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Stefanie Anna Sandberger

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Ao. Univ.-Prof. Dr. Monika Seidl

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Diese Arbeit ist meinen Eltern und meiner Schwester gewidmet, die mich über lange lange Jahre mit Liebe und viel viel Geduld unterstützt haben. Dafür danke ich euch. Danke auch an Manuel, der mich des Öfteren davon abgehalten hat, aus dem Fenster zu springen.

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Introduction

Die gesellschaftliche Auseinandersetzung um eine Darstellung von Auschwitz ist zu einem offenen Machtdiskurs geworden, bei dem sich jede Darstellung von Auschwitz – ob als Erinnerung, Polemik oder Analyse veräußert – in einem Kontext unterschiedlicher Zuschreibungen bewegt und jede Rede über Auschwitz zugleich Darstellung von Auschwitz geworden ist.
(Krankenhagen, 2)

The Holocaust represents a rupture in historiography, philosophy and art. Auschwitz as the epitome of total destruction, as complete breakdown of civilisation resulted in devastation, depression and the question of one's place in life. Writing literature after Auschwitz without acknowledging and incorporating this fundamental loss, this experience of incredible violence and the trepidation it caused is what Adorno called barbaric. In the aftermath of the catastrophe many writers have in one way or another dealt with the Holocaust or referred to it. This thesis attempts to analyse three novels from 1996 to 2005 in which the Holocaust plays a central role. The principal points of this paper will be the novels' treatment of the fictional interpretation of the Shoah, the depiction of the protagonists' trauma and their re-humanization as a reaction to the Nazis' vilification of their victims as "figuren", as Anne Michaels calls this deprived status (*Fugitive Pieces*, 165), the de-humanization of human beings. Memory is certainly another focal point of these novels. The shared process of fixing memory regarding certain events and the role of memory for questions of identity and finding a way to live on after the Shoah also feature prominently in the novels and therefore also in my thesis.

The earliest of the three novels dealt with in this thesis is *Fugitive Pieces* by Anne Michaels. It is the only novel by Anne Michaels so far. Born in 1958 to a Russian immigrant to the U.S., Michaels is no contemporary witness to World War II and the genocide of the Jews. In her poetry and prose writing Michaels however tries to understand how the individual copes with these events. Her approach in *Fugitive Pieces* is retrospective and personal, tracing the impact of the Shoah through the lives of two characters. Ben is no direct witness to the Holocaust, while Jakob Beer, whose memoirs form the major (and first) part of the narration, has lost his family in the Holocaust. Jakob suffers from this loss

throughout his life, especially from his sister's presumed abduction during the raid. After his traumatic experience he is geographically removed through his exile in Greece and later in Canada,

[d]aher verzichtet sie [Michaels] größtenteils auf die detaillierte Schilderung des Holocausts als historisches Ereignis. Ihr Hauptinteresse gilt vielmehr der metafikionalen Verhandlung möglicher Formen der Erinnerung an den Völkermord an den europäischen Juden. (Bölling, 175)

Michaels avoids directly narrating the horror of the concentration camps by precluding Jakob from seeing the actual event of his family's death and on the other hand, by removing him geographically from the heart of Europe. Similarly, *The History of Love* and *Everything is Illuminated* refrain from narrating the horror of the concentration camp; instead they focus on personal stories of individual survivors or the descendants of survivors in the second or third generation and their efforts to cope with the past. The role of coincidence in the survival of these victims is an important element which will be explored through an analysis of the motif of science in the novels.

That the Holocaust is, on the one hand, not exposed through a direct depiction of its gruesome events, and on the other hand obfuscated by different narrative strategies, allows the novel to largely evade criticism aimed at the voyeurism implicit in the depiction of the horrors.

The best of these texts gesture towards this: as the reader becomes too comfortable with Jacob Beer's life – as he is happy – he and his pregnant wife are killed in a senseless car accident, and the process begins again with Ben; the meaning of 'illumination' is to make readers aware of the terrible complexities of that time and ours. (Eaglestone, 133)

Similarly, in *Everything is Illuminated*, the events are veiled through narrative techniques that remove them from the viewer's eye or reveal the constructedness of memory, because

[o]nce our focus is narrowed [...] to the death camps, the locale of what must be considered the essential Holocaust, the novelist's difficulties come to seem awesome. (Howe, 189)

Moreover, Foer's magical realist story of Trachimbrod's history is countered by foreshadowing of its end and the readers' knowledge that Alex' grandfather has something to hide. Langer claims for videotaped survivor testimony that it "tells

two stories simultaneously, one of life and one of death.” (Langer, 71) The same is true for these novels, all of them speak of death and life, new beginnings in the wake of catastrophe and endings of old forms and traditions.

Just like *Everything is Illuminated* and *The History of Love*, *Fugitive Pieces* is a novel as much about the Shoah as about the act of writing and the ambiguity of memory.

Die metafiktionale Selbstreflexivität von *Fugitive Pieces* resultiert vornehmlich aus den zahlreichen Interdependenzen zwischen der Ich-Erzählung Jakob Beers und derjenigen Bens. (Bölling, 175)

These interdependences ring true for *Everything is Illuminated* as well. Foer's novel similarly explores this metafictional self-reflexivity through its characters. One narrator, bearing the same name as the author, is on a quest to find the woman who saved his grandfather from the Nazis. In the Ukraine, the home country of his grandfather, he tries to find this saviour who made his existence possible but at the same time collects material for his fictional account of the village of Trachimbrod.

In this strand of the narration, Foer recreates the shtetl in all its opulent, colourful, magical realist abundance. Supernatural occurrences, hyperbole and melodramatic incidences interweave to form a web of consoling seclusion of the shtetl that will later be painfully shattered through the Nazi massacre. This narration is contrasted with the letters and the narration of Jonathan's translator in the Ukraine Alex Perchov. These two narrations have the same endpoint, the annihilation of the shtetl, its reduction to the nothingness that awaits them at the end of their journey. Alex' narrative is framed as a realistic contrast to the evident fictionality of Jonathan's musings, revealing his grandfather's own story, his involvement in the Holocaust and exploring the question of guilt. Both writer-narrators reflect on each other's writing and therefore again emphasize the act of writing.

Foer himself is a Jewish American writer who grew up in Washington, his mother is a Polish Jewish immigrant. *Everything is Illuminated* is his debut novel, as are the other two novels dealt with in this thesis. Foer is married to

Nicole Krauss, the author of *The History of Love*, the third novel to be analysed here (cf. Solomon). Contrary to the other two novels, *The History of Love* has so far been neglected by academic research. The reviews generally agree that Krauss' novel is fraught with confusing plot lines, absurd detail and too much mystery for such a novel. Although there has been negative criticism of *Fugitive Pieces* and *Everything is Illuminated* as well, *The History of Love* is the novel that has been judged least favourably. One might now speculate about the reasons why academia has refrained from analysing Krauss' novel in detail.

In *The History of Love*, Nicole Krauss shows only brief glimpses of the ordeal of her male protagonist, who is the narrator of one of the three interrelated and interweaved narrative strands that make up the novel. Alma, a young girl is in search of her namesake, narrates the second part of the novel. In the third strand, an omniscient narrator recounts how the novel with the title *The History of Love* came to Alma's father. The novel is a complex web of references and cross-references. Reality and fiction are difficult to disentangle, especially towards the end when narrative techniques become more experimental and the mental state of the old man and his reliability as a narrator can be doubted. The bulk of the novel is taken up by the search for a dead woman, the old man's beloved. This search brings the girl and the old man together and some kind of peace becomes possible.

Fugitive Pieces and *Everything is Illuminated* also revolve around present absences, namely Jakob's sister Bella, who disappears during the Nazis' raid of his house, and Augustine, the woman who saved Jonathan's grandfather in *Everything is Illuminated*. In all three novels, these women are out of reach forever, through death or oblivion. These victims of the Shoah embody the central message that the dead cannot be brought back but must be commemorated nevertheless, in writing or in memory. This void that traumatizes not only witnesses of the Shoah but also the second and third generation is explicitly gendered as female in these novels. Bella was beautiful, talented and intelligent, Augustine a saviour figure and Alma was loving and good. The little girl, the adolescent and the grown woman – all of them victims of a murderous ideology. These women and their qualities have been lost in the

Shoah and have to be re-established in the aftermath of catastrophe. The novels all try to find a way of recovery, to overcome trauma and still remind us of what happened so as to not let it happen again.

This thesis basically has a two-part structure. The first part analyses the traumata the protagonists of the novels endure and the two areas in which the effects of these traumata resound, namely religion and spirituality and time and place, two different ways to orientate oneself and navigate one's way through life. In this section, the authors' fictionalisations of aspects of the Shoah as events in their protagonists' stories will be analysed in more detail regarding stylistic and narrative technique.

The second part of this thesis attempts to show the re-humanization of the victims of the Shoah (after their traumatising) attempted in the three novels. The de-humanizing strategies of the Nazi regime reduced the Jews to "figuren", to mere objects that were denied a will of their own, could not make decisions for themselves and their families, were even robbed of essential human qualities. Therefore, the novels all strive to right this wrong and re-humanize the victims. Essential human qualities are stressed in all of these narrations. It is physical as well as psychological traits that make us human. Therefore, the emphasis on the sensory perceptions, the protagonists' sexuality, their ability to feel pain and happiness and their rootedness in communities of different sorts are important to the analysis. Communication or rather the use of language is another important human trait. To speak as well as to be silent, to creatively use language for different purposes are features that shape our sense of humanity. The treatment of the act of writing will be explored in this thesis, on a diegetic as well as on a non-diegetic level. Also, the need to explore transcendence, be it through conventional religion or science or other ways of making oneself 'immortal', is an essential part of the authors' concerns.

Authors who write about the Holocaust, be it in a more realistic style, with techniques that serve to distance the writer and readers from the Shoah, or only by peripheral mention, are faced with various ambiguities that challenge

storytelling. In situations of stress the perception of time is altered, which leaves room for diverse stylistic techniques. While the context of the Shoah is familiar to everybody, people are still often overwhelmed by the information they are presented with. Therefore, the common novelistic tendency to have a happy end or present a moral or some kind of meaning at the end is precarious in the context of the Shoah.

In the Holocaust case the context is at once stable and unendurable, time is at once suspended and arbitrarily abbreviated, and the closure is at once predictable, and utterly bereft of meaning and comfort. In such circumstances any good outcome, any act of dignity or defiance, appears as a falsification or sentimentalisation of the general condition. (Clendinnen, 168)

Therefore, the chapter that is concerned with the endings of the respective novels will ask how the different stories are resolved, if there is a happy ending, some sort of reconciliation or if there is a blank space at the end of the book in more than the literal sense.

Theorising the Holocaust, Writing about the Holocaust

Touch the Holocaust and the flow is reversed. That matter is so potent in itself that when art seeks to command it, it is art which is rendered vacuous and drained of authority. (Clendinnen, 164-5)

Before turning to an analysis of the three novels which are the focus of this thesis, it is in order to survey the critical and literary traditions and contentions with which their production and reception is inescapably entangled. The purpose of this chapter is thus to outline some of the most pertinent critical voices about the artistic representation of the Holocaust, beginning with Adorno, and to provide an overview of the development of American Holocaust literature.

What is the Holocaust?

In a thesis centring on the Holocaust and its treatment or its inclusion in fictional narratives one has to start with the question what this term actually means and implies. Michman concludes that “we still have not reached a definitive answer to the question “What, exactly, was the Holocaust?””(Michman, 257) There exist various definitions, multiple significant dates and characteristics in this still ongoing discussion; therefore, at the beginning of this thesis, a brief definition – with no claim to completeness or general agreement – will be given below.

As a starting point, there are different names for “the Event”, as Haidu calls it: “Holocaust”, “Shoah”, “Final Solution” or “Auschwitz”. All of these terms are deficient in some regard; the first two imply a theological significance, with the Jews as sacrificial victims or with a perspective of redemption; “Final Solution”, while foregrounding the de-humanizing nature of the project, replicates the terminology of the Nazi regime; and the last is the name of a place that stands as a pars pro toto for a whole genocidal project. For example, in the term “Auschwitz” metonymic and synecdochic aspects come to light: while the term connotes the genocide as such, it also refers to events that have happened at this place, which has become a literal site of memory, a “time-place” (cf. Rothberg, 28f). In this thesis I will for the most part use the terms Holocaust,

Auschwitz and Shoah, as they are largely accepted in the academic world, and sometimes only “the events” for specific murders, raids or attacks during the Holocaust. Despite the fact that not only Jews were systematically killed but also other ethnic groups and minority groups this thesis will focus on the Jewish victims.

The Holocaust means the “[s]ystematic state-sponsored killing of Jews and others by Nazi Germany and its collaborators during World War II” (Encyclopedia Britannica). In 1935 the Nürnberg Laws robbed Jews of their citizenship, making them “subjects of the state”. Their rights were systematically restricted. Being Jewish was defined by the Germans as related to the blood, to one’s ancestors and not to a religious community. After the November 1938 pogrom, also known as ‘Kristallnacht’, Jews were systematically deported to concentration camps where they had to perform hard labour under horrifying conditions. With the occupation of new territory mobile killing units rounded up the Jewish inhabitants, separated them and killed them systematically. These ‘Einsatzgruppen’ killed about one million people, most of them Jewish. At the Wannsee Conference 1942 the ‘Endlösung’ or Final Solution was formulated that aimed at the extinction of European Jewry. Extermination camps were erected as killing factories, sometimes with adjacent slave-labour and prison camps. About six million Jews were killed during the Holocaust (cf. Berenbaum).

Adorno

The following section concentrates on Theodor W. Adorno’s comments on literature after Auschwitz, as he is one of the most influential critics to write about the consequences of the Shoah on art, culture and society. His comments are important for this thesis because reflected and self-conscious literature has been made possible not least because of his constant appeals and warnings and their reception in historiography and literary theory. One result of his endeavours is definitely that

Eine Darstellung von Auschwitz kann nie autonom als Kunst rezipiert werden, sondern muß sich in der Bewertung an moralischen,

historischen oder pädagogischen Kriterien messen lassen. (Krankenhagen, 9)

Because of his rather polemic statement on literature after Auschwitz, Adorno is frequently the starting point for a discussion of the legitimacy and relevance of literature about and after the Shoah.

Kulturkritik findet sich der letzten Stufe der Dialektik von Kultur und Barbarei gegenüber: nach Auschwitz ein Gedicht zu schreiben, ist barbarisch, und das frisst auch die Erkenntnis an, die ausspricht, warum es unmöglich ward, heute Gedichte zu schreiben. (Adorno 1976, 31)

He criticized Enlightenment philosophy in its positivistic view of history and human beings. Progressive optimism has become obsolete in his opinion since technical progress was turned against human beings in the most extreme sense. Thus, his writings demand an integration or at least an acknowledgement of this caesura or rupture in every work of art because culture and society suffered a total breakdown. His famous statement concerning poetry writing after Auschwitz was and still is hotly debated. Having read Adorno myself, I can only agree with these words: "Adorno is [...] the enemy of clarity" (Cohen, 16). His opaque statement has been revised and reformulated by himself throughout his career. Its reception, however, has been far more varied; it was understood as diction, an injunction against poetry, an interdiction against poetic art by critics, writers of literature and others who commented on Adorno's writings. Often defensive and vehement against this perceived prohibition, often reflective and theoretically substantiated voices on Adorno and Auschwitz are to be found.

Claussen claims that Auschwitz is central to Adorno's writings, influencing his thinking and writing. The notion of culture is central to Adorno's reflections on Auschwitz. In *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, Adorno and Horkheimer advocate a dialectic notion of culture and refute that society is subject to continual progress. Enlightenment is never without its negative sides. "Der kulturelle Fortschritt führt also schon immer eine gegen die in diesem Prozeß befangenen Menschen gerichtete Gewaltätigkeit mit sich" (Kramer, 69). Adorno introduces the term 'Barbarei' (barbarism) to signal that the mass murders cannot be integrated into the dialectics of culture. He claims that Auschwitz marks a rupture and demands that theory does not relapse behind reflecting on the Holocaust. He stresses the discontinuity. Later, Adorno extends the term barbarism to a

cultural practice: “nach Auschwitz ein Gedicht zu schreiben ist barbarisch” (cf. Kramer, 68ff). He claims that

Wo Verzweiflung und unmäßiges Leiden ist, soll darin bloß Geistiges, der Bewusstseinzustand [sic] der Menschheit, der Verfall der Norm sich anzeigen. Indem die Kritik darauf insistiert, gerät sie in Versuchung, das Unsagbare zu vergessen, anstatt wie sehr auch ohnmächtig zu trachten, dass es von den Menschen abgewandt werde. (Adorno 1976, 7f)

This summarizes his most ardent demand: that Auschwitz must not be forgotten, that it must never happen again. Adorno's writings are still topical because he locates art firmly in its sociohistorical context and integrates the conditions of its production. As objects of mass culture, cultural commodities dominate society through our own making. Human beings subject themselves to the culture industry and are vulnerable to totalitarian ideologies and fascist thinking. Passive consumption is one result of the increased mechanisation of life which leads to repetitive and formulaic cultural products. Art is not art in itself, art is made and makes itself. What is often perceived as reality or representation of reality is rather a filter through which to perceive life (cf. Fagan).

Denn kein authentisches Kunstwerk und keine wahre Philosophie hat ihrem Sinn nach je sich in sich selbst, ihrem Ansichsein erschöpft. Stets standen sie in Relation zu dem realen Lebensprozeß der Gesellschaft, von dem sie sich schieden. (Adorno 1976, 13)

Each cultural product, each object of art does not exist in itself but within a larger context of production, consumption and reception. Adorno, however, deplores: “[n]icht nur richtet der Geist auf seine marktmäßige Verkäuflichkeit sich ein und reproduziert damit die gesellschaftlich verwaltenden Kategorien” (Adorno 1976, 10). This could be interpreted such that the weak mind bows to the interests of the economy and the most convenient option available, always in danger of following a dangerous ideology. The dangers of abolishing independent cultural criticism would include a brutalization and deceit in the area of the publishing and its reduction to mere communication. Also, “vulgäre[r] Positivismus und Pragmatismus” (Adorno 1976, 22f) are to be opposed. One must oppose the belief that the Holocaust was the result of a misdirected surge of progress. The Shoah must shatter any conviction of a progressive nature of man and culture. Indeed, culture has fallen back onto barbarism.

Darum hat die Kritik oftmals weniger nach den bestimmten Interessenlagen zu fahnden, denen kulturelle Phänomene zugeordnet sein sollen, als zu entziffern, was von der Tendenz der Gesamtgesellschaft in ihnen zutage kommt, durch die hindurch die mächtigsten Interessen sich realisieren. (Adorno 1976, 24)

This hints at Adorno's constant demand that Auschwitz must not be forgotten and must never happen again. What he requires of art or culture is therefore to scrutinize what we are presented with and to challenge general assumptions.

Wahr ist Kultur bloß als implizit-kritische, und der Geist, der daran vergaß, rächt sich in den Kritikern, die er züchtet, an sich selber. Kritik ist ein unabdingbares Element der in sich widerspruchsvollen Kultur, bei aller Unwahrheit doch wieder so wahr wie die Kultur unwahr. (Adorno 1976, 11f)

This is all the more important with regard to what is called the "Americanization of the Holocaust". The Shoah has become common knowledge and has become increasingly merchandised by popular culture in recent years. To critically question these representations is important because this subject is such a dangerous one. In the light of these massive productions of fictional representations, Adorno revised his comments.

Das perennierende Leiden hat soviel Recht auf Ausdruck wie der Germarterte zu brüllen; darum mag es falsch gewesen sein, nach Auschwitz lasse sich kein Gedicht mehr schreiben. (Adorno 1966, 135)

In his 1974 essay *Commitment*, Adorno reaffirms his earlier statement but also attributes it with the role of expressing suffering in adequate ways.

