all God's others. How then could one be certain God's power was greater than that of the Jesuits?' (126). Yet, it is following personal encounters with two traumas associated with martyrdom—the rabbi, as a survivor of the Inquisition who was tortured for his faith, and Ester's brother, Isaac, who, after inadvertently starting the fire that killed their parents, explains to her that 'starting that fire, you see, was my function. That makes me evil [...] On my way out of this world, I'll do something. Something good. Like *Samson*' (74), thus finding meaning for his survival and guilt in religious text through an intention to martyr himself, like Samson, who famously brings down the pillars of a temple, killing himself along with the Philistines inside—that Ester's theistic challenge begins in earnest. With clear reference to the suffering of the rabbi, and his guilt at having possibly renounced God under torture, Ester questions '[w]hy [it is] a sin against God to wish for death—yet a virtue to choose to die in defense of God's word? Is life a token, valued only for the thing it's sacrificed for?' (438). The notion of God taught in her Judaic education she finds incompatible with its own application to the survivors of the Inquisition and other traumas; as she explains to Rivka, incredulous that the rabbi could feel he had 'failed God', '[a] God who would ask this of us can't be the same as gave us our wish to live' (462). Yet, Kadish describes how, '[e]ven when Ester could find in herself no belief in the God of the psalms or prayers, she believed in the holiness of Rabbi HaCoen Mendes's spirit' (351). In parallel with the third generation response to the Holocaust as explored throughout this thesis, Ester hence rejects idealised and religious interpretations of suffering, choosing instead to humanise the rabbi, revering him not as a symbol, but for his personal qualities such as compassion. Kadish thus suggests that what is 'hol[y]' is not his suffering, but his kind treatment of Ester and his other students.

Equally central to this reevaluation are the nuances inherent in the concept of survival, a theme which pervades *The Weight of Ink* and upon which Kadish provides a cacophony of different perspectives. From Constantina's enraged refusal to circumcise Isaac or to tolerate

⁵¹³ See p. 52; Rachel Kadish, 'On the Search for Victims Who Are Too Perfect to Be Us; Or, what I learned from my friendship with Helga Newmark and her friendship with Anne Frank', *Slate*, 12 June 2019
<<https://slate.com/human-interest/2019/06/anne-frank-helga-newmark-friendship-victim-perfection.html>> [Accessed 10 December 2021], n.p.

the Mahamad's decrees with the rebuff 'When my mother and I ran from Lisbon, we ran to save our lives. Not our *Jewish* lives. Our *lives*' (125) to the rabbi's guilt at having wished for death and possibly denied his God under the hands of the Inquisition, and even his later request for God's forgiveness for wishing Ester's life and health 'more fervently' than 'for [her] to change [her] conduct' (393) in pursuing dangerous philosophical questions; from Rivka's initial choice to die in 'holy martyrdom and the kindness of a death that did not compromise the soul' (460) rather than at the hands of the mob, to her later choice not to deny the baptism she receives to save her life; and even Ester's struggle between physical and intellectual survival; Kadish repeatedly explores the tensions between notions of faith, goodness, life, and survival. These questions, moreover, are still relevant in a contemporary context. Referencing her family history, she notes for example that

My own mother's family were law-abiding citizens in Poland until August 31, 1939. Then they bribed, lied, sneaked across borders. They were arrested and interrogated; they escaped and then broke rules again, until they became law-abiding citizens once more in the U.S. in 1942. We call that *surviving*.⁵¹⁴

The definitions of concepts such as goodness and survival, Kadish hence suggests, are not fixed.

The morals of life and sacrifice, and the slippage between them, are also issues that are questioned by Helen and Aaron in *The Weight of Ink*, and especially as a result of their historical investigations into Ester's life. Helen especially identifies strongly with Ester as a female intellectual in a patriarchal society. Notably, this issue is also echoed not only between the two women's timelines, but transhistorically by Wilton and his colleagues, who assert that

We can assume [...] that this young woman's [Ester's] own education had not prepared her for the learned discourse to which she had access in the household of Rabbi HaCoen Mendes. The pronouncements she makes in the inverted text are most likely a blend of her own thoughts and fragments overheard in the rabbi's conversation. Given the disjointed nature of the inverted text, it also seems possible that she was merely copying out lines from a poem or other source unknown to the modern reader. (339)

⁵¹⁴ Kadish, 'Writing the Lives of Forgotten Women', n.p. Emphasis added.

This erroneous assumption, in addition to reflecting the ongoing issue of gender discrimination in academia, mirrors Helen's own dismissive treatment in her workplace, such as a male colleague's deliberate reference to her as a 'woman' rather than 'scholar' as an attempt to patronise her and 'erode the pilings on which she stood' (243), or Wilton's discussion of the size of the female staff's brassieres (244) rather than their work. Furthermore, Helen similarly grapples with the seeming incompatibility between her scholarly and bodily desires. Particularly resonant is her history with Dror, and especially the end of their relationship following Dror's attempts to have Helen understand the dangers that have been faced by the Jewish people throughout history. Although Helen initially finds solace in the Richmond documents against her 'confusion' (446) surrounding desire, stimulated by witnessing the sexual tension between Aaron and the married owner of the Richmond house, ultimately, her 'energies trying to redeem Ester Velasquez's fate—believing fervently in some hidden truth that would upend the story of another woman's life' leads her to understand that 'she'd failed to look for the same in her own' (452); by leaving Dror and the love they shared, '[s]he'd wasted her life' (453). Helen thus comes to a realisation that parallels Ester's regarding the virtues of desire.