I have no wish to soften the saying that to write lyrical poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric; it expresses in negative form the impulse which inspires committed literature. [...] But Enzensberger's retort also remains true, that literature must resist this verdict, in other words, be such that its mere existence after Auschwitz is not a surrender to cynicism. Its own situation is one of paradox, not merely the problem of how to react to it. [...] this suffering [...] also demands the continued existence of art while it prohibits it; it is now virtually in art alone that suffering can still find its own voice, consolation, without immediately being betrayed by it. (Adorno 1974, 84-5)

Here, Adorno acknowledges the existence of art, even attributes it with the only way to react to suffering without falling back on itself. The final verdict seems to be that art needs to do what politics fails to do.

Today every phenomenon of culture, even if a model of integrity, is liable to be suffocated in the cultivation of kitsch. Yet paradoxically in the same epoch it is to works of art that has fallen the burden of wordlessly asserting what is barred to politics. (Adorno 1974, 89)

A significant aspect of Adorno's writing for this thesis is metalinguistic. Adorno's writing style points to the ambiguous nature of language. Although language is itself an instrument of domination he is nevertheless forced to use it as a means of communicating his ideas. He does this, however, in such a way as to foster critical thinking that requires concentration and effort (cf. Fagan). This view on language will be encountered again in a later chapter of this thesis that will deal with exactly this aporia of the need to express something but being only able to use inadequate means.

In the following different critical voices dealing with Adorno's statement will be explored in order to show this varied reception and, through this focus, to show how literature after Auschwitz was conceived. At the outset, from the viewpoint of the 21st century, bearing in mind the bulk of Holocaust literature already existing, a tentative result could be this: "representation is both inescapable *and* ruined" (Cohen, 16).

Critical Voices

"The task of bearing witness is a normative element of Jewish existence."
(Berger 1990a, 45)

Many critics agree with the above quotation in that the Holocaust is constitutive of Jewish identity. So it is their duty to testify to the events. But how to testify? In which form? And what can Jews of the second and third generation after the Shoah actually testify to? These are not only questions of historiography but also of art and specifically of literature. In order to answer these questions many critics and historians have turned to Adorno, as his philosophical musings on the Shoah present a convenient starting point. Rothberg emphasises Adorno's merit and claims that "Adorno's comments were the first to suggest the impact of the events on literature, philosophy, and art." Criticism is specifically concerned with the question of representation as it overshadows both

historiography and art. Philosophy and theory in general must embrace the fragmentary and ruptured nature of the present. Society is overwhelmed by the masses of images of the Holocaust, photos, filmic representation in documentaries and witness videos, in memoirs and testimonies of survivors and in numerous other historiographic contexts – history after Auschwitz has a traumatic structure, it is “repetitive, discontinuous, and characterized by obsessive returns to the past and the troubling of simple chronology.”(Rothberg, 19) It will be the aim of this thesis to pinpoint where this traumatic history transcends into fictional literary forms. As Rothberg states, it is, however, dubious if Adorno would have wanted to become part of this.

Given this pattern [critics’ disinterest in Adorno’s whole system of thought], as well as the infamous difficulty of Adorno’s thought, it is not surprising that most commentary on this theme has de- and recontextualized the words, often taking them far from whatever meaning Adorno might have intended. Although it is also unlikely that Adorno would have welcomed his inclusion in the field of Holocaust studies, the problems of reception that his writings on Auschwitz have met parallel the problems of multidisciplinary work on the Nazi genocide. (Rothberg, 26)

Alphen comes to the conclusion that “[i]n short, Adorno objects not to representation as such, but to transfiguration” (Alphen, 19).¹ Art takes away some of the horror of Auschwitz and lets the consumer get pleasure out of its representation. These objections, however, rely on a narrow conception of art, an aesthetic perspective of enjoyment or diversion. Art is neither reducible to a redemptive function nor aesthetic purposes. Art also has the task of providing knowledge, to keep informed, to shock and make aware without giving pleasure. A redemptive function of art is similarly disapproved to prevent readers from closing a book that includes such representations with the feeling that something has been achieved, some reconciliation or forgiveness has been reached. Redemption is not an option. Auschwitz is „keiner Versöhnung mehr zugänglich“ (Nieraad, 179). Forgiveness can only be given by the victims but the victims are dead.

¹ Cf. Adorno, *Commitment*, p.85. “The so-called artistic representation of the sheer physical pain of people beaten to the ground by rifle-butts contains, however remotely, the power to elicit enjoyment out of it. [...] The aesthetic principle of stylization, and even the solemn prayer of the chorus, make an unthinkable fate appear to have had some meaning; it is transfigured, something of its horror removed.”

Adorno's statement about aesthetically (in the sense of pleasure) motivated transformations of reality is relevant in that it serves as a moral warning, an unassailable axiom in Holocaust studies – and rightly so. (Alphen, 20)

The ostensible dichotomy of reality and fiction of historiographical writing and literature is questioned by Alphen when he stresses the fact that historical testimony can never be separated from interpretation and that every rendering of the past is necessarily a construction, depending on “cultural and narrative frames” (Alphen, 25). Thus historical writing is only one version, one specific perspective on any given event. There is no autonomous “true” version of the events which can as such be evaluated according to certain criteria. When it comes to literature one has to bear in mind that authors of fictional representations of the events are subject to similar scrutiny. In fictional renderings, however, the question of representation has to be approached on a different level.

Irving Howe claims that Adorno's famous assertion to write a poem after Auschwitz was barbaric is a

dramatic outburst he probably meant to focus upon the sheer difficulty – the literary risk, the moral peril – of dealing with the Holocaust in literature. It was as if he were saying, Given the absence of usable norms through which to grasp the meaning (if there is one) of the scientific extermination of millions, given the intolerable gap between the aesthetic conventions and the loathsome realities of the Holocaust, and given the improbability of coming up with images and symbols that might serve as “objective correlatives” for events that the imagination can hardly take in, writers in the post-Holocaust era might be wise to be silent. Silent, at least, about the Holocaust. (Howe, 179).

Howe advises silence as the appropriate answer to what happened. For Howe, Adorno's dictum appears to imply different aspects. The representation in literature can have a domesticating effect, making familiar or even tolerable what is irreconcilable, incomprehensible, unimaginable (a common trope in academic writing); or “the chastening aspects of literary mimesis can be felt to be misleading, a questionable way of reconciling us with the irreconcilable”(Howe, 180). A voyeuristic sadomasochism, a cathartic experience or illicit pleasure drawn from the consumption of Holocaust literature is a constant danger or, respectively, a precarious response. Art has to adapt to

its subject and not vice versa. Another danger is the implication that such art was made possible only because of the Holocaust, which therefore has had some kind of sense. Howe perceives a need for closure that must be resisted.

So much so that it becomes an almost irresistible temptation for Holocaust writers, whether discursive or fictional, to search for some redemptive token, some cry of retribution, some balancing of judgment against history's evil, some sign of ultimate spiritual triumph. It is as if, through the retrospect of language, they would lend a tragic aura. (Howe, 190)

What is to be avoided in any case of Holocaust literature is a deceptive continuity with pre-Shoah ways of writing, fictional or non-fictional, historiography and representation. The rupture of the genocide must be acknowledged at all times. The pitfall of fictional accounts, of novels is, however, just this temptation. Novels often attempt to restore a balance and find some closure for their protagonists. Howe somehow flinches from Adorno's remarks, questioning his seriousness about refuting literature about the Holocaust. Indeed, Adorno himself has later revisited and rewritten his statement. But the erection of limits is deemed necessary as they can be viewed more as guidelines or reminders of the precariousness of the field. Howe concludes that

[p]erhaps his remarks are to be taken as a hopeless admonition, a plea for the improvisation of limit that he knew would not, and indeed could not, be heeded, but which it was nevertheless necessary to make. (Howe, 182)

In the representation of the Holocaust the notion of limits is ever-present. Where are the limits in describing what happened in these years, how much detail is justifiable and how "realistic" may depiction be, how much cruelty and emotional impoverishment may be shown? Thus, limits are always there if there is criticism or praise. Krankenhagen, for example, strives to shift the focus of discussion away from questions of legitimacy to questions of representation. According to Krankenhagen it is the quantity and heterogeneity of representations of the Holocaust that is now central to public and academic debates. "For Adorno, the inescapability of representation's violence demands precisely the recognition of its limits, of the danger of seeking an adequation between the event and its representation." (Cohen, 22) But where are they?

With regards to Adorno's statement as a warning against barbarism and its repetition, Lang argues that fictional representations, "representations that seek the effects of melodrama or sentimentality or prurience – may nonetheless be warranted as within the limits" (Lang, 317) as they serve the purpose of drawing attention to the event.

Dominick LaCapra widens the scope from poetry to imagination and memory. How can imagination become manifest on paper? What impact does literature have on memory or rather the construction of memory? With an explosion of publications on the Holocaust and the postmodern turn questions about the representation of the Shoah gained even more importance. LaCapra understands Adorno's comment as a

[s]tatement concerning the difficulty of legitimate creation and renewal in a posttraumatic condition, and it is also better applied to the role of the imagination as well as its interaction with memory than to poetry in any generic or delimited sense. (LaCapra, *his and mem*, 181)

Nieraad understands Adorno's postulate in the most radical sense, as a repudiation of any kind of literature about Auschwitz. Nieraad sees a similarity to the biblical interdiction of representation that sacralises Auschwitz and comes to symbolise the intrusion of mythic evil. Adorno's proposition denies all trust in language to enlighten and reconcile, the taming quality of language (cf. Nieraad, 178). Auschwitz should not be mythicised and sacralised. Auschwitz was committed by humans therefore Auschwitz must entail a break with pre-war traditions and forms of writing. The pleasure that art can bring is questioned. Nieraad here refers to the mini-series *Holocaust* in 1979 when he says the audience was only "kurzfristig alarmiert, aber doch nur auf der Ebene eines begriffslosen, momentanen Identifikationsschocks, einer sentimental und folgenlosen Mitleidsreaktion" (Nieraad, 183). He sees the danger of a trivialized, conciliatory, banal representation. Similarly dangerous is the aestheticisation of the events, surreptitious authenticity.

Literarische Texte über Auschwitz müssen sich vielmehr auf ihre jeweilige Interpretation des Geschehens hin befragen lassen, und unsere Kritik wendet sich gegen solche Interpretationen, die dem Geschehen Erhabenes, Heroisches, Beschwichtigendes, Mythisch-Schicksalshaftes, kurz: einen versöhnlichen Sinn abgewinnen. (Nieraad, 184)

Literature and the Holocaust

After this very brief presentation of some potential pitfalls of fictional representations of the Holocaust, there will be a brief flashlight on the history of Holocaust literature to show how this genre evolved, in order to be able to locate the analysed novels' place both in critical and literary traditions.

American Holocaust literature as a distinct genre really begins to flourish in the 1960's. Identity formation in Jewish communities is often centred around the Holocaust and the voices of Holocaust survivors are being heard. There is, however, one direction of Jewish-American literature and literary criticism that opposes this rooting of Jewish identity in the Holocaust. Cynthia Ozick is one of the most important representatives of this direction. While she believes in "art's capacity for nurturing and redeeming the human spirit"(Kauvar, 375), she prefers a text-centred formation of Jewish identity, as memory is unreliable and based on particular interests. Despite having herself written a novel about the Holocaust, Ozick comments that "[i]nsofar as my stringent feelings about this would sanction writing a novel at all, I would say that if a novel must be written, let it be written by a true witness." (Ozick, 391) This would, however, limit literary production drastically only to survivors and preclude the much needed discussion, exploration and negotiation of memory in the 21st century.

The reference points of American Jewish fiction have been and still are subject to change due to changing historical and socio-cultural conditions. In her analysis of two novels, Rohr sees as the referent no longer the Holocaust as such but the discourse of its unrepresentability that was briefly explored above (cf. also Rohr, 547), while in the seventies and eighties Berger sees a turn towards Jewish tradition, traditional figures and core texts of Judaism. Before that, Berger notices a domestication of the Shoah that does not reflect on theological consequences (cf. Berger 1990b, 225f). Later writers testify to the ambivalence that, among others, Cynthia Ozick and Elie Wiesel share, that "although one cannot write of the disaster, one must" (Berger 1990b, 227). Second generation writers focus on Jewish identity and generally refrain from writing about the concentration camps. Berger also records several second

generation themes that can be traced in the three novels analysed in this thesis as well:

suffering from an event that one has not personally experienced, struggling to achieve emotional, moral, and theological coherence in the wake of unprecedented chaos, the incalculable importance of survivors' tales, and the transformative phenomenon of becoming a witness by listening to witnesses. (Berger 1990b, 229)

Libowitz sees a significant rise of interest in Holocaust Studies in the USA in the 1980s in academic writing, colleges and universities, literature and historiography. Influential works such as *The Destruction of the European Jews* by Raul Hilberg, *A History of the Holocaust* by Yehuda Bauer and other works about diverse aspects of the Nazi regime, religious explorations but also philosophical writings about the Holocaust were published. Also, fictional writing and theoretical research on literature and art began to flourish (cf. Libowitz, 271). Similarly, Jeremy Varon registers an increase in research due to the fact that survivors of the Shoah are dying off and the following generations feel the responsibility to research, record and commemorate. However, he also registers the danger of abuse of the Holocaust "to inquire into or enhance the prestige of the key terms of recent intellectual fashion – trauma, transgression, language, loss, the sublime, and so on" (Varon, 85). This would devalue the Holocaust as an instrument of analysis and not the actual object of analysis. He furthermore locates a general agreement among many historians that history is per se mediated, even its "raw material", sources such as testimonies, witness accounts, photos, and other documents, that is, history is "shaped by the discursive forms in which it is figured" and "all history is to some meaningful extent myth" and influences the formation of identities. Varon also mentions the "inexhaustibly ideological dimension" (Varon, 89) of any historical account. Every piece of historical writing serves a purpose. This purpose must not be concealed or obscured but always questioned. These views have become common sense and opened up the engagement with these same themes in fictional writing.

In 2002, Susanne Rohr sees a paradigm shift in fictional Holocaust representation. This shift relates to the two notions of Jewish identity and its relation to the Holocaust, entailing questions of memory and representation in a

process called the Americanization of the Holocaust. The reception of the Holocaust in the U.S. can be divided into different phases and is linked to (changes of) the cultural, social and political climate and has therefore a distinct national profile. Rohr explores the intensified engagement with the Holocaust in the US and supports Halbwachs' theory of the collective memory and its constitutive function for collective identity (cf. Rohr, 539). There are some dates that are especially significant for Rohr, namely the publication of Anne Frank's diary in 1952, the broadcasting of the Eichmann trial in 1961, the NBC series *Holocaust* and Jimmy Carter's "President's commission on the Holocaust" in 1978, and in 1993 the opening of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and Spielberg's *Schindler's List*. The Holocaust as a common denominator counters an erosion of the Jewish community.

Zwei Diskursstränge zum 'Opfer' bilden sich heraus: einerseits der des Überlebens als letzlicher Triumph und Erlösung, andererseits der des Überlebens als und im Trauma, dessen pathologische Strukturen sich bereits in die nächste, die Second Generation fortgeschrieben haben. (Rohr 542f)

Based on the acknowledgement of the diverse existing forms of Shoah literature, Haselstein explores different reasons for American-Jewish writers to engage with the Holocaust. Being nowadays one of the shaping narratives of American culture, an icon, even part of popular culture as the famous *Maus* by Art Spiegelman shows, the Holocaust has become a prevalent motif in literature. Among the reasons for this, the authors' own Jewish identity and their familial legacies are central. In the form of the novel communication with the reader is made possible. This interaction allows for diverse forms, ample use of different sources and the possibility of communicating morals without guaranteeing truth value. Consequently, the influence of fragmentary stories and memoirs of family members preserving their own childhood memories are important for the writing process. To emphasise remembrance and mourning and inscribe the traumatic experiences into collective memory is another reason for second and third generation writers to write fictionalised texts from a certain distance. Haselstein sees the potential of the novel in writing about the Holocaust.

Denn mehr noch als andere literarische Gattungen gibt der Roman der Dialogizität der Sprache Raum und ermöglicht es den Autoren, eine

Vielzahl von historischen Quellen zum Holocaust in die Erzählhandlung einzuarbeiten und religiöse und literarische Figurationen des Traumas zu zitieren, ohne einer davon Verbindlichkeit zuzubilligen. (Haselstein 200)

According to her, there is a discomfort with literary representations of the Holocaust based on the understanding of the Holocaust as a rupture that only allows for personal experience. For Jewish-American readers these texts unlock the trauma of anti-Semitic persecution as a counterpart to Jewish assimilation in the US. This brings memories of the destruction of Jewish culture in Eastern Europe and by this a new motivation of Jewish identity in the U.S. (cf. Haselstein, 194).

Haselstein furthermore asks about the nature of a therapeutic reworking of historical trauma and introduces the problem of the continuance and recording of the events and the effects thereof. She refers to Cathy Caruth who explains trauma as a

Figur einer Latenz des Nicht-Wahrgenommenen, Übergangenen, die jede gesellschaftliche Erfahrung durchzieht und Konzepten linearer Zeitlichkeit widersteht, da das Vergessene jederzeit in entstellter Form als Neues wiederkehren kann. (Haselstein, 195)

If history is conceived as latent where different collective trauma overlap or interlink, historiographic text have to be seen as performative constructs because the historic discipline responds to historical trauma, thus perpetuating it. The same accounts for literary texts that stage the covertness of their reference due to their linguistic materiality and are able to form cultural knowledge about what is forgotten, repressed or inaccessible and its distorted inscription into any kind of representation (cf. Haselstein, 195). Haselstein thematises the problem of an aesthetics of Holocaust writing in times of commercialisation, sentimentalism and sacralisation. The quantity and quality of these representations, however, leads to a concern that an overload might result in the exact opposite of the intended effect (cf. Krankenhagen, 5). Krankenhagen refers to Lawrence L. Langer who claims that

die spezifische Erkenntnis von Auschwitz gegenwärtig verdrängt wird durch die wachsende Zahl der Darstellung[sic] des Holocaust, die diesen als ein effektvolles pädagogisches Beispiel für zukunftsorientierte Handlungen instrumentalisiert. (Krankenhagen, 5)

The production of Holocaust novels in the style of documentary realism showed the immanent constructedness of historical accounts and reports as well. This multiplicity and polysemy of the signifier 'Holocaust' demands a discussion on a metalevel.

Der Holocaust ist durch seine Darstellung zu einem in unterschiedlichen gesellschaftlichen Systemen anwendbaren Zeichen geworden und dieser Prozeß – das ist ein entscheidendes Kriterium der gegenwärtigen Debatten – wird auf einer Meta-Ebene reflektiert. (Krankenhagen, 2)

For Haverkamp, literary texts that expose their figurality present themselves as products of intertextual references and leave space for the non-representable. Literature in its cultural function works to establish in common knowledge the consciousness that history is a text. Weigel, on the other hand, strives to read literature as a reservoir of symbolisation that works on the level of common memory:

Während die kulturelle Funktion der Literatur demnach insbesondere darin besteht, als Allegorie der (Un-)Lesbarkeit der Historie das Wissen darum in den Diskurs einzutragen und zu bewahren, profiliert Weigel die Literatur als Archiv kultureller Symbolisierungen, in denen sich die Phantasmen transgenerationaler Erinnerung symptomatisch lesen lassen, und tastet die ontologisch begründeten disziplinären Grenzen zwischen Literatur und Geschichte nicht an. (Haselstein, 196)

Questions as to adequate reactions to fictional representations produce differing suggestions. Nieraad disputes that identification is an adequate reaction when confronted with Holocaust art. Hahn questions this rejection of identification with the victims of the Holocaust and advocates this

notwendigen, zeitweisen und partiellen Identifikation mit den, hier fiktiv nachempfundenen Opfern des Holocaust. Ohne die Fähigkeit, sich die Leiden anderer *vorstellen* zu können, ist Empathie unmöglich." (Hahn, 27)

But is it really necessary to imagine the victims' sufferings? Is it crucial in the process of understanding? Nicola King claims that "[i]t seems presumptuous, to say the least, to attempt to enter the frame of mind of the dying and to imagine their cries" (King, 106). *Fugitive Pieces* does exactly that. Jakob Beer enters the gas chamber in his imagination and pictures how they die. This has been a major point of criticism of the novel. How the fictional accounts of suffering are

presented in the three novels under consideration will be considered in a later chapter.

LaCapra's theories represent a new way of analysing the fictional and historiographical representation of traumatised victims. He uses psychoanalytical tools and concepts in his analysis of the process of mourning. While mourning may help to recognize the other as other, melancholia is still important in the process of mourning. This entails the acceptance of one's loss but also as release of the other and a new beginning. In the sense that acting out means a return of the repressed it is necessary for the process of working through. Working through brings a loosening of ties from the traumatic past and its repetition. This recurrent process is distinct from acting out in that interpretation serves as a certain distancing from the traumatic events (cf. LaCapra, 1985f), "a matter of critical purchase on problems and responsible control in action that would permit desirable change" (LaCapra, 1986). The aim of this process is a heightened degree of agency and independence. A recognition of the impossibility of complete redemption or rather elimination of the traumatic effects is, however, necessary for a successful process. "Freud related working-through to the process whereby the past is recalled in memory rather than compulsively repeated or acted out" (LaCapra, 1996). This recollection may, however, not be seen as acting-out but as, for example in repeated dreams of lost ones, "forms of arrested or partial mourning". (LaCapra, 1996) LaCapra argues that "mourning involves memory-work in the attempt to convert haunting presences into honored dead who can be laid to rest but not simply forgotten or dismissed." (LaCapra, 2004) Dominick LaCapra and Sigrid Weigel criticize the totalisation of trauma that normalises it and disables cultural argument.

Nieraad emphasises that for the victims mourning is essential in the engagement with the Holocaust. Nieraad claims that "[d]iese Situation durch personalisierende Schicksalserzählungen im Medium der Fiktion ändern zu wollen, heißt ihr ausweichen" (Nieraad, 1993). He dismisses personalised narrations, bearing in mind the melodramatic TV series *Holocaust*. However, he does not present his notion of an adequate appreciation of the victims' lives or a

demonstration of solidarity. He only remarks that naming is the only adequate way of remembrance (cf. Nieraad, 194).

To give suffering a voice, to make it heard so that it will never be forgotten and never happen again, is one important reason for many writers to integrate the Holocaust in their works. The emphasis of prose fiction on character formation, personal motivation and manipulation or representation of reality clashes with the Holocaust as all these elements were denied to the victims. The frame of a chronological, linear or ordered story line also poses a problem also for survivors of the Shoah, which can never be told in full. In order to cope with this problem, literary critics argue for different ways to read such accounts. "They call for readings that are just as attentive to the silences and the gaps as to the stories actually told. The problems of storytelling are just as important as the account itself." (Ribbat 200) The idea is to look for the trauma that wrecks the narration. There is no neutral position from which to tell a story anymore. No omniscient narrator can account for the events, no chronology can encompass the tragedy (cf. Ribbat, 199f).

Instead of attempting to portray the violence of the conflict with as much authenticity as possible, the postmodernists focused on the way the twentieth-century watershed had transformed experience and the systems of representation. (Ribbat 201)

Ribbat sees a transformation of post-Holocaust fiction in recent years that leads away from earlier narrative strategies of silence and fragmentation.

Three developments have intersected in this transformation: the constructedness of memory, the ever more intimate linkage between American literature and popular culture, and finally the passing away of many Holocaust survivors whose voices have thus ceased to speak in a discourse marked by authentic trauma. Hence, fragmented narratives – with their gaps, silences, and ruptures caused by pain – are rapidly receding into the past. (Ribbat 206)

Ribbat analyses different novels from the 1990's and the beginning of the twentieth century and sees a striking difference of topic. The novels from the twentieth century depict families thus making these novels "future-oriented narrative[s that...] seem less apocalyptic" (Ribbat 211). Individual journeys to find one's place in family and life are presented and the focus has shifted onto second and third generation Jews. All of the novels analysed in this thesis are

family stories as well. All of them focus on the individual in his quest for his/her place. There is, however, a striking difference when looking at *Fugitive Pieces* on the one hand and *Everything is Illuminated* and *The History of Love* on the other. Michaels' novel is still written in the earlier tradition while the other two novels focus on the integration into and acknowledgement of the Shoah for one's personal history. This thesis, therefore, finds itself at the intersection of parameters of writing.

Point of View

Nur aus der Perspektive der Toten ließe sich ein Holocaust beschreiben
 – freilich gibt es aus dieser Perspektive nichts mehr zu berichten.
 (Schell, 35)

Since the discourse of (un)representability is central to Holocaust writing it should also be asked who is representing what? The “what” will be dealt with later on, in the chapter on traumatising events; the “who” will be briefly tackled in the following chapter. Who narrates a story about the Holocaust or against the backdrop of the fictional representation of the traumatising events is central regarding, among others, the issue of authority. Many critics ponder the question if second- or third-generation writers can legitimately write about what they only know from history books, documentaries or memories of their ancestors. Even more interesting for this thesis is, however, the question of who speaks in the novels from which perspective and with which motivations and intentions.

To look at this aspect is important for different reasons. All of the novels analysed in this thesis feature a direct survivor of the Holocaust. Their voices, however, differ radically. While Leo’s (*The History of Love*) is that of a grumpy old man full of sadness, Alex’ grandfather (*Everything is Illuminated*) is full of guilt. Jakob (*Fugitive Pieces*), the youngest of those survivor protagonists, tries to intellectually cope with his trauma. All the novels dealt with in this thesis also have a second- or third-generation narrator. This allows for a shift of focus away from the genre of historiographical testimony and witness accounts which might result in harsh criticism concerning authenticity. These narrators furthermore allow a distancing from the Shoah and a turn to issues such as identity, nationality and the feeling of disorientation as a child or adolescent. Nieraad claims that it is problematic to represent the Holocaust through personification and narrative exploration of the fate of individuals or families during and directly after the years of war.² The temporal removal from the Shoah through second- and third-generation narrators, however, allows an empathic identification that is

² Cf. Nieraad 182.

not as problematic as that of a first person narrator. Michaels received some criticism for her fictional survivor memoirs.

Berger lists motifs of such temporally removed stories. All of them entail an exploration of the consequences of the Holocaust for the following generation. The characteristics below can all be found in the three novels mediated through the voices of second- and third-generation protagonists:

Holocaust literature written by children of survivors displays its own icons; parents' tales of the Kingdom of Night, or, the other side of the same coin, silence about the past, photos of murdered siblings or other family members, objects which once belonged to a relative consumed by the Shoah's flames, heightened personal awareness of contemporary evil, and the parents' continued forms of suffering. (Berger 1990a, 48)

These characteristics seem to be recurrent elements in Holocaust literature. All of them speak of trauma and loss despite the tendency to move away from fragmentation, silences and gaps. Muteness as a common trope has generally been conceived as a legitimate literary response. The following section will take a closer look at the different narrative voices, stylistic idiosyncrasies and significant aspects in all three novels.

To begin with the earliest novel, *Fugitive Pieces* is divided into two books with two different first-person narrators, Jakob Beer in the first book and Ben in the second book. These homodiegetic narrators encompass two different viewpoints. Beer's memoirs become embedded in a broader frame at the beginning of the novel. The prologue suggests that Beer's memoirs are among "countless manuscripts" that have been written during World War II but have been lost during the war or destroyed. Jakob Beer, who would be killed in an accident in 1993, had begun to work on his memoirs, although the prologue claims that "A man's work, like his life, is never completed" (FP, not paginated). There is no acknowledgement that the following account is fictitious. This purports some degree of authenticity through alignment with presumably similar destinies that have been lost to the following generations. As a "sustained exploration of memory, represented through imagery and metaphor, on the understanding that such writing is constituted by the very incomprehensibility of its occurrence" (Cook, 13), *Fugitive Pieces* struggles with narrating what cannot

be told in full. The fragmentary nature of the novel and the different perspectives only at the end of the novel integrate and form an organic whole. Ben, the narrator of the last third of the novel, is the child of survivors of the Holocaust, thus a member of the second generation and haunted by different ghosts than Jakob.

The structure of Jakob's memoirs is reflected in the second part of the novel. The first chapter in Ben's section is called *The Drowned City*, which is also the name of Jakob's memoir. All of Ben's four chapter headings repeat some of Jakob's in different order, thus showing Jakob's influence on Ben's writing and development. Written in retrospect after Ben has found Jakob's memoirs in his house on Idhra, he evaluates his own life and solves the mystery of his parents' silence throughout his life by looking deeper. "Never trust biographies. Too many events in a man's life are invisible" (FP, 141), Ben says, who is a biographer himself, tracing Beer's life, searching for his memoirs in order to get close to this father-figure. He even emulates his writing style, visible in the extensive use of metaphor in both parts. Also, the fragmented style of Jakob's musings is mirrored in Ben's narration. The two stories are separated from each other; Jakob never mentions his meeting Ben, it is only Ben who refers to Jakob's life and writings.

Everything is Illuminated, on the other hand, consists of three interrelated strands of narration: the letters of Alexander ("Alex") Perchov, the story of the Jewish shtetl Trachimbrod and Alex' account of their journey. All three of them focus on some revelation, some epiphany, or as they call it, an 'illumination'. The novel starts out as a comedy; however, "the farce ends, the comedy implodes" (Ribbat 213). This is not only due to the frustration they face in looking for Augustine but also due to Alex' growing wisdom and sadness and Jonathan's realisation that

"I used to think that humor was the only way to appreciate how wonderful and terrible the world is, to celebrate how big life is. [...] But now I think it's the opposite. Humor is the way of shrinking from that wonderful and terrible world." (Ell, 158)

Although in the beginning Alex' crude English corresponds to his naïve and simple musings later on in the novel his insights into human nature become

very clever. The account of the journey and, obviously, Alex' letters are written in first-person, the magical realist tale of the shtetl is told by an omniscient first-person narrator.

Eaglestone sees an "emphasis on mimesis of process (on the writing itself) rather than mimesis of product (the world represented)" (Eaglestone, 128). Mimesis of product is, however, present in the narration of the shtetl Trachimbrod situated on the Ukrainian-Polish border. The omniscient narrator of this strand uses magical realist elements, foreshadowing, stretches and condenses time and creates

eine Art phantastisch – folkloristischer Genremalerei [...] Die Selbstreferentialität dieser Pastiches ist jedoch kein postmodernes Spiel, sondern eine Konsequenz der Leere, der Lücke in der generationellen Vermittlung jüdischer Kultur. Eine mit dem Fortschreiten der erzählten Zeit zunehmende experimentelle Schreibweise hebt durch Techniken der Visualisierung die Synchronizität der Darstellung im Sinne einer doppelten zeitlichen Perspektive des Erinnerns und Vergegenwärtigens hervor. (Haselstein 201f)

Experimental typographical oddities visualise the weird chronicle of the townspeople, emphasise the theatricality of certain scenes or the panic during the massacre. This strand of the narration pretends to be the transcript of passed down memories, but the surreal elements expose the void that silence and death have left. The narrator therefore resorts to his own imagination in the creation of an ancestry and thus mixes memory and his own vision. However, "[d]er Augenzeugenbericht Trachimbrods ist nicht nur trauernde, sondern auch anklagende Erinnerung." (Haselstein 206) It is a presentation of life as it could have been, showing what has been lost creating an

immer dichteres Gewebe von Anspielungen, Querverweisen, Spiegelungsfiguren, Vor- und Rückblenden, in denen die Performativität des Schreibens und des Geschriebenwerdens die existentielle Frage beider Protagonisten nach ihrer persönlichen Identität und Geschichte modelliert. (Haselstein 202)

In their opulence, these stories are contrasted with the blunt reality of post-communist Holocaust rehabilitation.

Die Vermitteltheit aller Figuren durch die jüdische Tradition macht es Jonathan möglich, eine indirekte Darstellung des Holocaust zu entwickeln, deren moralische Bedeutung für Gegenwart und Zukunft in

der Wiederaufnahme zerstörter jüdischer Geschichte liegt. Zugleich ist es aber Freuds Theorie des Trauma, die Jonathans Darstellung strukturiert und dem Erzählen realitätsstiftende Funktion gibt. (Haselstein 209)

The “hero” (as Alex calls him) of the third strand of narration is “Jonathan Safran Foer”, who comes to the Ukraine to find his grandfather’s and eventually his own origins, although Alex narrates the story. Near the end the reader realises that it is only Alex who finds illumination. Jonathan is rather giving input for Alex’ witty analyses and through Alex’ responses in the letters. One could also say that Jonathan is a present absence himself. What the reader gets to know about Jonathan is provided by Alex. Alex is the only first person narrator.

Jonathan und Alex kommen einander nahe, und in dieser Nähe machen Wiederholung, Übersetzung, offene Fragen als zentrale Verfahren der literarischen Darstellung die Positionen der Protagonisten in ihrer Komplementarität und Differenz lesbar. Sie reflektieren die weitgehende Absenz eines Dialogs der Nachfahren von Opfern und Tätern als historische Erblast, und sie nehmen in der Gegenüberstellung und Vernetzung distinkter Erzählungen vom Holocaust Rücksicht auf die Unmöglichkeit einer synkretistischen Darstellung und die Unhintergebarkeit der kulturellen Verortung des Erinnerns. (Haselstein 210)

Alex and Jonathan are constructed as opposites. Coming from the U.S., Jonathan cannot understand that the Ukraine is still haunted by the ruins of communism and life standards are not comparable. This is exemplified in a comic incident at the beginning of their journey. Jonathan is a vegetarian, which is not a concept familiar to the Ukrainians (*EII* 65-6). Jonathan has spent all his life conscious of his role as offspring of Holocaust survivors while Alex is totally unaware of such a project. Their stories of the Holocaust are diametrically opposed: Jonathan is on the victimised side while Alex is revealed to be the grandson of someone who is responsible for another’s death. Their difference is also stressed through their different languages. Alex’ English is very strange which makes translation even more difficult. Added to that is the incongruency of “the act of linguistic translation with that of cultural translation” (Varvogli, 91). Still, it leads to revealing situations. There is one instance, where at first Alex translates his grandfather’s answers, changing from the first to the third person, then translating verbatim until his I and the I of the grandfather merge before he tries to separate again. Through opening the question of legacy for the offspring of the perpetrators by these transgressive figurations of language, questions

about moral obligations and the existence of God ensue against the backdrop of making oneself understood in another language cf. Haselstein, 207).

The form of narration allows for a representation of the genocide from different perspectives. While Jonathan's narration leads up to the point of destruction, Alex' narration goes beyond. He needs and struggles to find some kind of reconciliation. Finally, they realise there is no answer to the guilt and the need for reconciliation. Alex' development is, however, a reconciling element of the novel as he begins to empathize with the "hero" and understand his loss. That Jonathan is present only through the information the reader has from Alex and the Trachimbrod stories is a clever move of the author. Jonathan's silence as to a reconciliation of victims and perpetrators is crucial. The gap is left open as is the figure of Augustine an empty space.

Dass Foer mit Alex einen Protagonisten erfindet, der sich in seinem Schreiben mit den jüdischen Opfern identifiziert, ohne sein Eingeschriebensein in die Genealogie der Täter zu verleugnen, ist der Entwurf, der in der rigorosen Trennung der narrativen Konstruktionen und dem Fehlen jeder Stellungnahme Jonathans zu Alex' Sehnsucht nach Erlösung vom Trauma des Holocaust seinen Kontrapunkt findet. (Haselstein 209)

The History of Love is told primarily by two first-person narrators, Alma Singer and Leo Gursky. Alma is a fifteen-year old girl living with her mother and brother in New York. Her mother still mourns the death of her husband, Alma's and Bird's father, so Alma wants to find her a new man. Her narration is a numbered list of sometimes random thoughts that are supertitled by statement that only arbitrarily fit. Alma thinks the key to finding her mother a man is in finding the author of *The History of Love*, the novel her father gave to her mother. Eventually, through her quest to find her namesake, the Alma from the novel, Alma finds herself and also Leo Gursky.

Leo Gursky, the Holocaust survivor who fled from Eastern Europe only to find the love of his life married to another man with whom she raises her and Leo's son. The grumpy conversational tone of his story ("I quote unquote hurried around the reading room." (HL, 123)) and the comic situations of his tale are contrasted by the brief glimpses the reader gets of his life. His only close friend Bruno is later revealed to have died during the war. Leo only imagined him. This

makes the reader go back to the parts pertaining to him and re-read. Leo is at the same time reliable and unreliable. His traumatised state makes his narration dubious at times. Still, the content and form seem largely plausible throughout the novel. Gursky's voice is full of absurd remarks about his sadness and loneliness, his comic behaviour and queer stories distract the reader from the fact that he survived the Holocaust. This serious aspect is at times banalised through exaggeration and flamboyance.

Alma's uncle Julian tells her on her birthday, "Wittgenstein once wrote that when the eye sees something beautiful, the hand wants to draw it" (*HL*, 182). The same holds true for Leo's writing *The History of Love*. His love for Alma is so beautiful to Leo that he wants to create a memorial for her, to make her immortal. Similarly, he himself wants to leave an imprint of his existence and while writing the book the reader is reading Gursky is writing a second book, the book that eventually will be thought to be the last manuscript of his late son. This fact may be confusing as to what the reader is actually consuming. Leo's casual resignation with life is reflected in his narrative voice, always ignored, his achievements never honoured, his life lived invisibly. His "And yet." at the end of his sentences does just the opposite: keep the reader on the edge, there is more to what I am saying, just ask me. One reviewer sees him as "a tragi-comic one man show, obsessed with death but in a self-aware manner which makes his attempts to escape it in any way utterly charming" (Guest³).

One further strand is told by an omniscient narrator who tells the story of Zvi Litvinoff who passes Gursky's novel off as his own and is henceforth haunted by this theft. Only at the end of the novel may the reader ask who really wrote *The History of Love*. Zvi feels just like Leo when he wants his book to "flap their wings and return to him to report on how many tears shed, how many laughs, how many passages read aloud, how many cruel closings of the cover after reading barely a page, how many never opened at all" (*HL*, 71). Only one copy reaches Alma, only it is the wrong Alma, still related to Leo's Alma through her immortal name but nevertheless not the woman he loves. But his writing has made him finally immortal as now there is one person who will remember him

³ Anonymous guest review on <<http://vulpeslibris.wordpress.com>>.

and tell her children about him. Also, his novel made other things possible: “It prompts plagiarism, fuels imaginations, makes people fall in love” (Maslin).

There are also two instance where diary entries written by Alma’s brother Bird are inserted into the narration. This plurality of voices produces a certain confusion, especially as the different strands interweave and finally culminate in a section that alternately narrates the meeting of Leo and Alma from each perspective. I agree with Janet Maslin who states that “there are times when Ms. Krauss's gamesmanship risks overpowering her larger purpose” (Maslin) and with an anonymous reviewer who says that “perhaps *The History of Love* is a little too intricately plotted. There are just too many strings wrapped around each other so that when you try to pull them apart they end up a big knot” (Guest). In a novel where Leo is writing to be read one might ask for whom he intends the musings the reader is faced with. Also the plurality of voices may at times seem overpowering although taken together they show that human beings are related in the most mysterious ways and may come together despite the most difficult hindrances.

Now that the different narrative voices have been expounded in more detail, analysis will turn to the traumatised of the protagonists.