Moreover, although Kadish depicts a similar tension between safety and freedom for both women, Helen's choice to end her relationship with Dror resonates with a second historical context: the siege of Masada in the year 73, wherein around 960 Jewish defenders of the plateau's fortress died by mass suicide rather than be captured and killed at the hands of the Romans. The sketch of Masada Helen keeps in her office as a reminder, therefore, symbolises '[a] stark choice. Self-immolation or slavery. Freedom or life, but not both' (218). Hence, once again the concept of survival is, in a sense, bifurcated, distinguishing between physical and psychic survival. The martyrdom at Masada, Kadish suggests, represents literal and psychological freedom at the expense of the biological lives and safety of the defenders, a choice that is faced in different ways by both Ester and Helen also. In the case of Helen, she chooses physical survival—explicitly linking her separation from Dror to Masada, she explains to Aaron that she chose as she did because, 'if we had been there, he would have cut my throat' (218)—a choice which privileges her safety from the dangers of which Dror warned her over their intimacy, and one which Kadish reveals that she later regrets. Therefore, in addition to highlighting consistencies in gender-based issues across history, and particularly the bifurcated reality experienced by women in patriarchal society, Kadish, through Helen's contextualisation and recontextualisation of her choices via Masada and Ester, considers the

ways in which the historical past can resonate with and influence the present. It is because of such transhistorical identification, Kadish suggests, that Helen refines her own position on the necessity of sacrifice, and, as her final act, writes a letter to the now-deceased Dror in which, in echo of Ester's own confession, she can 'exist unsundered' (558), laying honest claim to her love for him.⁵¹⁵ The use of Ester's words in a new context acts not only as an instance of historical intertextuality, but as an affirmation of empathic identification across the temporal gulf, creating a sense of unity and continuity of human subjectivities that spans centuries. History in this sense can be understood not as a simple curation of facts, but as an interpersonal and social project that has ramifications on our self-conception and society today.

Kadish depicts Aaron as undergoing a similar reinterpretation of the meaning of history via historical encounters with Ester. His initial arrogance and naïve romanticisation of the past—his doctoral project, for example, ambitiously seeks to investigate possible connections between Shakespeare and the Jewish Inquisition refugees in London, while history itself is described in terms of divinity, as a 'god' (546)—is challenged by the complicated ethics of Ester's struggle for survival and freedom, as well as by his interactions with Marisa. Early in the narrative, Aaron writes to Marisa with the assertion that '[i]f we looked through the eyes of history, we'd live differently. We'd live right' (95), which she immediately counters with, 'If I looked through the eyes of history, I wouldn't want to live' (95). This tension between perspectives on the past marked by reverence and pessimism, Kadish implies, is strongly implicated in the holder's relationship with history. This is something that is also reflected in Marisa's criticism of Jewish American culture:

'American Jews are naive. They don't want memory, or history that might make them uncomfortable, they just want to be liked. Being liked is their... *sugar rush*.' She sat back, lifting away her hand. The ghost of its warmth remained on Aaron's skin. 'American Jews are addicted to sugar,' she pronounced, '*and* to being liked.' (94-95)

Marisa's view of American Jewishness is an example of K. Anthony Appiah and Amy Gutmann's concept of recreational ethnicity, in which the identity can be treated in a manner similar to other aspects of personality, such as hobbies or music taste, and can be displayed or

⁵¹⁵ The line, 'Let there be one place in which I exist unsundered. This page' is repeated verbatim from one of Ester's documents (307).

muted at will.⁵¹⁶ Although for Appiah and Gutmann such a possibility facilitates an ethical conceptualisation of racial identity that avoids a certain insularising ‘imperialism of identity’ existent in collective identities deemed to be essential, Banerjee, drawing upon the work of Matthew Frye Jacobson, argues that recreational identity can be misappropriated, particularly by white groups, to disavow their own white privilege by claiming participation in a nondominant (and often historically oppressed) minority, such as Irish or Jewish ancestry.⁵¹⁷ Similarly, the crux of Marisa’s argument in *The Weight of Ink* is that the Jewishness of American Jewishness, in its mutability, allows the American Jewish individual to maintain a similarly recreational relationship with history, something which is contrasted with her own third-generation transmitted Holocaust burden: Aaron, unlike Marisa, can treat history as a depersonalised (and romanticisable) object of curiosity, whilst avoiding its ‘uncomfortable’ truths. His consumption of history, as implied in Marisa’s charge of sugar addiction, is unenriched and devoid of nutrition, lacking both the human element of history familiar to those invested in their familial past, and the ethical obligations that ensue. In this respect, this depiction by Kadish of a third-generation perspective as perceived through the lens of a non-Holocaust descended Jewish American creates an interesting subversion of stereotypical expectations: it is Aaron who is focused on the past to the exclusion of the present, in which he acts according to the expectations of his social role rather than his ethical principles, leading to disatisfying encounters such as his sleeping with the owner of the Richmond house as the expected result of their flirtation, and Marisa who approaches present life with an ‘unsettling directness’ (379). Contrary to the image of the third generation held by Aaron—‘dutiful girls, many bearing the names of lost cousins or aunts whose ashes had been blown all over Europe; perpetual A students who repeated the stories of their families verbatim, lest a detail be lost’ (89-90)—Marisa is interested not in her relationship with the past but to the present, where, provoked by her survivor grandmother’s hypocritical bystander response to her brother’s depression and implied subjection to homophobic discrimination and abuse, she wishes only ‘to be with people who know what they care about and aren’t afraid to say so’ (92), a desire with a clear ethical impetus towards action rather than passivity; in other words, a relationship with the past that obligates an attentiveness and disposition towards advocacy for social change in the present.

⁵¹⁶ K. Anthony Appiah and Amy Gutmann, *Color Conscious: The Political Morality of Race* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), p. 103.

⁵¹⁷ Ibid, p. 103; Banerjee, pp. 153-155.