De-Humanization – Trauma

Es ereignet sich, daß ein Mensch scheinbar unbeschädigt die Stätte verlässt, an der er einen schreckhaften Unfall [...] erlebt hat. Im Laufe der nächsten Wochen entwickelt er aber eine Reihe schwerer psychischer und motorischer Symptome, die man nur von seinem Schock, jener Erschütterung oder was sonst damals gewirkt hat, ableiten kann. Er hat jetzt eine „traumatische Neurose“. (Freud, Moses, 88-9)

In the three novels dealt with in this paper the survivors of the Shoah suffered traumatising, through witnessing horrifying events, being subject to those events or being implicated in them. This traumatising wrecked their sense of unity, individuality and security. Victims of the Shoah were denied dignity, mobility, physical integrity, access to a fair and equal law system, familial relations and property. They were denied each of their human rights. They were tortured, physically as well as psychologically. This trauma caused different reactions. The representation of the fictional traumatic events will be analysed in this section as well as two areas in which this traumatising shows effect. Said traumatising continues into the second and third generation. These children and grand-children grew up with silence as to what happened during the war or carry the burden of their ancestors' stories.

Trauma or rather a traumatic neurosis is the reaction to an unexpected psychical or physical wound. But only after some time do the first symptoms of a neurosis appear. After what is called latency the individual is subject to various deficiencies that affect body and soul. These may be articulated as movement disorders or psychic effects such as angst, dreams/nightmares, diverse phobias, et cetera. In order to locate trauma the boundaries have to be approached as closely as possible: to circle the void shows its circumference. Since trauma is a state of being the past is carried into the present, merging past and present into a pathological condition. On the other hand, the past can never be fully accessed and therefore must be removed at the same time (cf. Coffey, 33). Freud speaks of trauma in *Der Mann Moses und die monotheistische Religion (Moses and Monotheism)* when he says:

Die Wirkungen des Traumas sind von zweierlei Art, positive und negative. Die ersteren sind Bemühungen, das Trauma wieder zur

Geltung zu bringen, also das vergessene Erlebnis zu erinnern, oder noch besser, es real zu machen, eine Wiederholung davon von neuem zu erleben [...] Man faßt diese Bemühungen zusammen als *Fixierung* und das Trauma und *Wiederholungszwang*. [...] Die negativen Reaktionen verfolgen das entgegengesetzte Ziel, daß von den vergessenen Traumata nichts erinnert und nichts wiederholt werden soll. Wir können sie als Abwehrreaktionen zusammenfassen. (Freud, 99)

Caruth's concept of unclaimed experience is similar to trauma, "a history which cannot be fully perceived as it occurs." (Whitehead, 53) The experience is a fragmented one that is latent and repressed. LaCapra applies psychoanalytic categories to historical discourse and enlarges the scope and applicability, for example on the Holocaust.

LaCapra's premise is that the binary opposition between the individual and the society, and historical approaches to collective as well as individual reactions to events, need to be reconceived in light of fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis – denial, repression, transference, acting out, and working through. (Kauvar, 146, mistake in original)

The following section will briefly explain the above terms with reference to their use in this thesis. Denial and repression denote defense mechanisms. Denial keeps threatening perceptions and effects from entering consciousness. It is part of the mourning process and means a refusal to acknowledge reality. Repression makes sure that undesirable demands of the instinct are kept from the mind. Freud claims that repression affects the memory. It is memories that are repressed, not the original experiences and perceptions. Acting out means discharge patterns that cannot be completed; working through means the process of assimilating the resistances one has built up.⁴

Whereas Freud envisioned acting out as a compulsive repetition of a trauma from the past that sacrifices life lived in the present, he conceived of working through as a healthy form of transcending or, at the very least, coming to terms with trauma, so that the individual differentiates the past from the present and thereby owns a future. (Kauvar, 146)

Denial is the first reaction to trauma; body and soul refuse to or are not able to cope with what happened and therefore repress the traumatic events. The intrusion of these events is too much to process; what happens cannot be taken in. This is what happens to the novels' protagonists as well as to the texts. The

⁴ Cf. Eidelberg. All explanations of the above concepts from the *Encyclopedia of Psychoanalysis*.

protagonists are overwhelmed by the horrors. Jakob cannot accept for a long time that his sister is gone, Alex' grandfather repressed his memories of the massacre and took on a different name, Leo tells only in elusive interludes of his flight from the Nazis. Gaps appear where reality seems too much to depict. Narrative style becomes more experimental and creative.

Traumatisation

The past, then, arises before the reader as that which will have been, and it so arises because language has the capacity to retain the traces of past lives that, in reading or hearing, become one's own. Such recognition is always mournful, however, inasmuch as it is a presence of absence, a recognition of loss. (McCollough, 832)

“It is not a thing that you can imagine. It only is. After that, there can be no imagining.”(EII, 188)

This chapter will explore how fictional events referring to the Holocaust are represented in the novels. This means a recreation of the past in language; the losses the authors tell about are mourned in a recognition of their absence, their irretrievable loss. All of the war events in the novels are fictional. They are imagined but modelled onto similar historic accounts. Each of the three novels uses a different technique to represent such horrifying events. In *Fugitive Pieces* it is on the one hand the personal experience of a boy hidden behind a wall while his family is murdered, on the other hand stories he hears are included in his memoirs. *Everything is Illuminated* depicts such events in each of its three strands of narration. Different versions of the same massacre are presented to the reader and make obvious that history is always a construction. In *The History of Love* the reader has to piece together the fragments of Leo's flight from Poland. These accounts employ experimental narrative techniques, a fragmented style or typographical markers. The representation of the traumatising events will be presented in the order of the publication date of the respective novel.

Fugitive Pieces

Jakob Beer loses his family to the Nazis when he is only a child. He hides behind a wall and overhears the murder of his family: “I heard the spray of buttons, little white teeth”(FP, 7). The contrast of these images, the teeth that are metaphorized as buttons shows the denial that is already in action. He enters the scene of the killings and finds his parents dead. He cannot even recognize them as his parents (“fleshheap” (FP, 7)). His sister has disappeared. Even more than by the murder of his parents, Jakob is traumatised by the loss of Bella. Her unknown fate haunts him throughout his life. The section covering the raid on his home is only briefly described. He flees in a haste, body and mind having no chance to process these events as he has to fight for his own life. Bella returns to him in his memories and, disturbingly, in his dreams:

At night I choked against Bella’s face, a doll’s face, immobile, inanimate, her hair floating behind her. These nightmares, in which my parents and my sister drowned with the Jews of Crete, continued for years, continued long after we’d moved to Toronto.(FP, 44)

Due to his traumatic experiences Jakob feels alienated from himself. His account of his and Athos’ stay in Kostas’ and Daphne’s house revolves around visual depictions and food. Consequently, the following paragraph describes the adults as “starved”(FP, 62) of words. Some things Jakob does not understand but “there was also much I did understand – hunger, shooting, bodies in the street, how suddenly everything familiar is inexpressible” (FP, 62). Cruelty and hunger are paired. What follows is a disparate succession of desperate scraps of stories interspersed with what Jakob remembers of his own tragedy and memories of his village. Occasionally, they are related through lexical items or other triggers, for example the flags flying in the wind, Jakob’s father falling, Daphne bringing him some milk which triggers a memory of Mrs. Alperstein who gave him and his friend milk; chocolate and things like eggs or potatoes that were luxury during the war. Memory is triggered by smells, images, imagined similarities. Thus, history is destined to be repeated, what we know of the past is about to return and bears the potential of destruction.

An interesting section from a stylistic point of view contrasts Jakob’s experiences in hiding with the fate of millions of Jews all over Europe. The

constricted spaces physically torture their prisoners while Jakob suffers psychologically, “Jews were filling the corners and cracks of Europe, every available space. They buried themselves in strange graves, any space that would fit their bodies, absorbing more room than was allotted them in the world.”(*FP*, 45) The Jews were forced into hiding-places which for many became their graves. Most sentences of this section either begin or contain the word *while* to highlight the sharp contrast between Jakob’s relative security and the gruesome fate of the Jewish population. This contrast makes the terrifying experiences even more graphic. The descriptions are explicit here, presenting different particular moments, such as the burning of the corpses, the Sonderkommando or instances of torture. Like a flashlight onto these scenes, the pictures flash in the reader’s imagination, similar to some infamous photographs in history books. Trauma is transferred onto the readers who are reminded of their own encounters with the Holocaust.

The Italian’s surrender of Zakynthos to the Germans is a moment of change for Athos, Jakob and the Greek. The Jews are burying their valuables. “All across Europe there’s such buried treasure.” (*FP*, 40) In retrospect, this sentence has a gruesome meaning because the Jews themselves are the buried treasure as we have seen above. Jakob tells a story of disappearances, of death hidden away in cramped spaces. He explains how nature created different ways to camouflage, himself feeling vulnerable and exposed on the streets of the town of Zakynthos. Michaels devotes only little space to the German occupation of Zakynthos. Scattered images and scientific facts that seem randomly interjected narrow like a funnel into a single message: “To survive was to escape fate. But if you escape your fate, whose life do you then step into?” (*FP*, 48). As a Jew, to have survived the Shoah meant to be one of only few. Many of the survivors ask themselves why they are still alive while millions of others had to die. What makes them special, what is their purpose in life now, do they have a responsibility to the dead? To the living? Do they have to live for the dead as well?

The following paragraph examines Beer’s imagination of Bella and the dying in the gas chamber, the most frequently criticized scene of the novel.

We look for the spirit precisely in the place of greatest degradation. It's from there that the new Adam must raise himself, must begin again. [...] I want to remain close to Bella. To do so, I blaspheme by imagining. (*FP*, 167)

He imagines her in the barracks of a concentration camp, wounded and sore and, interspersed, how she muses on her music. But Beer goes even further. In the face of death he imagines, as he knows from reports, how everybody climbs on top of the others in the gas chambers: "The terrifying hope of human cells. The bare autonomic faith of the body. [...] Each mouth, Bella's mouth, strained for its miracle." (*FP*, 168) Instinct draws them to live even though they know that they will not survive. Nothing will save them but still they hope as an automatic gesture. It is here that Beer looks for the spirit, the essence of a human being. In this instant, he fantasizes, the core of being becomes palpable. Though he imagines even the most gruesome scenes, it is impossible for him to imagine the screams, there is still a barrier inside the mind. He even finds grace in that moment because there is still the hope that some cried out believing, against all odds, that they would be saved. Hope is equated with grace, "that moment of utmost degradation, in that twisted reef, is the most obscene testament of grace" (*FP*, 168). He metaphorizes this imagination as blasphemy, a violation of a taboo, a sacrilege against God. This unrepresentability reminds of the commandment to not make an idol. This can be interpreted as a warning against the tendency to treat Auschwitz as sacral, untouchable, inexplicable. The Holocaust was man-made.

This image of grace is somehow perversely positive and is a figment of Jakob's imagination. "It has taken me years to reach this fabrication. Even as I fall apart I know I will never again feel this pure belief. *Bella, my brokenness has kept you broken*" (*FP*, 169, emphasis in original). His imagination has restored faith to the broken and the damaged, his fabrication makes him feel better and triggers the separation of Jakob and Bella. This seems irresponsible and sacrilegious. At the same time, Jakob has restored faith in himself. He can now believe that Bella is dead, that Bella died with faith. In this context of being separated from one's loved ones he refers to birds whose instinct draws them to a certain place and models this onto humans who are lost to their loved ones. Both carry so much of each other in themselves that their movements align but still they are

“bent with carrying absence” (*FP*, 169). Absence is a burden more troublesome and painful. While the second image is consoling and does not touch the dignity of the victims, Jakob’s vision of the gas chamber seems disrespectful as it has the sole purpose of restoring faith in himself and repairing his “brokenness”.

The recurrent similes of Michaels’ novel are a further indication of one important theme. No moment in history is ever singular, unique and independent. Different perceptions, perspectives, memories and biographies make a single-stranded narration of history impossible. There is no such thing as one story. There are millions of stories. Most of them have disappeared, not only those in writing but those of the people imprisoned, tortured and killed.

“Truth grows gradually in us, like a musician who plays a piece again and again until suddenly he hears it for the first time.” (*FP*, 251) Truth comes after someone has made an effort, it is a piece of work and does not come gratuitous. Only after his parents’ death does Ben find out the truth about his own parents. The picture he finds in their flat was taken in June, 1941. His parents lost two children in the Shoah. On the photograph are his two siblings. “We think of photographs as the captured past. But some photographs are like DNA. In them you can read your whole future” (*FP*, 251). DNA carries the genetic instructions and stores the information of human beings. In his hands is a blueprint of his own genetic code, his own fate. The reason why his parents were silent all these years and why Ben became the way he is – traumatised by silence, lost and confused.

Only now does he hear them speak from the photograph. “I understood that there had been a daughter; and a son born just before the action. When my mother was forced into the ghetto, twenty-four years old, her breasts were weeping with milk.” (*FP*, 252) Ben’s mother’s milk is wasted and will never nurture the one it was intended for. This image of waste is compared to spilt tears. He calls his parents’ deportation “the action”, euphemising the horror, seemingly not really understanding what this loss entailed. His wife Naomi has known all along what happened to his two siblings and his parents, thinking Ben knew, too. The truth is delayed by his mother through this photograph, the DNA

that outlives his own parents. Eventually he would find out. This revelation finally uproots Ben and he leaves Naomi: "I knew I must not open my mouth. The misery of bones that must be broken in order to be set straight" (*FP*, 254). It is now his turn to keep silent. The pain he feels is necessary for an eventual healing. His ties have to be cut, he has to leave. It is Naomi who suggests that he leave for Idhra to help Maurice Salman and find Beer's notebooks. He does not perceive the danger of separation. "At that moment, fear should have stung me, I should have smelled the whiff of ether, felt the knife edge" (*FP*, 256). Separation works like ether, first agitation, then an anaesthetizing effect. Ben leaves and takes the chance to heal his wounds.

Everything is Illuminated

In *Everything is Illuminated* three stories of a German assault are presented to the reader. First, there is Lista's narration of how Trachimbrod really disappeared, followed by Eli's account of his betrayal of his best friend, and finally Jonathan's fictional rendering of the events of 1941. Eli's account is deemed reliable while Lista's story is fragmentary. Jonathan's story is an imagination, allegorising the pain, the terror and the terrible silence after the massacre.

Lista's story

Finally when Jonathan, Alex and his grandfather reach what was once Trachimbrod, Grandfather asks Lista to tell Alex what happened. In staccato sentences the woman begins to talk.

"It was all very rapid, you must understand. You ran and you could not care about what was behind you or you would stop running." "Thanks?" "One day." "One day?" "Some departed before." "Before they came?" "Yes." "But you did not." "No." "You were lucky to endure." Silence. "No." Silence. "Yes." Silence. (*EII*, 184)

"You must understand" is Lista's plea. This is foreshadowing the feeling of guilt she feels, the responsibility she carries as a burden. "You" is the pronoun she uses in these sentences. They address the reader just as much as they address

Alex and the others. At first Alex does not feel anything but curiosity as to what is happening between Augustine and his grandfather. He is translating the story for Jonathan. "You cannot know how it felt to have to hear these things and then repeat them, because when I repeated them, I felt like I was making them new again." (*EII*, 185) He realises the power of language in recreating past events and feels terrible. First the Germans burned the synagogue, then they assembled them outside it and ordered the people to spit on the Torah or the Nazis would kill the Jews' families. Lista points outside, into the dark where the people were standing, where the houses of these people stood, relating what she did there, how she was related with them but all that can be seen is nothingness, darkness. Language recreates what happened a long time ago.

"He was a friend of mine, and when his wife had the baby, I would care for it like it was my own. Spit, the man with the blue eyes said, and he put a gun in the mouth of Izzy's wife, just like this," she said, and she put her finger in her mouth. "Did he spit?" Grandfather asked. "He spit." "He spit," I told the hero. (*EII*, 185f)

Lista's account is given in direct speech. Feelings of love are contrasted with cruelty. Intermittently, Alex repeats or summarizes what was said before. Grandfather often asks if the people really did what they were ordered as if to emphasize their sacrilege and their sacrifice.

"And then the General came to my father." It was not too dark for me to see that Grandfather closed his eyes. "Spit, he said." "Did he?" "No," she said, and she said no as if it was any other word from any other story, not having the weight it had in this one. (*EII*, 186)

The word "No" carries the weight of an entire life. Alex objects to this and really says that each word in language gets a new meaning dependent on its context. In this case, "No" means death.

"I will tell you that what made this story most scary was how rapid it was moving. I do not mean what happened in the story, but how the story was told. I felt that it could not be stopped." (*EII*, 187)

Alex feels scared by how rapidly the account is progressing, not by the content, knowing that the ending will only bring destruction and death. He is afraid of the ending, still hoping it can be stopped. Alex has the feeling that different stories have to be told in specific ways, each according to its own requirements. For him, this story would need a slower pace.

Lista's father refuses to spit on the Torah. Lista's mother and her sister are killed. The blame is shifted onto her father as other men from the community betrayed their faith and did what they had to do in order to save their families. Her pregnant sister is humiliated before she is shot into her belly. The question "Why would he not spit?" (*Ell*, 187) is not answered when asked the first time. Alex asks again and wants to know if her father was religious.

"Why?" I asked. "Why did he not spit? He was so religious?" "No," she said, "he did not believe in God." "He was a fool," Grandfather said. "You are wrong," she said. "You are wrong," Grandfather said. "You are wrong," she said. "And then?" I asked, and I must confess that I felt shameful about inquiring. "He put the gun against my father's head. Spit, the General said, and we will kill you." "And?" Grandfather asked. "And he spit." (*Ell*, 187)

The word "wrong" is repeated several times, branding the events with this word. Alex feels ashamed for asking about what happened, for penetrating into this pain. Does he feel ashamed for her father's behaviour or is he ashamed that all this happened? It is not answered if her father was shot but his action means death. Her pregnant sister was wounded and tried to crawl away asking the Gentiles to help her. Lista does not blame them for not helping her sister but neither can she forgive them. There is no easy way out. Only their voices are heard in the darkness while Lista tells her story. There is no light for many miles. Fleeting and ephemeral their words vanish. "Faced with the reality of the Holocaust, the process of imaginative restoration cannot be sustained." (*Whitehead*, 56) The discrepancy between making the story real by telling it and its transitoriness is striking.

"I don't want to hear any more," the hero said, so it was at this point that I ceased translating. (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.) (*Ell*, 186)

Curiosity means voyeurism, a sacrilege. Jonathan here gets the choice to either continue or stop. This verbal recreation can be stopped. The inability to actually see what happened is metaphorized through the act of translation. Felman, speaking of the significance of the act of translation in the film *Shoah*, comments that

[t]hrough the multiplicity of foreign tongues and the delay incurred by the translation, this incapacity of the act of seeing to translate itself spontaneously into a meaning, is recapitulated.(Felman, 96)

Lista's sister, wounded, can escape to the woods and later return to collect everything from the dead. Their belongings, their hair, even their gold fillings. Finally the reader realises that it was not her sister who the old woman is talking about but herself. Her child was shot inside her body, taking the bullet and saving her. She returns a second time and pledges to live there among all of the things she could save until she dies. This is her punishment. "'For what?' 'For surviving,' she said." (*Eli*, 189) Survival, for her, is a punishment. To live with relics of the dead but not their corporeal presence testifies to the open wound the massacre caused. She talks about herself in the third person. She does not know anything about Augustine. She only met Jonathan's grandfather some time after the massacre, he had returned to see if the Messiah had come.

"'They were all killed,' she said, and here I commenced to translate for the hero what she was saying, 'except for the one or two who were able to escape.' 'You were the lucky ones,' I told her. 'We were the not-lucky ones,' she said." "It is not true," Grandfather said, although I do not know what part he was saying was not true. "It is. You should never have to be the one remaining." "You should have died with the others," he said. (*Eli*, 153)

This can be interpreted as an accusation: she should have taken the story to the grave, making it undone. No signs are visible of the massacre. It seems as if it never happened were it not for the old woman. Another interpretation is that her fate was to have died with the other inhabitants but she escaped fate.

Eli's story

Jonathan's journey to find the woman who saved his grandfather brings destruction for Alex' grandfather. His trauma is the guilt he brought upon himself by pointing out his best friend to the Nazis. Jonathan came to the Ukraine to close some gaps in his family history, in his own memory but there he has to witness how memory can destroy a person's life. He learns about the power of memory but at a very high prize.

Finally, the trauma of history is unearthed. A young Jewish American who knows only 'post-postmemory' (because that is all there is too[sic!] know) witnesses the destructive force of a much more painful, much more direct form of memory as it destroys another person [...] the impossibility of a sane, harmonious learning process remains. (Ribbat 213)

In the narration of Alex' grandfather all punctuation disappears. What follows is not silence but a hurried breathless monologue. This monologue ends both strands of narration, Lista's story and Alex' account of the journey. The diametrically opposed stylistic techniques show two ways of approaching this difficult subject.

Also, the breathless narrative, a modernist stream of consciousness, serves as a fulcrum between the magic realism Foer employs to tell the history of Trachimbrod and the postmodern globalized pseudo-English that Alex' letters to 'the hero' employ. (Ribbat 214)

Illumination happens when confronted with the belongings of the dead Trachimbroders. The old man retrieves a photo from the box. While Alex is rummaging the box the moment is described in great detail as if this already was illumination. "A prick from a pin. "Oh my God," he said, and he held the photograph up to the light of the candle. [...] "It's you," he said" (*EII*, 225). Recognition is aligned with pain. Jonathan says this to Alex, not his grandfather. Alex sees himself in the man on the photo, face, body and posture. "His cheeks appeared like mine. His eyes appeared like mine. His hairs, lips, arms, legs, they appeared like mine. Not even like mine. They were mine." (*EII*, 226) Here one feels reminded of Beer's claim that each moment is two moments. Alex now begs Jonathan to change the story but it is his own account. Or is he addressing the "real" author Jonathan Safran Foer? A direct address of the protagonist to the real world, a total break in the diegesis?

You may understand this as a gift from me to you, Jonathan. And just as I am saving you, so could you save Grandfather. We are merely two paragraphs away. Please, try to find some other option. (*EII*, 224)

Alex' grandfather's description of Herschel is not given in his grandfather's words but twice removed from his narration. Alex translates his grandfather's words into English, Jonathan records them on paper. This removes the reader even further from the story and prevents emphatic identification to a certain

degree. If the story continues in this fashion is not clear. The betrayal is even greater, even more shameful through the couple's close relation to Herschel. Dialogue between Alex and his grandfather is inserted in brackets in between. If this dialogue parts are spoken or only imagined is not clear, though.

"We were stupid," he said, "because we believed in things." "Why is this stupid?" "Because there are not things to believe in." (Love?) (There is no love. Only the end of love.) (Goodness?) (Do not be a fool.) (God?) (If God exists, He is not to be believed in.) "Augustine?" I asked. "I dreamed that this might be the thing," he said. "But I was wrong." "Perhaps you were not wrong. We could not find her, but that does not signify anything about whether you should believe in her." "What is the good of something that you cannot find?" (EII, 245)

There are no abstract concepts to believe in, no love, no god. He hoped that he could believe in Augustine but they will not find her. The hope to find faith again is disappointed. Alex tells Jonathan about his experience during this conversation. Alex feels as if finally he becomes himself, "whom I knew better than myself" (EII, 245). "Just because I was not a Jew, it does not mean that it did not happen to me." (EII, 246) Alex identifies with the victims and feels he becomes himself. Despite his being the offspring of a perpetrator he feels as and with victims. Claiming the tragedy for himself is dangerous, however. Taking responsibility for Herschel's death is not in his power. Alex suggests they go to the village where everything happened but his grandfather replies,

"My ghosts are not there." (You have ghosts?) (Of course I have ghosts.) (What are your ghosts like?) (They are on the insides 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 spaces amid love.) (EII, 246)

The actual story of the German massacre in Alex' narration is inserted into the text in brackets. Repeating to Jonathan the movements and story, he begins with "Do you remember what he did next, Jonathan?" (EII, 247) Thus he asserts another presence at the act of the narration, claiming a witness to what he heard. Repeated phrases such as "you will remember", "he did not once avoid our eyes" (EII, 247, my emphasis) ask for confirmation and authentication. As the story progresses the tone becomes more emotional. Punctuation is sparse, repetitions occur frequently. The people are involved in this abomination as they have to point out a Jew or die themselves, "everyone was pointing at a Jew

because nobody wanted to be killed one Jew pointed at his cousin and one pointed at himself because he would not point at another.” (*EII*, 250) Guilt is put onto the victims in a perverse act of cruelty. As the German general comes nearer to Eli there are no Jews except for Herschel outside the synagogue. Two men are shot because they cannot point out any Jews. For example, the cries “shotthismaninthehead”, “shothiminthehead” and “soafraidofdying” “Iamsoafraidofdying” (*EII*, 250), once spoken by Eli while telling his story, once by Herschel in Eli’s narration indicate the emotional strain. The section where Eli betrays his friend is told in a hurried, strained sequence:

who is a Jew the General asked me again and I felt on my other hand the hand of Grandmother and I knew that she was holding your father and that he was holding you and that you were holding your children I am so afraid of dying I am soafraidofdying Iamsoafraidofdying Iamsoafraidofdying and I said he is a Jew who is a Jew the General asked and Herschel embraced my hand with much strength and he was my friend he was my best friend I would have let him kiss Anna and even make love to her but I am I and my wife is my wife and my baby is my baby do you understand what I am telling you I pointed at Herschel and said he is a Jew this man is a Jew please Herschel said to me and he was crying tell them it is nottrue please Eli please (*EII*, 251)

It seems as if he is telling the story to himself, trying to justify his act. Throughout this sequence words are connected into strained utterances. All of these compounds express something unutterable: “shothiminthehead”, “cryingofthebabies”, “Iheldhimwithmuchforce”, “somuchforcethathecried” and “hewouldhavebeenafaultodoanythingelse”. The terrible sins committed by the Germans led to other sins and transgressions. Eli holds his son so hard that the baby starts to cry. He points out his best friend. His own deeds become as unspeakable as the German crimes. Furthermore, the coalescences indicate the speed of narration, the shame that tries to omit those words.

The Magical Realist Version

The third version of the annihilation of Trachimbrod is the magical realist account. The last dream of “The Book of Recurrent Dreams”⁵ is one version of the events. Elie Wiesel says about Jewish life described in memoirs:

⁵ “The Book of Recurrent Dreams” is a repository of „Aufzeichnungen des kollektiven Unbewussten“(Haselstein 202) and collects recurrent dreams of the inhabitants of

And it has survived in words alone. [...] [The shtetl] was swallowed up by smoke and night along with its sages and their pupils, its preachers and their followers, its dreamers and their dreams.”(qtd. in Haselstein, 196)

Dreams play a prominent role in the magical realist story.

Das Ich, das aus diesen Zeilen spricht, das zu retten versucht, wo keine Rettung war, ist Brod, die Urahnin Jonathans und Namensgeberin des Shtetl, die des Autors Phantasie aus dem Fluss (der Zeit) geborgen und verewigt hat, und der Autor Jonathan Safran Foer selbst: Beide sind im *Book of Recurrent Dreams* enthalten, beide werden von ihm gesprochen. (Haselstein, 204)

Brod's voice personifies the imagination of the author and wrests it from oblivion. This dream is embedded in Jonathan's narration. Here, on the first evening of German bombing, the Gypsy girl slits her wrists. “She didn't say, *You are going to marry*. And she didn't say, *I am going to kill myself*. Only: *How do you arrange your books?*” (*Ell*, 239) Her life ends not because of the Germans but because of a lost love, the lost love of Jonathan's grandfather. There is life happening during the catastrophe. Life is not on hold.

In dieser Konstellation treten alle Zuhörer in den Kreis der Zeugen ein und übernehmen damit Verantwortung für die Geschichte der Überlebenden. Dass Foer in dieser Dialogsequenz einen fiktionalen Augenzeugenbericht, der die Geschehnisse des Holocaust für die Nachwelt erinnert, mit der Aussage eines Zeugen vor Gericht verschmilzt und damit den testimonialen Diskurs in seinem gesamten Bedeutungsumfang realisiert, wird erst im Folgenden deutlich. (Haselstein 206)

The second to last section of the novel contains several headlines in capital letters from newspapers indicating the Germans' approach. They are coming nearer, the people have heard of atrocities but lost in their memories they continue their lives in Trachimbrod. The day of destruction is Trachimday, March 18, 1942. Headlines in capital letters from the radio, typographically becoming “louder” and other catchlines are integrated into the scenery. The danger is imminent. The reader already knows what is about to happen. White string spans the village to commemorate that event. At the picnic, a magical realist incident heightens the surreality of the scenery: “My grandfather put his

Trachimbrod. Some of them show the Holocaust as „Realisierung der Alpträume von Generationen” (Haselstein 203), some of them speak of unfulfilled love, others of death, fear and freedom.

ear against her belly and received a powerful knock to the head, lifting him off the ground, landing him on his back a few feet away.” (*EII*, 268) Reality is hyperreal.

Only few men are present at the celebration, most men already fight in the war. The parallel development of Trachimday and scenes of war, atrocities and killings is interrupted by the omniscient narrator’s voice “GO AWAY! RUN WHILE YOU CAN, FOOLS! RUN FOR YOUR LIVES!” (*EII*, 269) and later, “Here it is almost impossible to go on, because we know what happens, and wonder why they don’t. Or it’s impossible because we fear they do” (*EII*, 270). This points to the oft-felt effect of dramatic irony in films and literature. Their destiny is clear, the extensive foreshadowing and Lista’s narration have already ascertained what is about to happen. The moment before the bombing begins is arrested in time. Hands are separated to applaud, the sacks for the game hover in the air. “There is still time.” (*EII*, 271) but there is none. After the bombing and the burning of the synagogue Brod’s dream of the end of the world is the end of the narration. Brod dreams she is the river or it is the river that speaks itself in a magical realist metamorphosis, an anthropomorphisation of nature. All the people jump into the water to evade the bombing. In their panic and fear they pull at each other.

I wanted to save them all to save everybody from everybody [but] the desperate mass of babies children teenagers adults elderly all pulled at each other to survive but pulled each other into me drowning each other killing each other (*EII*, 273)

Again, it is Brod who kills them, the people who kill each other. The blame is on the victims. Jonathan’s grandfather Safran and pregnant Zosha are in the river, as well, but they are separated, “the baby refusing to die like this was pulled up and out of her body turning the waters around her red”, Zosha tries to cut the umbilical cord but “she died with her perfectly healthy nameless baby in her arms”(*EII*, 273). The narration of the shtetl begins and ends with a baby floating on the water. All death is futile but the death of a baby is probably the most senseless death. Foer thus denies the end all possibilities of interpretation.

The History of Love

In *The History of Love*, the events of the Holocaust, Leo's flight from the Nazis and the losses Gursky and Litvinoff suffer are presented in fragmented form. Only at the end a relatively coherent narrative is established of Leo's flight. It is up to the reader to collect the fragments and assemble them into a coherent order. The fragments, however, never form a whole. There is a marked gap in the descriptions of his life. Leo tells about his childhood up until he has to flee the SS and continues when he reaches the US. The void that is left is only acknowledged in passing comments. The events of the Holocaust are mostly mentioned in veiled form throughout the novel. "Later – when things happened that they could never have imagined – she wrote him a letter that said: *When will you learn that there isn't a word for everything?*" (HL, 11)

"When they write my obituary. Tomorrow. Or the next day. It will say, LEO GURSKY WAS SURVIVED BY AN APARTMENT FULL OF SHIT. I'm surprised I haven't been buried alive." (HL, 3)

But actually he has been buried alive for some time. It is only later that the reader gets to know the full story. The novel begins with death and ends with death. Gursky had to hide from the SS when he was a child. As an old man, he is faced with a different kind of invisibility. At the end, the reader finds Gursky's obituary. He has already suffered from a heart attack and is aware of his own mortality. "I thought: I didn't live forever" (HL, 5). Death is Gursky's constant companion. "Even during the years when I hid in the forest, in trees, holes, and cellars, with death breathing down my neck, I still never thought about the truth: that I was going to die" (HL, 129).

The following paragraph gives a still frightened-sounding account of the Nazi raid of the village. At first they cannot believe what they hear, unable to imagine it. He never saw anyone of his family again. Like Jakob in *Fugitive Pieces*, Leo hides in the woods, silent and indistinguishable. Similarly to Jakob, he relies on sound. But there are only shots, no human sounds. Humanity is silent. Leo narrates it as if he were in a conversation, questions are repeated as if to ponder them. The sentences become shorter, the sequence seems very conventional in comparison to those of the other two novels.

After she left, everything fell apart. No Jew was safe. There were rumours 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. [...] The Germans pushed east. They got closer and closer. The morning we heard their tanks approaching, my mother told me to hide in the woods. I wanted to take my youngest brother, he was only thirteen, but she said she would take him herself. Why did I listen? Because it was easier? I ran out to the woods. I lay still on the ground. Dogs barked in the distance. Hours went by. And then the shots. So many shots. For some reason, they didn't scream. Or maybe I couldn't hear their screams. Afterwards, only silence. My body was numb, I remember I tasted blood in my mouth. I don't know how much time passed. Days. I never went back. When 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. (HL, 8)

It is in one of the beginnings that the story of the annihilation of Slonim is told in more detail. Leo can narratively distance himself from the story by fictionalizing his persona and writing in the third person. He makes himself invisible, a feature he tries to reverse for the rest of his life.

One day he [i.e. the boy] was laid off. No one said why. He returned home. In the summer of 1941, the Einsatzgruppen drove deeper east, killing hundreds of Jews. On a bright, hot day in July, they entered Slonim. At that hour, the boy happened to be lying on his back in the woods thinking about the girl. You could say it was his love for her that saved him. In the years that followed, the boy became a man who became invisible. In this way, he escaped death. (HL, 12)

It is in his son Isaac's house that Leo finally counts his losses and summarizes how his family died. He does this in exclamatory form, directly addressing the victims. By telling their stories he briefly revives them and expresses his love. His father's death is perceived as freedom compared to the later horrors. He expresses his guilt for his mother's sacrifice and blames himself for not seeing the truth. Towards the end, the fates of his relatives become more and more abstract until he lists everything that ever meant something to him. He is man who has nothing anymore, it seems.

I lost you Tateh. We found you lying under a tree, your face splashed with mud. We knew you were free then, unbound by disappointing results. [...] Three years later, I lost Mameh. [...] I didn't bother to say goodbye. I chose to believe what was easier. I waited [in the woods after his flight]. But. She never came. Since then I've lived with the guilt of understanding too late that she thought she would have been a burden to me. I lost Fritzzy. He was studying in Vilna, Tateh – someone who knew someone told me he'd last been seen on a train. I lost Sari and Hanna to the dogs. I lost Herschel to the rain. I lost Josef to a crack in time. I lost

the sound of laughter. I lost a pair of shoes [...] I lost the only woman I ever wanted to love. I lost years. I lost books. I lost the house where I was born. And I lost Isaac. (HL, 169)

The beginning “I lost” is repeated several times, stresses that he was robbed of everything he loved. Towards the end of the paragraph the causes for his losses become more and more abstract. He loses not only people but things and abilities. This shows that death leaves you with a mark, a burden. Of himself he says “Once upon a time a man who had become invisible arrived in America. He’d spent three and a half years hiding, mostly in trees, but also cracks, cellars, holes. Then it was over” (HL, 12). He has been hiding for so long that he feels that he has lost himself in the process. Once, he characterizes himself as a “Jew from Poland who’s so afraid that if he even so much as forgets to flush the toilet he’ll get deported”(HL, 130). This tremendous sadness is countered by his careless style. But he is proud of his ability to unlock all doors. He signs all the lock he installs just to stay and even gets inside Carnegie Hall. He gets onto the stage and sees Alma with her violin. “Plain as day, a girl of fifteen, her hair in a braid, not five feet from me” (HL, 131). This illusion points to his questionable reliability. He sees and hears her playing a tune from the past and when she’s finished, she is gone. “In my loneliness it comforts me to think that the world’s doors, however closed, are never truly locked to me” (HL, 132). Even though people may not want him “inside” he is still able to get in despite their opposition.

Another strand of the narration is about Zvi Litvinoff, the man who stole Leo’s book. Litvinoff had to flee from the Holocaust himself, but from the outset he is constructed as a man who cannot be known fully:

“As for Litvinoff himself, we know only what is written on the pages of the one book he wrote. He kept no diary and wrote few letters. Those he did write were either lost or destroyed.” (HL, 67)

His losses are also presented in a negative version, as things that are not known about him, things that have not been communicated. The facts below explicitly describe the fate of his relatives but in the same sentence they speak of ignorance.

What is does not say is that his sister, Miriam, was shot in the head by a Nazi officer in the Warsaw, or that aside from Boris, who escaped on a kindertransport and lived out the remaining years of the War, and his childhood, in an orphanage in Surrey, and later Boris's children, who were at times smothered by the desperation and fear that accompanied their father's love, Litvinoff had no surviving relatives. [...] What is *not* known about Zvi Litvinoff is endless. (HL, 68)

Litvinoff saves all his money to bring his sister over to Chile but her letter suggests that this is not possible anymore. Truth is compared to an elephant, a rather hideous image. But maybe the truth is equally grotesque as an elephant in the middle of the room.

The War ended. Bit by bit, Litvinoff learned what had happened to his sister Miriam, and to his parents, and to four of his other siblings (what had become of his oldest brother, Andre, he could only piece together from probabilities). He learned to live with the truth. Not to accept it, but to live with it. It was like living with an elephant. His room was tiny, and every morning he had to squeeze around the truth just to get to the bathroom. To reach the armoire to get a pair of underpants he had to crawl under the truth, praying it wouldn't choose that moment to sit on his face. At night, when he closed his eyes, he felt it looming above him. (HL, 156)

Knowing the truth, his body begins to react to the trauma. His hair falls out, his body shrinks. But when his future wife Rosa falls in love with him, his "whole body reverberated with the news" (HL, 157). Here again, memory results in bodily reactions. Not only the mind suffers from loss but the body does, too.

"If he ever envied her being taken, it wasn't out of any special feeling for Alma, but out of a wish to be likewise singled out and loved alone" (HL, 184). The book is the palpable proof of love, of being special. In copying the book, her name is the only one he cannot change to another. Hers is the only name that stands out,

"perhaps it was because he knew that to remove her name would be like erasing all punctuation, and the vowels, and every adjective and noun. Because without Alma, there would have been no book." (HL, 184)

Alma is the "salt" of language, the centre of the book, its heart, its spine, its reason of existence and finally even the reason for Alma's search. She is the absence around which everything revolves. When Litvinoff returns to Slonim

after a two years' absence and witnesses Leo Gursky and Alma kissing, "he felt that everything that belonged to him was worthless" (*HL*, 184).

At the end Leo reveals more of his life in hiding and tells of its difficulties and hardship. Only at the end, it seems can he take pity for what he suffered. His will to live is stronger than pride because it feeds on love.