Interestingly, it is following Aaron's investigations into and investment in Ester's life, a process which in many ways parallels third-generation inquiries into the past, that he begins to understand Marisa's criticism of him and is inspired to realise the ethical obligations he has to the unborn child conceived with her. Integral to this is his increased understanding of the complexities of Ester's context and choices, such as those highlighted by Helen regarding the caution of London's Jewish community and her later admonishment that Ester, living and writing during a time when '[l]ife was strewn with terrors, and the worst were reserved for atheists [...] could not [...] have been *nice*' (421). Importantly, this understanding is supplemented by a sense of empathic identification and the social obligations of testimony. While at first, like Helen, who '*needed Ester's voice to endure[i]n order to believe that she herself could*' (445), Aaron had '*been counting on Ester's story not to fizzle out in some trivial, humdrum ending*' (374), seeking to uncover '*some triumphal parade showcasing the very qualities Aaron wished to see in his own reflection*' (374), Aaron later realises he must '*listen to what Ester was actually saying, rather than what he wanted her to say*' (414). This shift from a projection of the academics' agendas onto Ester to an openness to her own not only better reflects Laub's prescriptions on the subject of testimony, but also represents Landsberg's definition of empathy, which is constructed not of an '*essentialism of identification*', as in Aaron's quest to see himself reflected in Ester, but in '*the alterity of identification*', creating a context for engagement that does not impose a desirable (and therefore inherently non-actionable) interpretation onto the past (and Ester), but facilitates the utilisation of Aaron's identification with Ester as basis to critically reassess his own life choices and circumstances.⁵¹⁸ Like Marisa, in humanising and individualising history, Aaron develops a better awareness of his social obligations, of the necessity of directly confronting one's present, and, allegorically, Shakespeare. Progressing from his initial position, where '*he didn't understand *The Tempest* at all, because he couldn't honestly believe Prospero's relinquishment of his magical powers*' (200); nor Sonnet 71—whose lines '*Nay, if you read this line, remember not | The hand that writ it*' provides the epigraph to *The Weight of Ink*—prompts him to ask '*Wasn't love, by definition, the wish to be remembered?*' as '*[n]owhere in Aaron's notion of love was there anything remotely resembling the willingness to erase himself for the sake of the other's ease*' (295-296), Aaron, gaining understanding of Ester's own motives to have her own authorial hand forgotten, and the value of sacrifice more generally, symbolically abandons his hubristic academic goals for his Shakespeare

⁵¹⁸ See pp. 47-48.

dissertation, instead resolving to ‘before all else give Ester Velasquez her due’ (554), publish the first paper on her life with the now-deceased Helen’s name as first author with ‘his name trailing hers on the byline’ (555), and finally to sell Ester’s documents at a fair price so as to ensure the comfort of Marisa and the baby in Israel, with or without his own presence.

History, Kadish thus suggests, is neither alien nor separable from the present, and, most importantly, is a site of human empathic identification. Both within and outwith *The Weight of Ink*, Kadish’s strata of human history demonstrate not only the timelessness of issues of the nature of the self and one’s obligations to one’s community (and indeed, the obligations of the community to the individual), but to a more important continuity: that of the humanity shared by people throughout history, their emotional subjectivities, and the common themes of love, loss, trauma, and sacrifice. By rehumanising and recontextualising history, Kadish considers not our obligations to the past, but to the future, and the ways in which the two are intertwined. Ester’s story, and the ways in which it resonates with the two contemporary academics, invites both scrutiny of the past and those aspects of its study deemed unassailable, such as the truth, and indeed very presence of, the historical record, and of one’s present and future circumstances, which, too, constitute history in motion. As Aaron, reflecting on his maturation of perspective in *The Weight of Ink*, muses,

He’d always pitied those ensnared in the time periods he studied—people captured in resin, their fates sealed by their inability to see what was coming. The greatest curse, he’d thought, was to be stuck in one’s own time—and the greatest power was to see beyond its horizons. Studying history had given him the illusion of observing safely from outside the trap. Only that’s what the world *was*: a trap. The circumstances you were born to, the situations you found yourself in—to dodge that fray was impossible. And what you did within it was your life. (546-547)

By reconsidering the present day as part of an ongoing historical narrative rather than an island from which the past can be viewed objectively, Kadish not only humanises the past, but re-subjectifies the historian. History, she suggests, provides but the illusion of omniscience, that a sense of inevitability is a function of retrospective interpretation or, as Hutcheon and White would argue, as part of history as a specific narrative composition. This is not only pertinent within the pages of *The Weight of Ink* or in the writing of the novel, but in the ongoing writing of history of which the novel is inherently part; reading the novel shortly

after its publication in 2017, for example, furnishes a reader with even a limited knowledge of seventeenth-century English history with a sense of impending doom when at first Kadish mentions obliquely ‘some sickness’ that ‘lately shadows this London’ (314), progressing to a point where ‘every soul [was] afraid of every other’ (386), the streets are emptied, and conspiracy theories are prolific as the plague spreads. Yet, reading these passages again after the events of 2020 creates eerie new resonances; for many, the COVID-19 pandemic arrived on the horizons equally quietly, equally innocuously, and caught us equally unprepared. Such resonance, as with the strata of history depicted by Kadish in *The Weight of Ink*, invites us to turn our attention not just to what history means *for* the present day, but what it means *to* the present day. From the lessons the academics learn from their studying of Ester’s history to the debates that ensue regarding to whom that history belongs, history, Kadish suggests in *The Weight of Ink*, must be considered as much in terms of what is being created as has been created.

Summary

This chapter has examined the interactions between individual, transgenerational, and cultural traumas in *From a Sealed Room* and *The Weight of Ink*. With reference not only to specifics of the trauma theory of the introduction such as PTSD symptomatology, the mechanisms by which trauma may be transmitted transgenerationally by parenting and the communication of ‘life lessons’, and a sensitivity to the processes employed in forming cultural and historical narratives, I have explored how Kadish also incorporates these singular elements into a more complex image of trauma and its transmission. Especially notable in this regard are her depiction of the IDF as both the product and cause of trauma for two young Israelis in *From a Sealed Room*, and her multifaceted use of fire imagery in *The Weight of Ink*, which recalls Ester’s personal trauma; a traumatic ‘life lesson’ learned from her traumatised mother; a cultural trauma to which she is party; and the possibility for posttraumatic growth. Most prominently, however, both texts consider the ways in which history resonates with present-day concerns, including Maya’s taking of inspiration from Shifra’s enigmatic history to apply to her own traumatogenic circumstances in *From a Sealed Room*, and Helen and Aaron’s empathic identification with Ester in *The Weight of Ink*. In addition to the clear relevance to the third generation’s close relationship with history, this aspect of the texts also provides an increasingly urgent ethical thrust, not only facilitating Kadish’s investigation of contemporary socio-political issues, such as misogyny and how it is an inherent part of the

historical record in its current form, but, concomitantly, in redirecting the focus from the past onto present action.