There was I lived in the forest, or in the forests, plural. I ate worms. I ate bugs. I ate anything that I could put into my mouth. Sometimes I would get sick. My stomach was a mess, but I needed something to chew. I drank water from puddles. Snow. Anything I could get hold of. [...] Apparently, I wanted to live very badly. And there was only one reason: her. The truth is that she told me she couldn't love me. When she said goodbye, she was saying goodbye forever. And yet. I made myself forget. (*HL*, 226)

He talks about his childhood when he wants to be like the other children and starts making himself see things that do not exist. "I wanted to believe. So I tried. And I found I could" (*HL*, 228). "And now, at the end of my life, I can barely tell the difference between what is real and what I believe" (*HL*, 230). Once a policeman comes by and asks if he is alright: "what was I supposed to say, I've waited my whole life for her, she was the opposite of death – and now I am still here waiting?" (*HL*, 234).

Now that mine is almost over, I can say that the thing that struck me most about life is the capacity for change. One day you're a person and the next day they tell you you're a dog. At first it's hard to bear, but after a while you learn not to look at it as a loss. There's even a moment when it becomes exhilarating to realize just how little needs to stay the same for you to continue the effort they call, for lack of a better word, being human. (*HL*, 236)

This paragraph shows his dismay at the fact that life can be devalued in an instant by language policies. He claims that being human needs so little. It is in the last section during his meeting with Alma that the reader hears the story of his flight. His survival is the result of coincidence. There is no mention of God or some spiritual guidance. His life is owed simply to an unfaithful wife. Leo is saved because the soldier suspects his wife to have an affair, "and it's like some tiny nothing that sets off natural disaster halfway across the world, only this was the opposite of disaster, how by accident she saved me with that thoughtless act of grace, and she never knew, and how that, too, is part of the

history of love" (*HL*, 240). He overhears their conversation in constant fear of discovery. Their trivial topic is contrasted with Leo's fear of death, of brutal execution.

Once I was hiding in a potato cellar when the SS came. The entrance was hidden by a thin layer of hay. Their footsteps approached, I could hear them speaking as if they were inside my ears. There were two of them. One said, *My wife is sleeping with another man*, and the other said, *How do you know?* and the first said, *I don't, I only suspect it*, to which the second said, *Why do you suspect it?* while my heart went into cardiac arrest, *It's just a feeling*, the first said and I imagined the bullet that would enter my brain, *I can't think straight*, he said, *I've lost my appetite completely*. (*HL*, 238)

Absent Presences – Not-There

The question is [...] whether limits apply to the forms that imagined representations do take. (Lang, 314)

As shown above, a number of fictional events referring or related to the Holocaust are been represented quite extensively in the three novels, at times even very drastically. But there are also gaps in the narration. Not only are these absences personified, in the case of the three novels all of them are gendered female but there are absences of place or absences that offer a gap to "write into". These absences are enclosed by limits that constitute the absence within. "Limits are asserted [...] in the presence of transgression, after (if not exactly because) violation has occurred" (Lang, 301). The following section will look at these absent presences while the gendered voids will be analysed in more detail in the next chapter.

For the case of *Fugitive Pieces*, Whitehead remarks that

In *Fugitive Pieces*, the Holocaust [...] is associated with places of burial (individual or mass graves) or of concealment (ovens, chests, drawers, cupboards, crawl spaces, cracks in walls). The graves and hiding places are negative spaces, raising the question of how the processes of mourning and commemoration can take place. (Whitehead, 57)

There is still a sense of presence if only to realise that something is missing. Michaels even focuses on the absence of bodies for proper burials and the

ensuing ceremonies. Mourning is complicated and rituals have to be adapted. Whole villages have disappeared, no people, no houses, no signs of life remain.

“In the middle of a field of freshly ploughed earth, nothing anywhere, you’ll find someone has put up a sign. “This was Kandanos.” “This was Skines.” All that remains of the villages.” (*FP*, 70)

Absence of place or rather a place of absence is shown in Foer’s novel as well. The place where Trachimbrod once was is empty. No house, no fence, nothing material testifies to the former village.

“There is no Trachimbrod anymore. It ended fifty years ago.” “Take us there,” Grandfather said. “There is nothing to see. It is only a field. I could exhibit you any field and it would be the same as exhibiting you Trachimbrod.” “We have come to see Trachimbrod,” Grandfather said, “and you will take us to Trachimbrod.”(*EII*, 155)

Everything is Illuminated also presents a different kind of absence, an absence of reason. Jonathan’s narration of the shtetl does not adhere to natural laws, only to fantasy and imagination. Annihilation is sure to come but the opulence of his narration comes to stand in for the absence that is to come later. It is through stories, as well, that the Gypsy girl feels presence. The Gypsy girl tells Jonathan’s grandfather stories that all originate in lack. He listens so as to make her live and feel fully.

“She told him of ship voyages she had taken to places he had never heard of, and stories he knew were all untrue, were bad non-truths, even, but he nodded and tried to convince himself to be convinced, tried to believe her, because he knew that the origin of a story is always an absence, and he wanted her to live among presences.” (*EII*, 230)

The list of things scattered in the river at the beginning is reminiscent of the Jewish possessions taken from them upon their arrival in Auschwitz. The pictures of heaps of shoes, clothes and others things have become an emblem for Auschwitz. The material possessions separated from their owners indicate that this is the endpoint of the journey. There is no coming back. The owner of these items is missing but the things testify to his impact. But among this debris is also a baby, a new life. This life is laid out in the narration, the good times and the bad times. The following quotation describes Lista’s room in her house. It is full of furniture, clothes and other things but there is no human being except for Lista. All of these orphaned possessions point to their absent presence.

One of the rooms had a bed, and a small desk, a bureau, and many things from the floor to the ceiling, including piles of more clothes and hundreds of shoes of different sizes and fashions. I could not see the wall through all of the photographs. They appeared as if they came from many different families, although I did recognize that a few of the people were in more than on or two. All of the clothing and shoes and pictures made me to reason that there must have been at least one hundred people living in that room. (*Ell*, 147)

Another instance of absence is the hole in the wall between Brod's and the Kolker's bedroom after his accident in the mill. Because of his aggression they cannot sleep in the same room anymore as violence would take over. This absence is integrated into their lives, they even beget a child through this hole. A lack is what unites them again, what finally constitutes them and heals their marriage. Even the creation of human life seems possible through this gap. They integrate this small gateway into their lives.

They lived with the hole. The absence that defined it became a presence that defined them. Life was a small negative space cut out of the eternal solidity, and for the first time, it felt precious – not like all of the words that had come to mean nothing, but like the last breath of a drowning victim.”(*Ell*, 135)

A striking example of absence is Leo's "invisibility". Leo stages small accidents and misunderstandings to make himself seen. "I went into the drugstore and knocked over a display of KY jelly. But. My heart wasn't in it" (*HL*, 76). Gurski's need to be seen goes so far as to pose as nude model for a painting class. This is due to an incident when he arrived in the US after his flight. In 1947 when his cousin, an amateur photographer, makes a picture of Leo he cannot. Here, it is Leo himself who is an absent presence. His existence seems impossible to frame.

We waited. Nothing. Where I should have been there was only a scratchy grayness. My cousin insisted we do it again, so we did it again, and again, nothing. Three times he tried to take a picture of me with the pinhole camera, and three times I failed to appear. My cousin couldn't understand it. He cursed the man who sold him the paper, thinking he'd been given a bad batch. But I knew he hadn't. I knew that the way others had lost a leg or an arm, I'd lost whatever the thing is that makes people indelible. (*HL*, 81)

Leo thinks he has lost that what is needed to commemorate him. A photograph, a novel, a child. So Leo takes a picture of his cousin whose face does appear

on the paper. "It was I who'd taken the picture, and if it was proof of his existence, it was also proof of my own"(HL, 82). In time his face begins appearing on the paper, first in shadows, getting clearer. So Leo collects photos of himself in an album. "It was the opposite of disappearing" (HL, 82). After fleeing from the Nazis he is robbed of his face, his identity. Only slowly does he get his life back though never in full.

Leo even removes himself from his own story, again enacting the invisibility that saved his life. Not only does he make himself invisible, he also transfers the pain of losing his family, his home and his love onto a character in a fable. The girl this boy was in love with for such a long time, is pregnant. When she found out, she wrote to the boy. "Every day she waited for a letter from him, but none came" (HL, 12), he imagines. Presuming the boy died in the Holocaust, she marries another man. Now he has to hide his love for a woman and his son. "After all, what does it mean for a man to hide one more thing when he has vanished completely?"(HL, 13).

The chapter titled "THE ETERNAL DISAPPOINTMENT OF LIFE AS IT IS" gives a chapter of *The History of Love*, namely "The Birth of Feeling". The Holocaust as it is conceived in historiography and literature is something that was not predictable in its extent, it is unfathomable, and description is difficult; however, here it is not even named. Again, it is something that cannot be fathomed, not fit for human imagination as the following quotation implies. The quotation, however, also speaks of the shock that the heart absorbs, registering its sublime difference of feeling.

Even now, all possible feelings do not yet exist. There are still those that lie beyond our capacity and our imagination. From time to time, when a piece of music no one has ever written, or a painting no one has ever painted, or something else impossible to predict, fathom, or yet describe takes place, a new feeling enters the world. And then, for the millionth time in the history of feeling, the heart surges, and absorbs the impact. (HL, 107)

Leo is nine when he first comes into contact with death. His uncle dies and he realises his mortality. "The joy of being alive became so concentrated in me I wanted to scream" (HL, 125). And he realises the mortality of his parents, especially of his mother. "Without her, our lives would dissolve into chaos" (HL,

125). This awareness causes sadness and fear until he meets Alma. “She could be charming. But. She was a poor loser” (*HL*, 126). But he begins to see her closer and falls in love with her. “It was years before I’d spent all the joy and pain born in me in that less than half a minute” (*HL*, 127). Joy and pain mix, the feeling of mortality is not a negative feeling. It makes him more aware of what he has. He asks her to marry him when they are children, as he is sure that he loves her. From then on, he stops thinking about death, replacing death with Alma, his love. To ignore death is compared to exile. He feels at home when he is aware the he must eventually die.

Each new thing I learned about the world was a stone in that wall, until one day I understood I’d exiled myself from a place I could never go back to. [...] Even during the years when I hid in the forest, in trees, holes, and cellars, with death breathing down my neck, I still never thought about the truth: that I was going to die. (*HL*, 129)

Leo’s friend Bruno is another example of an absent presence. When the reader realises Bruno actually died in 1941 one might surmise that all the stories about Bruno are actually about Leo himself creating for himself a second persona. “And because I know that sometimes I see things that aren’t there, after dinner I called Information to ask if I was listed” (*HL*, 25). There are hints as to his having visions, like the elephant he claims to have seen in Slonim when he was a child (cf. *HL*, 19).

Absent Presences – Bella, Augustine, Alma

“Destruction doesn’t create a vacuum, its simply transforms presence into absence. The splitting atom creates absence, palpable “missing” energy.” (*FP*, 161)

Each of the three novels under consideration includes a personified absent present. These are gendered female in all the novels. Bella, Beer’s sister, is missing after the raid on his house haunting him nearly his whole life. Augustine is the woman Jonathan is looking for. She has saved his grandfather from the Nazis. He searches for her in order to close some gaps in his family history and to root himself in history. Alma is looking for her namesake to make her family happy again. This section will only briefly explain the significance of these

women for the novels; the gender aspect will be explored in more detail in the chapter on the senses in action below.

These absent presences exhibit different qualities: Bella is the gifted girl, she is a talented musician, "Bella's disappearance and her lost artistry as a pianist become the evanescent absences" (Gubar, 255). Like the last notes of a song Bella's absent presence resounds throughout the novel. She appears as a ghost, in Jakob's dreams, in his memories. Bella is present without any palpable proof of her existence. She exists only in thought.

Augustine is the least For a very long time the reader believes that they have found her. They find the story of the village of Trachimbrod but they do not find what they are looking for. Lista is so much more than Augustine. Believing that they have finally found her, they delude themselves. "It was her eyes that let me understand that she was, without a query, the Augustine from the picture.[...] Each day was a like another photograph. Her life was a book of photographs" (*EII*, 148). Augustine's proof of existence is a photograph, so they mistake Lista's albums for proof of her mistaken identity. They even attribute her with the power of creation. "'Because you created him,'" I said. "By saving his grandfather, you allowed him to be born'" (*EII*, 150). It is the responsibility of the new generation: because their ancestors were saved they were allowed to be born. Their present is a consequence of courage or faith.

It is Alex' grandfather who calls the woman Augustine for the first time, believing they have finally found her. She denies being the woman of their quest and fetches a box marked "Remains". She is only looking at Alex while telling stories from the past, pointing out and describing people on the photos or related to the items. She thinks that he is the One. He is the One who can tell her story. She has found a medium through which to communicate. His grandfather tells her to shut up; Jonathan does not speak or understand Ukrainian. So Alex is the only one to listen, to repeat, to translate her story. But of the former village nothing remains; all they will see is the absence of a former presence of life, loves and daily life, a presence in language. The old woman will take them to the place

where Trachimbrod once was while Jonathan takes the reader to the Trachimbrod as it could have or should have been.

Alma is an ambiguous figure in *The History of Love*. She really exists in the young Alma who tries to find her namesake. The old Alma, however, is dead, remembered by those who loved her and kept permanently in photographs and through Leo's proof of love, his novel. To Alma it is not clear why the book would be important to Jacob Marcus (the man who commissions her mother to translate *The History of Love*) but she realises what the book must have meant to her father when he gave it to her mother (cf. *HL*, 107). Alma comes to stand for the one and only, the love that never ends. "My mother would say she [Alma] was everyone, every girl and every woman that anyone ever loved" (*HL*, 108). However, she must have been a real person as well, before she came to stand for each and every woman. Alma is the centre of love, like a black hole. "I became aware of her special powers. How she seemed to pull light and gravity to the place where she stood" (*HL*, 126). And she is named after this woman. Leo's confession of love shows this motif of absent presence perfectly.

And though you were grown up by then, you felt as lost as a child. And though your pride was broken, you felt as vast as your love for her. She was gone, and *all that was left was the space where you'd grown around her*, like a tree that grows around a fence. For a long time, it remained hollow. Years maybe. And when at last it was filled again, you knew that the new love you felt for a woman would have been impossible without Alma. *If it weren't for her, there would never have been an empty space, or the need to fill it.* (*HL*, 57, my emphases)

At the memorial service for his late son, in the guest bedroom Leo sees a photo of Alma when she was a child triggering memories of their time together. Bernard tells him about it:

"It was inside an envelope with some letters. They were all Yiddish. Isaac thought they were from someone she used to be in love with in Slonim. I doubt it, though. She never mentioned anyone. You can't understand a word I'm saying, can you?" (*HL*, 90, emphasis in original)

Bernard refers to Leo speaking Yiddish but his question has a double meaning here. Leo cannot understand because his memory still brings him back to those times with Alma. In his understanding, they should have lived together, raised their son together. Leo claimed once that Alma became happier and sadder

each day of her life just like him. “*Because nothing makes me happier and nothing makes me sadder than you*” (HL, 91), and he wants to make a picture of her everyday to remember how she looked everyday of her life. That is one reason why he wrote the novel for her: to memorize Alma and preserve her for future generations, to fill up his love in written form. Finally, he steals the photo.

These absent presences are constitutive for the novels’ plot. It is around these women that the narration revolves. They are at the centre. Forever out of reach but always there in some form they are like the victims of the Shoah. They can never be brought back but have to be commemorated to do them justice.

Spirituality, Religion and Science

A haunting question for all religious survivors of the Holocaust was why God, if God does exist, could let such horrors happen to his people. How can one believe in God after the Shoah, how can one explain it? How can one be a faithful Jew after all or can one be at all? If there is a God why did he do nothing to prevent what happened? Spirituality is an area that has suffered very much from the historical trauma of the Shoah. This is fictionally depicted in the three novels.

The issue of spirituality is present in all three novels in different forms. *Fugitive Pieces* lets its protagonists turn to science, to geology, history, palaeontology, in their need for consolation and faith. *Everything is Illuminated* largely avoids references to God but at one point lets one character deny both his belief in God and man. The consequence is to belief in oneself and to act responsibly. To do what is morally right and just is one lesson the protagonists learn. In *The History of Love Bird*, in his immense desperation about the death of his father, imagines himself to be a chosen one who is now responsible for the salvation of his family. That his family is not aware of this but rather confused by his behaviour is another example of the uncertain and at the same time cardinal role of religion.

In *Fugitive Pieces*, the need to find order in chaos is obvious in the description of Athos' study with all the scientific terms, the lengthy list of nouns describing his environment; the descriptions of his perceptions testify to this need to find meaning in mayhem, sense where eventually no sense can be found and a desperate need to stay on in whatever form. This simple observation already hints at the significance of science in both Jakob's and Athos' lives.

In *Fugitive Pieces*' first chapter, the narrator calls himself a bog-boy who surfaces into a city that has not been walked for a long time. References to the Tollund Man and the Grauballe Man are made when he reappears out of the earth. "Afterbirth of earth" he calls himself. Born from the earth later in his life, also through his rescuer and mentor Athos, he turns to geology, palaeontology, archaeology and history. Already from the beginning his memoirs show his faith in science to represent reality. Geology is at the heart of the beginning of his memoirs and continues to be central for his development. Similar to the bog bodies that are material testimony of murder nothing ever disappears completely in Jakob Beer's universe. This is his hope for the dead. The ash of the dead that were burnt never completely disappears. Also, their memories are passed on.

For Athos the invisible world is hidden beneath the earth, bog people, buried cities and fossilized wood. For Jakob, however, the invisible world is inhabited by ghosts, spirits. Despite the fact that Jakob believes in the world of science and desperately takes what it can offer he still imagines that the dead are present as ghosts. Throughout his life, he feels his sister's presence; but to stay healthy, to overcome trauma in a certain way, he has to let go of this feeling. Eventually, he accepts for himself that

[t]o remain with the dead is to abandon them. All the years I felt Bella entreating me, filled me with her loneliness, I was mistaken. I have misunderstood her signals. Like other ghosts, she whispers; not for me to join her, but so that, when I'm close enough, she can push me back into the world. (*FP*, 170)

"Athos – Athanasios Roussos – was a geologist dedicated to a private trinity of peat, limestone, and archaeological wood" (*FP*, 19) This trinity replaces the sacred one. The belief in God is replaced by science. Hard facts is what they

live by. In the following account of Athos' life and experience the verbs *know* and synonyms of *tell* are often repeated. The level of language mirrors this orientation through science. Knowledge provides security. What Athos gives him is a second life. "Even as a child, even as my blood-past was drained from me, I understood that if I were strong enough to accept it, I was being offered a second history" (*FP*, 20). He is reborn on a small island. Athos introduces him to a world of science. Geology, navigation, history, palaeontology and poetry are the subjects that Jakob is told about. "Gradually Athos and I learned each other's languages. [...] We took new words into our mouths like foreign foods; suspicious, acquired tastes" (*FP*, 21). The metaphor of taste and language is remarkable.

What fascinates both Athos and Jakob is that bog bodies "outlast their killers" (*FP*, 49), while the murderers have already disappeared. Processes of nature accuse the perpetrators for eternity. No avenging God will punish the guilty but the victims themselves function as testimony. "Athos was an expert in buried and abandoned places. His cosmology became mine. I grew into it naturally. In this way, our tasks became the same." (*FP*, 49) It is Jakob's task to reconstruct, to commemorate. While Athos does this in a literal way, Jakob, later on in his life, tries to do this linguistically. He firmly believes in the power of naming and its resuscitating quality. For him, Biskupin represents the motif of a buried culture (cf. *FP*, 50f).

Athos' world is "big as a globe and expansive as time" (*FP*, 29). Athos can move in time, not just hundreds of years, but thousands, even millions. Science is a solace and an aid in times of need. Even in times of greatest poverty, Athos turns to history. Recipes from Pliny, Theophrastus and Dioscorides form their diet. Later Athos turns to drawing. "Important lesson: look carefully; record what you see. Find a way to make beauty necessary; find a way to make necessity beautiful" (*FP*, 44). Science makes one look closer, which is necessary for finding one's balance. Also, records and notes are the only remains that might stay on. Science seems to be a way to become immortal.