Conclusion

A Tapestry of History and Trauma: Cut Threads, Loose Strings, a New Cloth

Just as the very nature, and bounds, of trauma is a contentious subject, so too is the question of trauma literature. As intimated in the introduction, critics such as Gibbs have argued that trauma literature has become subject to certain generic conventions so as to become formulaic and easily replicable, part of a reciprocal interaction with dominant trauma theory that forms a ‘vicious circle [...] whereby dominant theoretical models inspire works of fiction which are then taken to endorse and therefore somehow prove the theory’s validity.’⁵¹⁹ Despite an important ethical impetus to protect the distinction between genuine traumatised persons and mercenary representation, Gibbs’s analysis does not take into account, firstly, that any sound trauma theory must incorporate information regarding the lived experience of trauma—something which, it must be noted, is in itself extremely multifarious—and secondly, that the slippages and intersections between different types of trauma, such as the direct, transgenerational, and cultural (an initial, rather than final, model of distinction) affect the ways in which trauma is experienced, which helps illuminate some of those aspects of trauma representation deemed problematic by Gibbs.⁵²⁰ This is something that, in this thesis, I have explicitly sought to rectify. It is undeniable that the commodification and aestheticisation of trauma, which, when performed in a reductive and exploitative manner wherein commercial or social capital effaces understanding of and sensitivity to the actual experience of trauma, is profoundly detrimental to those for whom it is a lived reality. Yet, the question arises, in a culture rife with narratives of trauma, of how we approach each emerging narrative. Do we regard it with suspicion or openness? Does protecting one type of narrative occlude another? In what ways are our responses to trauma narratives influenced by the culture in which we live, which, as many emerging movements such as #MeToo, Black Lives Matter, and LGBT+ activism attest, has historically ignored the experiences and testimony of those they represent? Who has the authority to write on trauma? Who has the

⁵¹⁹ See pp. 61-62; Gibbs, p. 153.

⁵²⁰ Consider, for example, Gibbs’s argument, highlighted on p. 96 of this thesis, that Oskar of *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* is part of a simplistic ‘collective’ trauma surrounding 9/11, rather than noting his personal traumatised through close family connection and the transgenerational impacts of his grandparents’ trauma.

authority to critically evaluate a trauma narrative? The ethics of reading and writing a body of literature which overlaps as it does with a reality with significant medical and social ramifications is complex, and requires a variety of different responses. An experience as complex as trauma demands an equally complex body of literary representation and criticism, that must, I would argue, as yet be fundamentally expansive rather than reductive or prescriptive, working in tandem with advancing research in psychological, psychiatric, neuroscientific, and sociological fields—and, of course, most importantly, with those affected by trauma themselves. By no means conclusive, this thesis provides but one participatory voice in such an ongoing dialogue, as we seek to collectively probe these questions.

A similar situation arises with regard to literatures of the transgenerational transmission of trauma, or, to a lesser extent, cultural traumas. I have already noted Finkelkraut's objection to second generation claims of trauma in general in the introduction, but other critics, such as Sarah Dowling, have likewise found issue with depictions of trauma in literature that are specifically related to transgenerational trauma.⁵²¹ In particular, in her article 'The human hole', for example, Dowling criticises Foer's first two novels for

treat[ing] trauma as an unavoidable, even defining, aspect of being, which undermines the practical imperative to 'work through' trauma espoused by most trauma theorists. No reconstitution of self-knowledge is possible if all structures of knowledge are deemed essentially fragmented. Instead, Foer's novels advance a challenging philosophy of 'living with' inexorable trauma.⁵²²

While, again, expressing an important concern in the treatment of trauma as irrevocable, especially with regard to the ramifications on those living with trauma, Dowling's charge that Foer's depiction of transgenerational trauma 'confus[es] trans-historical absence with historical loss' and therefore does not adequately potentiate the possibility of healing does not account for two important points of consideration: the third generation experience of history, and the future possibilities that arise from it.⁵²³ Although it is true in an objective sense that the trauma of the Holocaust constitutes a loss rather than an absence, for the third generation descendant, like those writers considered in this thesis, the loss, occurring prior to their birth, is not experienced *as a loss* but as a preexisting absence. The fact of the loss, in this way, does

⁵²¹ See p. 32.

⁵²² Sarah Dowling, 'The human hole: Problematic representations of trauma in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Everything is illuminated* and *Extremely loud and incredibly close*,' *TEXT*, 42 (2017), 1-12 (p. 2).

⁵²³ *Ibid*, p. 2.

not alter the experience of it as an absence, or rather as an *absent presence*. The unknown (and indeed ultimately unknowable) histories depicted in their novels represent the kind of oblique, fragmented sense of family history commonly experienced by the third generation and which cannot be ‘healed’ in a manner parallel to individual trauma; and nor can the absences be resolved when there is a lack of testimony (due to silence or death) or sufficient documentary evidence. This situation is all the more complex when combined with direct and cultural traumas; that is, to consider trauma across a broader spectrum than the singular segments adopted by some critics. To adapt Ramadanovic’s aporia, *each trauma is a singular trauma; there is no singular trauma*.⁵²⁴ This thesis, therefore, has made an important contribution to literary studies on trauma, both by developing an appropriately nuanced account of trauma that incorporates this multifaceted nature, and by exploring its complexities in the work of the third generation, which I shall summarise below.

The traumas evoked in the novels considered in this thesis are multifaceted, and reflect the nuances of intersecting personal, transgenerational, and cultural traumas. As members of the third generation, Foer, Krauss, and Kadish imbue their work with concerns both related to trauma itself and the significance of history on the present. In addition to the use of experimental styles of language by all three writers to reflect the experience of trauma in its representation—including fragmentary sentences that mirror the disjointed, somatosensory nature of traumatic memory, a disrupted chronology that represents the nonlinearity of posttraumatic experience, and the use of metaphor or symbolism to avoid inadequate, direct representation—equally significant are the ways in which these traumas are *not* represented, particularly in the context of historical absences and the effects on the third generation. While at times Foer depicts these narrative absences explicitly, through, for example, the use of blank space or ellipses in place of words, or the blanking/blackening of the grandparents’ narratives in *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*, he also blends fact and fiction to clearly highlight the role of invention in the reconstruction of the past, such as through the use of magical realism in the narration of the history of Trachimbrod in *Everything is Illuminated*. Krauss’s blend of fact and fiction goes even further. Like Alex and Jonathan’s dialogue regarding representation and truth in *Everything is Illuminated*, Krauss’s writer-character Leo in *The History of Love* constantly negotiates the most effective methods of representing truth—and, incidentally, also makes use of magical realism to do so—while the overall structure of the novel, and especially the narration of the chapters regarding Litvinoff, casts

⁵²⁴ Ramadanovic, n.p.

ambiguity over the actual extent of Leo's invention, and, by extension, the absence from which it originates. Krauss's autofictional novel *Forest Dark* generates a similar ambiguity, blending publicly-known elements of Krauss's life with Kafkaesque magical realism that destabilises the hegemony of commonly accepted—and indeed, knowable—reality. Kadish, meanwhile, provides an explicit meditation on gaps in the historical record in *The Weight of Ink*, both structural and incidental, and all three make use of translation as a metaphor for the (in)ability to verbalise different (and traumatic) realities.

Such interplay between the absence and presence of historical traces, as a key component of postmemorial work, is thus central to the novels of all three writers. In addition to a focus on uncovering the past, such as via the typical transgenerational 'quests' centred on unlocking or redeeming this history, including Jonathan's roots trip in *Everything is Illuminated*, Alma's search for her namesake in *The History of Love*, and Shifra's task of salvation imparted to Maya in *From a Sealed Room*, Foer, Krauss, and Kadish all highlight the roles of different objects (or traces) in the (re)construction of the past, from collections and archives such as those owned by Lista (*Everything is Illuminated*), Bruno (*The History of Love*), and Shifra (*From a Sealed Room*), to the objectification of history through single items such as the desk in *Great House* or the cache of documents in *The Weight of Ink*. The formation of a historical narrative around these objects highlights the postmodern understanding of history as constructed rather than found, which is exhibited in the novels through varying levels of invention; from the completely fantastic history of Trachimbrod in *Everything is Illuminated* to the fairly accurate reconstruction of Ester's life in *The Weight of Ink*, albeit shaped by the subjective interest of the historian characters. In other instances, the histories associated with the objects lapse into almost complete obscurity, such as the various experiences of the owners of Weisz's desk in *Great House*, drawing attention to narrative absences rather than filling them, and leaving a fundamental sense of incompleteness. This incompleteness, furthermore, is something that frequently stands at odds with cultural trauma narratives, which, in their collective focus, neglect individual stories. Often deployed for political reasons, they are interested in a sense of completeness; a familiar story with heroes, villains, and a moral lesson. Such narratives surrounding Israel, and especially with regard to the Holocaust, are considered at times by all three writers (*Here I Am*, *Forest Dark*, *From a Sealed Room*) as they interrogate the boundaries between a response to genuine trauma and its weaponisation.

However, personal, transgenerational, and cultural traumas are not fundamentally discrete, and all three writers are concerned with the ways in which they overlap and intersect.

As a notable formal example, the disrupted chronology of trauma translates into a disrupted chronology of history for the third generation, in which the Holocaust past, occurring before their births, maintains a strong presence in the present; something that is often reflected in the narrative structures of each of the novels. Moreover, just as traumas of the past impact on the present, so too are the junctures between transgenerational and cultural traumas, or cultural and individual traumas, ambiguous. While in *Everything is Illuminated* Foer includes the cultural trauma of the Soviet era as a shaping force on the Perchov family trauma, he depicts the silence of Oskar's traumatised grandparents in *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* as a compounding issue on Oskar's 9/11 trauma, for which he resultantly has no analogue, and which is itself influenced in nature by the cultural trauma of the attacks, influencing the highly visual nature of his experience of the trauma. Both Foer and Krauss in *Here I Am* and *Forest Dark* respectively consider the tension between cultural traumas and the individual; Foer highlights the process of the creation of cultural trauma narratives in the imagined destruction of Israel, and the ways in which they resonate and interact with personal issues such as divorce or transgenerational burdens, while Krauss explores the impacts of cultural expectations—particularly pertaining to the cultural coopting of (transmitted) Holocaust trauma—on author Nicole's writing, to the exclusion of other traumas that she considers more significant. Kadish's *The Weight of Ink* uses fire imagery to connect the traumas of the Inquisition (including the transgenerational lessons passed down from Ester's mother and grandmother) with Ester's personal trauma, while *From a Sealed Room* provides perhaps the most complex picture of the intersections between personal, transgenerational, and cultural traumas, such as, notably, the role of the IDF in Israeli culture as both a product and a cause of personal and cultural traumas.