A common relationship with time draws empirical physicality and ineffable personal memory together, and Michaels deploys the phenomena of radiation and carbon dating as symbols to link the

evanescence of time with the concrete methodology of science.
(McCullough, 832)

As Barbara Korte remarks, “God is only a vague presence in this novel although it has a dense web of religious and specifically biblical allusions” (Korte, 522)⁶ but “[i]n its treatment of moral and natural evil, the novel does not categorically deny god’s existence or the significance of religious faith for some people” (Korte, 531). However, “God is at best a fugitive presence, and [...] he can hardly be understood as benevolent.” (Korte, 522) This is exemplified by Ben’s parents who even try to hide from God’s view by not naming their third son, only calling him Ben, the Hebraic word for “son”. More than religious values, Jakob tries to find an ethically justifiable way of living, to make morally right choices. Whether these choices are triggered by a belief in the presence of God does not matter much to Jakob (cf. *FP*, 210). The Psalms, and I would go further and claim, religion as such, is for Athos “cultural heritage” (Korte, 524) and Athos’ “libraries thus manifest two of the value systems by which Athos and later Jakob live and which the novel sets up as alternatives to a disappearing God: culture and nature” (Korte, 524). Relating to the major argument of this thesis, a human being needs culture and nature. Korte even refers to Matthew Arnold’s *Culture and Anarchy*, and his claim that poetry could serve as an ersatz religion.

Different critics, such as Annick Hillger or Anne Whitehead, refer to kabbalism, a mystical tradition in Jewish philosophy, in their analyses.

[M]aterial nature [...] is the sole source of divine knowledge. Healing or redemption comes through the contemplation of nature, which contains within it the scattered sparks of God’s attributes or divinity. (Whitehead, 58)

Nature itself has memory; water, rock and wood carry traces of the past.

Micheals even locates faith in the most horrifying situation, inside the gas chamber, she sees that faith

beyond human reason or conscious choice [...] also beyond any religious faith in the soul’s transcendence [...] the basic instinct to life found in atoms, molecules, the smallest units of organic matter. (Falconer, 108)

⁶ For example, she mentions the patriarch Jacob, father of Benjamin, his youngest son.

This has been a major point of criticism levelled against her debut novel. To imaginatively enter the gas chamber constitutes a sacrilege (without implicating its religious connotations); even Claude Lanzmann, the director of the documentary film *Shoah* remarked once that "...if there had been—by sheer obscenity or miracle—a film actually shot in the past of three thousand people dying together in a gas chamber...I would have preferred to destroy it"(Lanzmann).

In *Everything is Illuminated* the notion of a God is also called into question. At best the relationship to God is ambiguous. "Jews are the things that God loves" (EII, 207); but pogroms happen and the Jewish are discriminated against. The reasoning is often circular. The long tradition of trying to prove God's existence is ridiculed, for example on page 207. In one instance God is accused of plagiarism. "God is the original plagiarizer. [...] When we plagiarize, we are likewise creating *in the image* and participating in the completion of Creation" (EII, 206). Plagiarism is acquitted of its Cain's mark and attributed to God's work. In the following passage every possibility is mentioned: was it God's power or not? Was humankind responsible?

"It is said that the Messiah will come at the end of the world." "But it was not the end of the world," Grandfather said. "It was. He just did not come." "Why did he not come?" "This was the lesson we learned from everything that happened – there is no God. It took all of the hidden faces for Him to prove this to us." "What if it was a challenge of your faith?" I said. "I could not believe in a God that would challenge faith like this." "What if it was not in His power?" "I could not believe in a God that could not stop what happened." "What if it was man and not God that did all of this?" "I do not believe in man, either." (EII, 189)

The entry on "THE BOOK OF REVELATIONS" claims that the

end of the world has often come, and continues to often come. Unforgiving, unrelenting, bringing darkness upon darkness, the end of the world is something we have become well acquainted with, habitualized, made into ritual. It is our religion to try to forget it in its absence, make peace with it when it is undeniable, and return its embrace when it finally comes for us, as it always does. (EII, 210)

The end of the world has often come for the Jews, there have been countless pogroms during which their property was destroyed or stolen, their homes ruined. They had to go into diaspora and begin anew. The end of the world has

become a nuisance, they have become used to it. This end of the world is not due to God's will, it is human beings who commit these crimes. One entry in the "Book of Antecedents" is about the "Pogrom of Beaten Chests" in 1764. The survivors beat their chests not knowing if they were praying "Forgive our oppressors for what they have done? Or, Forgive us for what has been done to us? Or, Forgive You for Your inscrutability?" (*Ell*, 207). The same questions are asked after the Holocaust. The survivors, just like the old woman, plead for forgiveness as surviving is not just a gift but also an ordeal.

For Alma, like for Jakob, science is a refuge. Emulating her father's abilities to survive in the wilderness Alma has to conquer a quite different wilderness but nonetheless does she devise strategies to make the best of her surroundings. Her interest in biology and palaeontology can be understood in a similar way as Jakob's. Humankind is just one of millions of species and compared to the universe its existence seems negligible. This idea is somewhat consoling. On the door of a palaeontology professor, Alma reads: "HENCE WITHOUT PARENTS, BY SPONTANEOUS BIRTH, RISE THE FIRST SPECKS OF ANIMATED EARTH – *ERAMUS DARWIN*" (*HL*, 53). This quote from *The History of Love* could as well caption the beginning of Foer's narration of Brod's birth. She rises from the river without an umbilical cord as if she had been sent from somewhere else. To Alma,

[t]he idea of evolution is so beautiful and sad. Since the earliest life on earth, there have been somewhere between five and fifty billion species, only five to fifty million are alive today. So ninety-nine percent of all the species that have ever lived on earth are extinct. (*HL*, 52)

One comical element of the story includes Alma's brother Bird. He believes that he is one of thirty-six holy people, "[t]he ones that the existence of the world depends on" (*HL*, 52). He is so devastated from the loss of his father that he can barely manage to keep up appearances. He tries to build an ark to save his family and the world from certain destruction. This belief strengthens him when his world seems to collapse around him. For Bird, God is a refuge from the troubles of everyday life. He is the only character in all of these novels who really believes in God. Only, he is a child. A child whose father has died, whose mother is absent and whose sister constantly tells him to act normally so that people will not torment him.

Place and Time

The Nazis [...] empty humans of worth; they turn people into things. Athos, on the other hand, turns things into people; he infuses nature with human emotion and with worth as a way to amplify and mourn the suffering of humans. (Coffey, 40)

For Rothberg, history after the Holocaust is always marked by trauma which is articulated particularly through textual temporal anomalies. Rothberg constitutes the term “after Auschwitz” used in so much literature after the genocide and especially in Adorno’s texts as a chronotope in a Bakhtinian sense – “a form of literary expression in which the spatial and temporal axes are intertwined” (Rothberg, 21). Of Adorno’s most often cited statement he claims that

It combines elements of aesthetics (“To write poetry”), temporality (“after”), and place (“Auschwitz”) with a morally or politically evaluative predicate (“is barbaric”). (Rothberg, 27)

This statement integrates time and place to demarcate a boundary after and where art is in constant danger of transgressing boundaries. Auschwitz is one of the places where mass murder has taken place and has come to stand synonymously for the genocide while “after” marks a temporal boundary. “According to Bakhtin, the chronotope captures the simultaneity of spatial and temporal articulations in cultural practices” (Rothberg, 27). Consequently, the trauma of modernism is, in Rothberg’s understanding, “the rupturing of its progressive temporality” (Rothberg, 22). The belief that humanity is advancing not only in knowledge but also in social and moral regards is shattered and left in pieces. Weber claims that the rupture of the Holocaust cannot be integrated into the usual progression of time. It is precisely this non-integration into the time scheme that guarantees the status of Auschwitz as significant but not accidental.

Was in dieser vorderhand paradoxalen Bestimmung der Präsenz eines Undarstellbaren insistiert, ist die Frage nach dem Status einer epochalen Zäsur, die im geläufigen Schema der Zeit nicht aufgeht. Denn der Versuch, die Singularität von Auschwitz im Gedächtnis bewahren zu wollen und die gleichzeitig als keineswegs nur singuläre oder gar akzidentielle Episode zu verorten, gelingt nur, wenn eben diese im Schema kontinuierlicher Abläufe nicht subsumierbare Zäsur bestehen bleibt. (Weber, 13)

In an analysis according to chrontopoi questions asked include: in which way is place significant for the story? How are the discursively created? How are characters related to place? How are place and development related? In the novels under consideration place often plays a significant role. Be it places of former presence that are now deserted, be it places that are connected to memory or be it places that give certain feelings. Place is occasionally even anthropomorphised. Place desires itself and has memory. Place is not inanimate. Since the imagery of place and time is particularly remarkable in Michaels' *Fugitive Pieces* the focus will be on this novel while only briefly referring to *Everything is Illuminated*. *The History of Love* will be left out with regard to this aspect.

The constant references to geology in *Fugitive Pieces* account for the changeability of even rock and stone. "Maps of history have always been less honest. Terra cognita and terra incognita inhabit exactly the same coordinates of time and space." (*FP*, 137) The world of science represents the world of ghosts, of an animate spirit. "Nature is both humanised and consecrated, and the elements of the landscape manifest their own will to remember or contain within themselves the traces of past trauma and suffering" (Whitehead, 65).

Just because certain phenomena amaze and confound this does not diminish their reality. If stones radiate their breath in traceable sound waves (radiocarbon dating) then the screams of the victims must be heard as well. If diachronic time means a linear organisation of events, vertical time, the name of two chapters of *Fugitive Pieces*, is a pile of memories in no chronological order but an organisation via context. For Whitehead the conversion of unmarked space into meaningful place and its inherent significance of position or perspective is an important issue in trauma theory. She mentions Simon Schama and his proposal to see landscape as a cultural construction invested with "inherited memory, factual information, and personal and national politics" (Whitehead, 50), and how, in turn, landscape shapes individual and collective identities (cf. Whitehead, 48f). In *Fugitive Pieces* nature functions as "a site of wounding and waste" (Coffey, 25); historical events influenced the geography and topography of entire countries. These changes, in turn, influence the protagonists.

Meredith Criglington sees Walter Benjamin's influence in Michaels' work, especially in her use of language as an instrument of deconstruction and anatomization of life and the geological imagery, of temporal and spatial representation. Sedimentation is linked with forgetting, digging consequently related to reconstruction and the preservation of memory. Criglington, like Rothberg, speaks of the chronotopic approach of Michaels' novel (cf. Criglington, 86-8). Oliva's summary that "time meets itself in pleats and folds, it's linear but it's deep" (Oliva) corresponds to Benjamin's conception.

"What is a man," says Athos, "who has no landscape? Nothing but mirrors and tides." (FP, 86) A man without place, without grounding is only mirroring what surrounds him, nothing that comes from within, an empty centre. When Athos dies Jakob writes to Kostas: "I will bring Athos home, to land that remembers him" (FP, 118). Again, place itself has memory. Similarly, the tides represent a repetitive cycle.

The excavation site of Biskupin comes to metaphorically represent the sedimentation of memory. Archaeology's task is to uncover layer for layer the past of a place in a steady but patient process. A reconstruction process is necessary for making meaning. Memory is, however, often constructed as a fluid notion that opposes the imagery of "solidifying or stultifying" landscape. "History needs to be flooded with memory so that its narrative does not solidify." Memory has to be in constant movement, so to speak, in a constant task of reworking and reassembling (cf. Whitehead, 63).

"Athos said: "Jakob, try to be buried in ground that will remember you." (FP, 76) Place remembers, longs, grieves. Place is attributed with human feelings. It is anthropomorphised. For Jakob, every thought, each memory leaves a trace inside the body, in the bones, inside the skull, like places that are scarred by the events that take place on them (cf. FP, 77). Athos tells Jakob:

"Love makes you see a place differently, just as you hold differently an object that belongs to someone you love. If you know one landscape well, you will look at all other landscapes differently. And if you learn to love one place, sometimes you can also learn to love another." (FP, 82)

"I thought it's longing that moves the sea." (*FP*, 75) Athos and Jakob hold a ceremony in remembrance of the dead at the sea, feeding the dead, giving them water. Their ritual is intended to give them release, to bring them calm and peace. Remembrance becomes material through locating it, anchoring it.

"Fugitive Pieces [...] turns vertical time into a figure for redemption. Rather than unfolding in a linear sequence, history stacks up with repeat encounters, characters and choices. (hence, 'verticalises')." (Falconer, 106)

This shows that there is no single version of history but multiple perspectives. History piles up in a slow accumulative process. "Nothing is sudden. Not an explosion – planned, timed, wired carefully – not the burst door. Just as the earth invisibly prepares its cataclysms, so history is the gradual instant." (*FP*, 77) Coffey sees a danger in the focus on geological time, she fears that the Holocaust may be perceived "as a blip on the screen of history" (Coffey, 43).

In the beginning, Jakob feels as a stranger in Greece, but nevertheless

to anchor myself in the details of the island: the sun burning away night from the surface of the sea, the olive groves in winter rain. [...] I tried to embroider darkness, black sutures with my glinting stones sewn safe and tight, buried in the cloth: Bella's intermezzos, Athos' maps, Alex' words, Maurice and Irena. Black on black, until the only way to see the texture would be to move the whole cloth under the light." (*FP*, 164)

In Toronto, "Jakob manages to create a sense of home by finding a form for his own strangeness and longing within the physical features of the land." (Criglington, 94) Coffey perceives some

unsettling affinities between Athos' and Michaels's revised pastoral and the Nazi pastoral: a primitivist and escapist focus on the past; a potentially anti-humanist privileging of nature over the human; and a melding of the rational and irrational through infusing science with the language of sentiment, poetry, religion, myth, metaphor, and ideology. (Coffey, 40)

The Drowned City of the first chapter is Biskupin, the city buried in sand and shame. "Time is a blind guide" is the first sentence that contains the whole novel in a nutshell. Therefore, a brief analysis will try to highlight some aspects. The sentence can be separated into its individual parts: Time is a guide, time is blind, a blind guide. The use of the present tense indicates a postulate, a

statement of validity that functions as a maxim. A guide helps to find the way or do something difficult, something or someone to turn to for advice or help. However, this guide is blind and cannot lead anywhere. There is no goal, no final condition of salvation or redemption. Never turn to time when lost. Time is not seen as a linear development but as locality, as place, expounded throughout the novel. Also, time is blind, it knows no direction, no steady progress but has to accommodate to narrative and historical interpretation.

When Athos tells Jakob about his family and the land, Jakob linguistically parallels language and geography: “a tongue of commerce” (*FP*, 26), a river “persuading itself into continents” (*FP*, 26), the sea “seduces” (*FP*, 26) its course through rocks. What Jakob cannot explore for himself, Athos communicates to him: the landscape, the history, the forces of nature, the wonders of salt and wood. Similar to the aftermath of war, “[i]t’s the moment of death we measure from” (*FP*, 32). Athos’ stories draw Jakob from his past: “Night after night, his vivid hallucinogen dripped into my imagination, diluting memory” (*FP*, 28).

Constantly, a connection to the past is established. Athos revives a time of great discoverers, great scientists who went courageously on diverse quests. By concentrating on these men Jakob’s memoirs avoid the current events. These events only appear in subordinate clauses, never in separate paragraphs. On the one hand, the reader does not know about their information level, on the other hand, the author evades the real horrors. “To go back a year or two was impossible, absurd. To go back millennia – ah! that was....nothing” (*FP*, 30). The issue of representation in Holocaust literature has been and still is heavily debated. Studying the history of the earth, Jakob speaks about stones and rocks. Images from Nazi atrocities, the limestone quarries in a concentration camp or smashed tombstones, are mentioned only in brackets. This passing reference to the horrors seems at once disregarding and grave. Looming like a shadow, everpresent, the Nazis’ crimes never leave Jakob or the reader.

Nature is repeatedly compared to or equated with the body. For Jakob the bodies of animals and humans alike always bear the signs of longing. But the land shows signs of torment as well. "The invisible paths in Athos' stories: rivers following the inconsistencies of land like tears following the imperfections on skin" (*FP*, 51). The metaphor for a river is a stream of tears, a sign of pain. The land "suffered" when the river formed its way and ripped the earth open. However, not only animate beings long; place longs, too.

Geography cut by rail. The black seam of that wailing migration from life to death, the lines of steel drawn across the ground, penetrating straight through cities and towns now famous for murder [...] Though they were taken blind, though their senses were confused by stench and prayer and screams, by terror and memories, these passengers found their way home. Through the rivers, through the air. (*FP*, 52)

Jakob is thirteen when they travel to Athens. Athos is aged and Jakob has to support him. "His touch felt natural to me, though all else was like a dream" (*FP*, 60). Reality relies on sensual perceptions. On their journey Jakob imagines that the hills grieve. They grieve and long. For times long gone, for their own wounds, for their lost inhabitants, for the injuries to nature itself and its beneficiaries. A massacre is mentioned. At Kalavrita, every man over fifteen was killed by the Nazis. On their journey on foot and on rides they get from other people they can witness what the war did to the country.

But catastrophe strikes yet again. While Ben is still a child, Hurricane Hazel, one of the worst hurricanes of the 20th century, floods the streets close to the river where Ben and his parents live. They do not want to abandon their house, feeling reminded of their deportation in Europe. The imagery is reminiscent of the Flood taking everything with it. The emphasis on natural catastrophe is the opposite of the genocide. Nature strikes without bad intention, it has no human aim. Natural catastrophes show life's contingency but contrary to that "cataclysm not only destroys life but may help in the creation of new life: there is a paradoxical chance for "redemption through cataclysm" (*FP*, 101)" (Korte, 527). This is reminiscent of the construction of Trachimbrod in *Everything is Illuminated*, where its spatial absence is recreated in the form of a chronicle. Ressurrected through time, the village is built again where only a void is left.

Ben feels like an archaeologist, excavating treasures from Beer's library where he gets lost in his extensive collection. "But my mistake would be to look for something hidden" (*FP*, 263). The house is described like a being alive, absorbing the sun, flitting with light, speckled with dust, full of books, treasures, artefacts and historical objects. Ben lists the most diverse items, fascinated by their variety. "Everything was wind-worn or sea-worn, old and odd, mostly only of personal value" (*FP*, 264). Here, the sound pattern is again striking, the vowels are repeated, the rhythm is steady. What fascinates Ben most about Jakob's house is that "[e]very room emanated absence yet was drenched with your presence" (*FP*, 265). He feels close to Beer, wants to absorb this presence, this creative energy. He misreads signs left in the house, like Pliny's *Natural History* in the kitchen. The reader already knows about Athos' use of this volume in cooking during the war. Ben fantasizes about and imagines different scenes, establishing a fake closeness to Jakob and Michaela. "I felt the power of your place speaking to my body" (*FP*, 266).

He begins to understand how Beer could face his demons here and write *Groundwork*. "How you descended into horror slowly, as divers descend, with will and method. How, as you dropped deeper, the silence pounded" (*FP*, 266). At the end of this chapter, Ben includes quotations, parts of sentences from Beer's poetry, into his own writing, since "[y]our images were everywhere" (*FP*, 266). Sound and smell are again more present in his writing. He begins to inhabit this house, like a squatter. "The idea seized me: you're still alive. You're hiding, to be left alone in your happiness. An energy of intention I'd never experienced before crackled through me" (*FP*, 269).