The highly nuanced picture of trauma created by Foer, Krauss, and Kadish is, furthermore, also a fertile location for the exploration of different ethical concerns. The most obvious of these is a consideration of the ethics of trauma and Holocaust representation. While such debates are considered most explicitly by Krauss's writer-characters and Alex and Jonathan of *Everything is Illuminated*, all three writers experiment with different aspects pertaining to representation, such as the representation of Holocaust survivors themselves (with only Krauss and Kadish writing Holocaust survivor subjectivities to an extensive degree in *The History of Love* and *From a Sealed Room* respectively), the use of humour in representation (especially in *Everything is Illuminated* and *The History of Love*), and the contextualisation of the Holocaust in cultural narratives. Foer approaches this latter concern primarily through the creation of a balanced history that includes the perspectives and trauma

of the perpetrators in cultural trauma narratives, such as Eli of *Everything is Illuminated* and the grandparents of *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*. Krauss also contextualises the trauma of the Holocaust with global traumas, including, notably, the traumas of political turmoil and oppression in Latin America via *The History of Love* and *Great House*. The connections she draws between these experiences undermine the idea of the Holocaust as a completely unique trauma, and creates a sense of empathy across nations and cultures. Kadish similarly draws parallels between the Holocaust and other traumas, but historically, such as through the transhistorical similarities between the Inquisition refugee community in the seventeenth century and the Holocaust refugees of the twentieth, and the continuity of social issues such as misogyny into the present.

These ethical concerns are all indicative of the fact that, despite Dowling's concern that a focus on irrevocable historical absence does not allow for working through trauma as such, 'living with' trauma does not imply a kind of nihilistic stasis. Rather, the horrors of the past, as a haunting presence today, provides a challenge to contemporary and future issues. Just as the third generation challenge the depiction of Holocaust victims and survivors as pitiful or symbols of glorious martyrdom, restoring instead a sense of compassionate humanity—that is, agentic and flawed—so too have they asked, such as in *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*, how those affected by recent tragedies like 9/11 are represented in public discourse, and the distance between national/cultural entities and the people of whom it is comprised. Even more relevant to current events are Krauss and Kadish's focus on the systemic oppression of marginalised groups. The recontextualisation of the Holocaust provided in *Great House* and *From a Sealed Room* in particular highlight the (post-)dictatorship issues ongoing in Chile (and, by extension, the dangers of growing fascism in any society), and the effects of systemic racial oppression in the US. Both writers also recentre the experience of women and women's traumas in their narrative; in addition to highlighting the perseverance of several manifestations of sexism over several centuries in *The Weight of Ink*, Kadish draws attention to the issue of IPV (of which, statistically, most targets are women) in *From a Sealed Room*, and Krauss uses *Forest Dark* to centre traumatic experiences centred on the female body, such as childbirth. Another contemporaneous issue to which all three writers turn is that of the socio-political complexities surrounding Israel, its ideological status as a Jewish homeland, its use of the Holocaust as part of its foundational narrative, and its oppressive treatment of Palestinians. Although no definitive answers are given, the writers experiment with different perspectives on Jewish American relationships with Israel and its often uncomfortable and conflicting ideologies.

‘Living with’ trauma, therefore, does not entail succumbing to despair or a symbolic interpretation of the world as an inherently, and irrevocably, malignant place. Rather than working through and resolving the traumas of the past, it elicits questioning of what it means to live in a world after such trauma, and what obligations are conferred towards it and ourselves.

In fact, this future focus is something that goes beyond the texts I have explored in this thesis. Foer, in addition to his three novels, has written two works of nonfiction, *Eating Animals* (2009) and *We Are the Weather: Saving the Planet Begins at Breakfast* (2019), which are concerned with the problematic ethics of animal agriculture and the climate crisis respectively. Yet, Foer’s argument in each is underpinned by storytelling—that is, the process of constructing a narrative—and his family’s Holocaust history. In *Eating Animals*, he includes autobiographical references to his relationship with his grandmother in terms of food choices, such as her ‘singular’ dish of chicken and carrots, which is both an expression of love for her grandchildren and reflective of anxieties surrounding food scarcity and health stemming from her Holocaust experience. In choosing vegetarianism in response to the innumerable ethical problems of factory farming, Foer muses, both he and his children will be deprived of ‘that unique and most direct expression of her love’.⁵²⁵ Yet, his eventual inclination towards vegetarianism also arises from attention to his family’s Holocaust history. In a second instance, he recounts an incident in his grandmother’s flight across Europe in which, despite nearly starving, she refused to eat a piece of pork to save her life, explaining that ‘[i]f nothing matters, there’s nothing to save.’⁵²⁶ This philosophy, he later argues, can be applied to more conscious eating habits in the era of factory farming, adding an extra layer of ‘deliberateness’ to family gatherings and meals, with the result that ‘tradition [is]n’t compromised so much as fulfilled.’⁵²⁷ In other words, Foer uses the philosophical lessons learned from his grandmother’s Holocaust trauma to form the basis of an ethical consciousness appropriate to contemporary America. He takes a similar approach in *We Are the Weather*, which is also concerned with animal agriculture as one of the leading causes of climate change, itself the biggest threat to life of our era. In addition to contextualising the kind of possible destruction faced by unmitigated global warming with the Holocaust—a strategy taken by other prominent and accessible writers of the climate crisis, such as David Wallace-Wells in *The Uninhabitable Earth*—Foer considers the conflicting need and

⁵²⁵ Jonathan Safran Foer, *Eating Animals* (London: Penguin, 2010), p. 15.

⁵²⁶ *Ibid*, p. 17.

⁵²⁷ *Ibid*, p. 195.

reluctance for action, once again, in terms of his family's stories. He narrates, for example, his 'daydream' of 'going from house to house in my grandmother's shtetl, grabbing the faces of those who would stay', and therefore, in factual history, be murdered by the Nazis, 'and screaming, "You have to do something!"'; a desire which he then relates to his imagined descendants' responses to our present-day inaction regarding the threat of climate disaster.⁵²⁸ The subtext of this well-researched argument is, therefore, that knowledge of past traumas can be used to reflect on our current, precarious situation, via imagining, in a sense, the descendants of the traumas of today, and our obligations towards them.

Krauss, since publishing *Forest Dark*, has taken two notable directions with her work. Her appointment in 2020 to the Zuckerman Institute at Columbia University heralds the furthering of her interest in the neuroscientific underpinnings of memory. At the Institute, which facilitates cross-disciplinary studies and interactions between scientists and writers, she has examined the intersection between narrative and memory. Such an interest not only builds upon this thread preexistent in her work, including the science-fiction experiments with memory plotted in her first novel—the inspiration for which she attributes to neurologist Oliver Sacks—and the mirroring of trauma and dementia in *Great House*, but also the necessary and timely interdisciplinary work between humanities and scientific disciplines.⁵²⁹ More than simply combining disciplines on the subject of memory, and thereby furthering knowledge in the field that will be of obvious benefit to the public, her residence in the Institute effected a transformation of her understanding of memory: while she describes always having understood memory as 'a creative act', she previously considered this in terms of 'something that serves our pasts, something that creatively meets our need to create coherence from our pasts.' However, conversation with neuroscientists engendered the realisation that 'memory is first and foremost a tool for predicting the future', for 'prepar[ing] for the future,' or 'want[ing] a different future.'⁵³⁰ This shift in perspective is also evident in her most recent publication, *To Be a Man*, which arises from her questioning surrounding, in the wake of #MeToo, 'what it is to be the mother of two boys and what it means to raise those boys into men in the context of this moment where the idea of manhood is so beleaguered and

⁵²⁸ Jonathan Safran Foer, *We are the Weather: Saving the Planet Begins at Breakfast* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2019), p. 23.

⁵²⁹ Daphna Shohamy, 'Novelist Nicole Krauss Explores 12 Questions with Brain Scientists', *Columbia University*, 10 June 2021
<<https://zuckermaninstitute.columbia.edu/novelist-nicole-krauss-explores-12-questions-brain-scientists>> [Accessed 9 June 2022], n.p.

⁵³⁰ Ibid.

problematic and complex.’⁵³¹ The collection of short stories, and especially the titular ‘To Be a Man’, makes use of past experience, including her family Holocaust heritage and the issue of misogyny as explored in her previous work, to consider the complex nature, and ethical implications, of different concepts of masculinity. Traversing some familiar contexts, such as Nazi-controlled Europe and contemporary Israel, Krauss considers the dichotomy of violence and tenderness demanded of masculinities as refracted through multiple identities—son, father, soldier, citizen, friend, lover—with the intention of ‘not trying to necessarily resolve these paradoxes, but at least opening them up a little’.⁵³² In other words, paralleling the shift from ‘working through’ to ‘living with’ different forms of trauma, she treats the contradictory and competing elements of masculinity not as a problem to be solved, but to be better understood as a lived reality, contrary to the ‘necessary narrowness’ of gender relations as portrayed by movements such as #MeToo, which must, by nature, ‘simplify in order to be effective’.⁵³³

Finally, congruous with Herman’s chronological mapping of interest in trauma studies, which highlights the main waves of focus from hysteria to war neuroses, and, most recently, gender-based violence, Kadish is interested in the private experiences of women amidst other contemporary and traumatic contexts.⁵³⁴ Her feminist focus is apparent throughout her oeuvre, such as her depiction of professor of English literature Tracy as she works to reconcile her feminist principles with her romantic relationship with rather traditional and conservative George in *Tolstoy Lied*, but, as I have explored in Chapter Three of this thesis, also with regard to women’s traumas and gender-based violence. The relationship between Maya and Gil in *From a Sealed Room*, beyond exploring the impacts of personal and cultural traumas on relationships, constitutes an intimate portrait of the interiority of a woman in an abusive relationship. Here, Kadish highlights the effects of psychological manipulation and the ways in which these facilitate the escalation of the abuse and increase the reluctance of the abused to leave the relationship: Maya begins to think that she is ‘crazy’ (200), notes ‘how long it had been since [she]’d joked in the privacy of [her] mind’ (201-202), but assures herself that Gil is

⁵³¹ Alex Preston, ‘Nicole Krauss: “The idea of manhood is so beleaguered”’, *Guardian*, 24 October 2020

<<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2020/oct/24/nicole-krauss-the-idea-of-manhood-is-so-beleaguered>> [Accessed 5 November 2021], n.p.

⁵³² Jonathan Bastian, “‘Manhood has never been more beleaguered or more challenged’ says author Nicole Krauss”, *KCRW*, 28 November 2020

<<https://www.kcrw.com/culture/shows/life-examined/nicole-krauss-interview-to-be-a-man>> [Accessed 9 June 2022], n.p.

⁵³³ Ibid.

⁵³⁴ Herman, p. 9.

not at fault, that '[n]o one else would love [her] enough to forgive [her]' (158) for relatively minor grievances such as calling him selfish, and even begins to disdain her potential support network, observing that '[a]t least Gil doesn't look at me with that insulting pity, erasing anything about me that's worthwhile. Gil knows who I am, he knows exactly how weak and uncertain, and he wants to be with me all the same' (295). External manipulation of a woman's trauma is also a focal point in Kadish's novella, *I Was Here* (2014), in which the trauma of Charlotte Cooper's rape as a child is concealed by the community so as not to be disruptive or to damage her 'so far [...] clean reputation'.⁵³⁵ This process of victim-blaming, also echoed in Officer Mulley's anger towards 'victims [who] didn't stand up for themselves', draws attention to the systemic misogyny that contributes to the silencing of women's trauma, also noted by Herman, as women are denied the status of a valid traumatised subjectivity.⁵³⁶ Moreover, Kadish's depiction of Charlotte integrates the correlation, observed by Root, between sexual trauma and disordered eating: Charlotte's body, as the site of the violence enacted against her, is implicated in the acting out of her trauma, as '[h]er fat [...] served to hide the girl she'd been', functioning, in the words of Root, as 'a retreat into safety'.⁵³⁷ Thus, productive connections between different mental health issues in marginalised groups are explored; a field of enquiry that, like Kadish's exploration of the psyche of abused women, is of great importance to understanding the ways in which larger socio-political issues are structured and manifest in individual realities.

If, as Barber claims, we do indeed live in an 'Age of Trauma', the traumas with which we live are multifaceted, intersectional, and nuanced.⁵³⁸ Although I have attempted to unpack some of the complexities in this thesis with regard to three American third generation writers, there are, of course, innumerable further fields of enquiry. Cultural representations of trauma and its transmission, in this period of heightened awareness regarding relevant subjects such as mental health and historical inheritance, are both copious, rich, and diverse, emerging everywhere from literary fiction (for example, Yaa Gyasi's 2016 exploration of the historical resonances of slavery in Ghana in *Homegoing*) to popular culture, such as Disney's 2021 release of *Encanto*. Yet, there is one particular context that is especially important to the work conducted in this thesis: the legacy of the Holocaust from the German perspective. Although the main body of work regarding trauma and the Holocaust has been centred on victims and

⁵³⁵ Rachel Kadish, *I Was Here* (Fancy Sisters Press, 2014). Kindle Ebook, loc. 85.

⁵³⁶ Ibid, loc. 159; Herman p. 8.

⁵³⁷ Maria P. P. Root, 'Persistent, Disordered Eating as a Gender-Specific, Post-Traumatic Stress Response to Sexual Assault', *Psychotherapy*, 28:1 (1991), 96-102 (p. 100); Kadish, *I Was Here*, loc. 1159.

⁵³⁸ Barber, n.p.

survivors, research by people such as Bar-On, Tal Ostrovsky, Dafna Fromer, and Gertrud Hardtmann have highlighted the experience of the descendants of Nazis.⁵³⁹ However, this experience is, perhaps unsurprisingly, little represented in literature. A notable exception is the writer Jessica Shattuck, whose novel *The Women of the Castle* (2018) depicts the postwar landscape of Germany, haunted by memory of Nazi atrocity. Shattuck, whose grandparents were members of the Nazi party, has written several pieces regarding this inheritance, noting for example the difficulty of reconciling her image of her beloved—and loving—grandmother with her participation in ‘a movement that would become synonymous with evil’, and of the importance of understanding the ways in which the two can—and did—coexist:

If we don’t view (or write about) Germans of that time as human beings, capable of love and hate, cruelty and kindness, we render them “other” and absolve ourselves of the need to view their flawed choices as a cautionary tale. If they are all monsters, we can feel assured that their experience is irrelevant to us; we can condemn without self-examination.⁵⁴⁰

Accordingly, in *The Women of the Castle* Shattuck presents a small, but deeply human, cross section of National Socialist Germany: Marianne, the wife of a resistor and a vehement opponent of Nazism, though not without her own prejudices; Benita, for whom Nazism is not a strong concern, and whose BDM membership is uncritical and its politics incidental to her own aspirations for social mobility and romance; and, most interestingly, Ania, an (initially) enthusiastic Nazi. In Part III of the novel, Shattuck delves into Ania’s early life and motivations for Nazi membership, and in one particularly striking passage wherein Ania watches a *Landjahr* lager presentation, describes how Ania

has not realised, until this moment, how isolated she has been. [...] Before today, she has always understood togetherness as factional: the rioting groups of her post-war youth, drawn together only because of what they were against.

⁵³⁹ Bar-On; Bar-On, Ostrovsky, and Fromer; Gertrud Hardtmann, ‘Children of Nazis: A Psychodynamic Perspective’, in *International Handbook of Multigenerational Legacies of Trauma*, ed. by Yael Danieli (New York: Plenum Press, 1998), pp. 85-95.

⁵⁴⁰ Jessica Shattuck, ‘I Loved My Grandmother. But She Was a Nazi.’, *New York Times*, 24 March 2017 <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/24/opinion/i-loved-my-grandmother-but-she-was-a-nazi.html?_r=0> [Accessed 14 June 2022], n.p.; Jessica Shattuck, ‘What We Can Learn from “Ordinary” Nazis’, *Lit Hub*, 27 September 2017 <<https://lithub.com/what-we-can-learn-from-ordinary-nazis/>> [Accessed 14 June 2022], n.p.

But she is against nothing. And neither are these young people onstage, who seem so sincerely lifted by one another's company. They are *for* something—for solidarity and Germany.⁵⁴¹

This portrait of Nazism is far from the caricature of evil to which it is sometimes reduced, and through it Shattuck highlights the genuine appeal of the movement to many Germans that was not founded on hatred or bigotry, and, more insidiously, exploited the vulnerabilities of the German population, especially in the difficult years following defeat in the First World War. Novels like Shattuck's are therefore a rich, and indeed timely, direction of future study.

It is difficult to contemplate history without reference to trauma. Not only is history rife with traumatic encounters, from wars and genocides to violence and invasion, but, as trauma is fundamentally a rupture that provokes a reevaluation of who we are and how we relate to others and our predecessors, so too is trauma necessary for the continued narrativisation of history; for distinguishing the *now* from what has come before. It is also a keystone of present-day politics, as the traumas of the past, from the Holocaust (both Jewish and that of other victims) to colonialism, slavery, displacement, and oppression are met with demands to be acknowledged and treated as such, in addition to understanding their continued presence in individual, day-to-day social realities. Studies in trauma, therefore, like testimony, demand an ethical reckoning. The sorts of representation provided by Foer, Krauss, Kadish, and Shattuck, and indeed critical study of their work such as this thesis, are important not only in the creation of a balanced and nuanced understanding of history, but for what it asks of us today. As these writers understand, understanding history is a process of understanding oneself, and therefore the types of stories we tell—stories with human characters and motivations and complexities—are of vital importance, and, in today's society threatened by war, regressive social policy, and insularity, perhaps there has never been a time in which it has been more urgent.

⁵⁴¹ Jessica Shattuck, *The Women of the Castle* (London: Zaffre, 2018), p. 245.

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