In *Everything is Illuminated* the place that is imbued with meaning is the village of Trachimbrod. It is a place where children are born without umbilical cords from rivers, people celebrate weird festivals that commemorate that day, where a man without a left arm becomes the lover of all the lonely women there and where all its inhabitants drown in the river trying to escape death. Trachimbrod is a mythical village that disappears in its entirety from earth after the death of its inhabitants. Nothing is left to mark its former activity. Therefore it has to be

recreated in imagination, embellished with everything fantasy offers. Its opulence defies the bleak reality of its doom.

Re-Humanization

The truth does not kill the possibility of art – on the contrary, it requires it for its transmission, for its realization in our consciousness as witnesses. (Felman, 91)

In their intention to eliminate all Jews the Nazis dehumanized their victims. Their policies shattered individuality, even the feeling of individuality. The trauma of the survivors and even second- and third-generation victims is the result of this de-humanization. Spirituality is at risk, absences gape and the knowledge about or the actual witnessing of the actual events makes a normal life impossible. The victims were robbed of all their human features and qualities, making them into “figuren”, as Michaels says in her novel:

Nazi policy was beyond racism, it was anti-matter, for Jews were not considered human. An old trick of language, used often in the course of history. Non-Aryans were never referred to as human, but as “figuren,” “stücke” – “dolls,” “wood,” “merchandise,” “rags.” Humans were not being gassed, only “figuren,” so ethics weren’t being violated. (*FP*, 165)

This degradation of their victims allowed the Nazis to deny their crimes. The construction of the Jewish not even as the Other (as the Other would imply humanity) removes them from whatever “moral framework” the Nazis claimed to have. The Jews were totally subjected to their oppressors’ power. What Aharon Appelfeld remembers from the years of the Holocaust is that “a person is not his own master. Will is an illusion” (Appelfeld, 149). They could not decide anything anymore, even the most basic expression of agency was denied to them. They were deprived of their individuality and thus became interchangeable. No individual character traits, human feelings, freedom of movement or mobility were possible during the Shoah. Not only did they become invisible but transparent, there but not there, like ghosts. Their substance was eroded; each of Felman’s imageries speaks of a lack. In an attempt to grasp the meaning of the term Felman specifies it as

[a] disembodied verbal substitute which signifies abstractly the law – material or linguistic – of indefinite substitutability. The dead bodies are voided of substance and specificity by being treated, in the Nazi jargon, as figuren: that which cannot be seen or can be seen through. (Felman, 95)

All the authors of the novels under consideration strive to re-humanize these victims. What has been taken from them is restored. Their bodies, their senses, love and human relations, family, sexuality, culture and science, communication. Especially, language has been taken away from them. Books by Non-Aryans were burnt, German, the native tongue of many, has been contaminated, the belief in the power of language to approximate reality or at least to interact absolutely annulled. The creative use of language has to be conquered back. Poetic forms have to be retried in the aftermath of catastrophe.

Human features are prominent in all of these narrations. The senses of sight, sound, taste, smell and touch are as important as love and sexuality – the senses in action. The need to become immortal through children, through writing or leaving something permanent can be traced in the novels as well. The act of writing affirms presence, creates a material object that can be transmitted to other people and later generations. Also, the hope of becoming immortal, the opposite of disappearing, resonates in the narrations. The creative use of language can be witnessed in both metalinguistic and linguistic regards. The protagonists need to know about their roots, find a place of belonging, trace their own history and find a tie that binds them to the past. Religion is questioned in all the novels. Therefore, the following chapters will explore how the victims of the Shoah – first, second and third generation – exemplify this affirmation of humanity.

The Senses

Sight and Sound

The mystery lies in silence, not in words. (Franciosi, Schaffer, Wiesel,
291)

“What could be less plain than seeing?”(*HL*, 90)

The senses of sight and sound are the first to be explored in this section. The focus will again be on Michaels' *Fugitive Pieces*, as it prominently integrates the senses of sight and hearing in Jakob's and Ben's accounts.

The inherent quality of testimony is that it can be told by nobody else than the witness. It is personal but “goes beyond the personal” (Felman, 90) in its consequences. Testimony always includes a particular position and perspective and is not transferable. Felman records a fundamental difference in seeing between victims, perpetrators and bystanders. This difference lies in a lack. The Jews “see but do not understand [...] blind to the full significance of what they witness”, the purpose of their ordeal, the bystanders “do not quite look [...] they overlook” (Felman, 94), while the Nazis strive to keep their crimes unseen; therefore, she summarizes the Holocaust as an “historical assault on seeing” (cf. Felman, 93f).

Already from the outset, Jakob is “obsessed [...] with sound and hearing, the sense through which he has witnessed the extinction of his family and the only sense which, to him, the immaterial dead retain” (Korte, 520). Their presence is felt by Jakob throughout his life. But this quotation, “the dead lose every sense except hearing” (*FP*, 6), even rings true for Jakob himself. His survival is a matter of coincidence, he escaped death through reducing his senses to only one.

Given not only what is gone [...] but also what was not visibly perceived [...] and what cannot be visibly perceived [...] – sound seems more reliable than vision. [...] Jacob finds in his linguistic alienation a way to shape English to his urgent needs (Gubar, 260)

Entering the scene he sees the bodies of his parents, his mother’s face, his father’s hands. Bella is missing. After his flight from the house he hides in the woods. Only then does he realise that his sister is missing: “Then I felt the worst shame of my life: I was pierced with hunger. And suddenly I realized, my throat aching without sound – Bella” (*FP*, 9). He falls silent, his sister is gone. Throughout his life his imagination tries to cope with this loss, deeper than that of his parents. Not knowing about her destiny his longing reaches out to his sister. Of these events Jakob says:

I did not witness the most important events of my life. My deepest story must be told by a blind man, a prisoner of sound. From behind the wall, from underground. From the corner of a small house on a small island that juts like a bone from the skin of sea. (*FP*, 17)

Not a witness in the conventional understanding but an earwitness he is deprived of an important sensual perception. Seeing is believing, is a common saying, and Jakob is filled with doubt and the most horrendous visions of his sister's fate. The predominance of aural impressions will accompany Jakob throughout his life. A prisoner of sound, it seems, he will always be. Sound is so important for Jakob as a

child who witnesses, albeit imperfectly, the effacement of his sister's memory, the silence that surrounds the forgetfulness in which her absence has been articulated, finds himself compelled to imagine her face in an alien medium – the medium of sound. (Cook, 14)

Already the third paragraph of the novel introduces Jakob's sister Bella who is present throughout his memoirs despite her unknown fate. The description of her beauty in this paragraph is starkly contrasted with the destruction the Nazis wreak in Jakob's family home. Jakob hides behind the wallpaper, inside the wall. He only hears what is happening but cannot see anything. Consequently, his memories of the crime are based on sounds only. "The burst door. Wood ripped from hinges, cracking like ice under the shouts. Noises never heard before, torn from my father's mouth. Then silences." (*FP*, 7) This scene introduces a recurrent motif: sound.

His sister's memory is effaced in the most literal sense. His sister will be envisioned through her music, as the memory of her face becomes blurred. Almost every memory of Bella in this chapter is related to music. Her proficiency at the piano, her love for music and her adoration for some composers is central. His memories of Bella are connected to and triggered by sound, vision and tactile impressions. His sister telling him what she reads, her beauty and her touch on his back are memories that stay with him. However, he cannot block the sounds he heard inside the wall. He cannot lock out the silence that swallowed his sister. "Filled with her silence, I had no choice but to imagine her face" (*FP*, 10). Her face is no longer remembered but imagined. His memories fail him. Silence comes to stand in for Bella's body and face. He tries to find silence in the river where he hides but cannot stand it. "This is more frightening to me than darkness, and when I can't stand the silence any longer, I slip out of my wet skin, into sound" (*FP*, 11). Silence is both longed for and terrible knowledge because it testifies to Bella's lack. For Cook, silence is linked to

amnesia, the trauma that struck Jakob represses the memory he actually does not even have (cf. Cook, 14f). Silence becomes a wound that needs to be healed and a consolation at the same time. “I know, suddenly, my sister is dead. At this precise moment, Bella becomes flooded ground. A body of water pulling under the moon” (*FP*, 12).

Starving, Jakob’s vision and perceptions become confused. He buries himself in the ground in order to hide from the Nazis. He climbs from the ground and meets Athos for the first time. “He said he spoke to me. But I was wild with deafness. My peat-clogged ears” (*FP*, 12). In the home of Athos’ friends they hear more of what happened in Greece and Europe. Athos tries to keep Jakob from hearing these stories. “Athos put his hands over his ears” (*FP*, 42). It seems unbearable. Literally shutting out these accounts Ioannis, who tells them what happened in the city, says “Maybe Jakob shouldn’t hear any more” (*FP*, 42). Athos replies “Ioannis, he’s already heard so much” (*FP*, 43). Jakob only heard what happened to his parents.

Sound becomes more and more important as Jakob’s memoirs progress. He tells of one incident as a teenager when rain began to fall and he and other people hide under a bridge.

No one spoke as we stood awkwardly listening to the sewers flash-flooding, the metal gutters of the bridge rushing with water, the great bone-snap of thunder. Then a screech tore the air, then another, like the cry of mammoth jays, and we saw the two boys blowing into their hands, grass pulled taut between their thumbs. (*FP*, 99)

No one speaks, the only sound is the rain and the screeching of the grass blades. They are in some kind of sound bubble together. The sequence of consonants mimics the drip-drop of the rain while the long vowels of the second sentence emulate the screech. The third sentence with its short syllables, short vowels and steady rhythm lends a certain playfulness to their activity. This example shows the musicality that Michaels or rather her narrator Jakob Beer brings into the narration. Again, this shows the importance of sound for his life. The following example shows this in even more detail.

Or the delicate metal staircases, a lace ribbon, swirling around the girth of the oil reservoirs. At night, a few lights marked port and starboard of

these gargantuan industrial forms, and I filled them with loneliness. I listened to these dark shapes as if they were black spaces in music, a musician learning the silences of a piece. I felt this was my truth. That my life could not be stored in any language but only in silence; the moment I looked into the room and took in only what was visible, not vanished. The moment I failed to see Bella had disappeared. But I did not know how to seek by way of silence. So I lived a breath apart, a touch-typist who holds his hands slightly in the wrong place, the words coming out meaningless, garbled. Bella and I inches apart, the wall between us. I thought of writing poems this way, in code, every letter askew, so that loss would wreck the language, become the language. If one could isolate that space, that damaged chromosome in words, in an image, then perhaps one could restore order by naming. (*FP*, 111)

This extensive quotation is important in different regards. Sound, touch, Bella and language are meditated on. The distance to Bella, his lost sister, cannot be bridged by anything, not language or music, not memory or imagination. She will always be forever out of reach but close by since Jakob is always thinking about her. She is always present in his life although he will never be able to ascertain what happened to her. He desires to find a language that can express this great loss, this immense void that her disappearance has brought onto him. Wrecked is what his language should become because there is no meaning in her disappearance anyway. How can anything that can be expressed in English, Greek or Polish represent what or who is forever silent and empty? Still, Jakob writes poetry because he feels an inner need to create with words. He feels torn between the urge to remain silent in the face of such tragedy – Kostas remarks that “[s]ome stones are so heavy only silence helps you carry them” (*FP*, 77) – and to construct a space for those who have been eradicated, giving them back their names. “I already knew the power of language to destroy, to omit, to obliterate. But poetry, the power of language to restore: this was what both Athos and Kostas were trying to teach me” (*FP*, 79).

Music is very important for Ben as well. On Sunday evenings Ben listens to music with his father and perceives hidden messages, things unsaid. “Watching him listen made me listen differently. [...] He used orchestras [...] to signal me; a wordless entreaty, all meaning pressed into chords” (*FP*, 215), and later “Music, inseparable from his touch” (*FP*, 217). Ben imagines that the silence that is a burden on his childhood and later life can be overcome through music.

He thinks that his father found a way to speak to him; however, he cannot decode the meaning. These memories incite a musical paragraph by himself:

Those hours, wordless and close, shaped my sense of him. Lines of last light over the floor, the patterned sofa, the silky brocade of the curtains. Once in a while, on summer Sundays, the shadow of an insect or bird over the sun-soaked carpet. I breathed him in. (*FP*, 216)

This whole section on his father and the brief glimpses Ben has of his life, his days in the concentration camp and his experiences is contrasted with a neat rhythm. The musical pieces they listen to become as familiar as a place or a photograph to them. They create common ground. Ben grows up hearing stories and seeing pictures about the war and the concentration camp, about suffering and horror. His father wants him to see the horrors he experienced, be aware of what the survivors had to endure, but Ben feels tormented.

To counter these lyrical paragraphs and exemplify why Michaels' style has been criticized the short sentence below shows how immense cruelty can be transformed into harmonious, rhythmic words. Michaels' consistent style can easily interpreted as banalisation or aestheticisation. Even in the most horrific descriptions Michaels includes significant sound patterns:

When citizens, soldiers, and ss performed their unspeakable acts, the photos show their faces were not grimaced with horror, or even with ordinary sadism, but rather were contorted with laughter. (*FP*, 166)

Silence

“We peeled the corn. The silence was a mountain.”(*EII*, 159)

Complementary to the sense of hearing silence represents its counterpart. Although silence has to be listened for even more attentively than music or the human voice it is nonetheless a prolific way of communication. At times, silence builds up and becomes almost palpable and poses an obstacle. For Lang, silence is even the most important representational limit; not a silence that expresses the impossibility of representation but a silence

[t]hat emerges as a limit precisely because of the possibility of representation and the risks which that possibility entails. In these terms, silence is a limit for particular representations as it happens, not intrinsically for representation as such. (Lang, 317)

Obscene, gruesome, horrific, as such a representation would be, it seems possible from a technical standpoint but what Lang claims is a moral decision not to make images of certain things. A general agreement of silence seems to be exactly this limit. The silence that surrounds the representation of fictional events is the rift that has to be overcome in order to penetrate the black box of the Holocaust. As Sue Vice claims, these gaps point to the unities and disunities of fictional writings on the Shoah, their blank spaces and their treatment of the horrors.

The trope of muteness, predominant in Holocaust narratives of all sorts, functions in fiction deliberately and explicitly to raise and explore connections and disjunctures among fictional constructs, textual omissions, and historical events. (Vice, 2)

All the protagonists have to pierce the wordlessness to end up at some representation of what happened. How the events intended to denote or refer to the Holocaust are represented in the novels under consideration has been explored in more detail in the chapter on Traumatisation above. In this section silence is shown as an important counterpoint to the sense of sound that heightens awareness for input that triggers the other senses and as a genuine means of communication. Silence can take on so much meaning so that it even becomes part of the language.

Silence is the antiworld of speech, and at least as polyvalent, constitutive, and fragile. [... it] can be the marker of courage and heroism or the cover of cowardice and self-interest [... it] can be a mere absence of speech; at other times, it is both the negation of speech and a production of meaning. [...] silence is enfolded in its opposite, in language. As such, silence is simultaneously the contrary of language, its contradiction, and an integral part of language. (Haidu, 278)

In the beginning silence seems to be the most terrible fate for Jakob, even though language can only inadequately convey the victims' torments. Although silence seems to be the only appropriate response to the catastrophe, the need to remember, the need to communicate what happened in order to fulfil the duty

to never forget, make language necessary for transporting representations, even for transporting silence itself. Thus silence has an ambivalent quality.

Jakob is not interested in the particular circumstances of the victims' deaths, although he meticulously studies accounts, testimonies, photographs – anything that could tell him about his sister's fate; but what matters for him most is,

Were they silent or did they speak? Were their eyes open or closed? I couldn't turn my anguish from the precise moment of death. I was focused on that historical split second: the tableau of the haunting trinity – perpetrator, victim, witness. But at what moment does wood become stone, peat become coal, limestone become marble? The gradual instant. (*FP*, 140)

He is interested in the victim's reactions to their fate and still comes back to the question "Why?" Why did some become victims, some perpetrators? He does not believe that a moment can change everything, it can only give one scene but this scene can be viewed from innumerable angles and make fixation impossible. Furthermore, he believes in procedural change that is invisible to the human perception. Here again, the senses of sound and vision are important. Did they make themselves heard and did they see at the moment of death? He questions his own obsession with the moment of death as there is never really one moment that could capture this experience in its entirety. Change takes time. Even death.

While Jakob grows up with stories of explorers, the wonders of nature and earth, Ben grows up enclosed in silence. His parents do not explain to him what they endured but his father shows him endless photographs of anonymous suffering that traumatise Ben. Naomi's silence is not threatening or intimidating. "No one's silences are more generous than Naomi's, [...] her silence is usually wise" (*FP*, 208). The silence he criticizes is of a different kind. The following long quote describes his relationship with his parents, survivors of the Holocaust who have moved to Canada. They cannot free themselves of what happened and have become mute in the face of such horrors. There seems to be nothing to say anymore. Ben sees the "aura of mortality" (*FP*, 204) everywhere. Similar to Jakob he grew up being closer to death than life. Food, drink and health, signs of the body have been raised to extreme importance for

both his parents. The smallest things are perceived as extraordinary. "Every thing belonged to, had been retrieved from, impossibility – both the inorganic and the organic – shoes, socks, their own flesh" (*FP*, 205). One night his mother comes into his room, a metaphor of both nurse and angel; she shows him the vision of an ice forest outside his window: "the sight put a temporary end to nightmares of doors axed open and the jagged mouths of dogs" (*FP*, 205) in its serenity and beauty. Despite the fact that his mother tries to see something good in everything they cannot overcome their silence. As Ben claims, a narrative, some sort of explanation would provide energy, a different dynamic that would revive familial ties. The silence that pervades their relationship is so dense that it marks even their home. Metaphors of nature suggest the futility of speaking in strong wind or muddy earth, wind that blows the words away, a swamp in mist that impedes movement. Death does not bring relief he hoped for. The absence of his parents does not change the place. The absence of his parents after their death does nothing to change the atmosphere which sadly suggests that they lived a life in death despite their efforts to continue life. Survival did not mean a life after all.

There was no energy of a narrative in my family, not even the fervour of an elegy. Instead, our words drifted away, as if our home were open to the elements and we were forever whispering into a strong wind. My parents and I waded through damp silence, of not hearing and not speaking. It soaked into the furniture, into my father's dark armchair, a mildew in the walls. We communicated by slight gestures, surgeons in an operating theatre. When my parents died, I realized I'd expected sound suddenly to enter the apartment, to rush into the place so long prohibited. But no sound came into the apartment. And though I was alone, packing boxes, sorting their belongings, the silence was now eerie. Because the place itself felt almost the same as before. (*FP*, 204)

Also in his marriage with Naomi silence is thematised. "You must abandon your illusions every time you speak" (*FP*, 202) is the first hint as to his relation with his wife Naomi. When they were married the city witnessed a heat wave. Sexuality and the body are present motifs of these first paragraphs. Silence, stillness and darkness characterise the atmosphere. "We slept close, knowing we could not have such pleasures without such muteness" (*FP*, 204).

In the diegetic novel *The History of Love* one chapter is called "The Age of Strings" that begins with the futility of words and the use of strings to direct

words to their destinations. The chapters materialise feelings and thoughts. The smaller the emotional distance the easier misunderstandings can happen, so the strings may be even more necessary, but sometimes all they carry is silence. The string furthermore metaphorises the emotional ties between people. Silence and the wish or the need to speak comes up in Litvinoff's story as well. Litvinoff develops a cough that is not so much symptom of an illness but "that there was something he wished to say. The more time passed, the more he longed to say it, and the more impossible saying it became" (*HL*, 110). He suffocates from his guilt, his theft. Not a day passes that he does not think about his farewell from a friend the day he left Poland, the day he held the manuscript in his hands.

A quotation from Foer's novel aptly metaphorizes a destructive side of silence. There is hunger for words, even a famine; people are starving for words and need them in order to survive. In this quotation can be found the essence of how language is conceptualised in all three novels: Language is just as essential as food, it is a bodily need. "'I do not know what to do,' the hero said. 'I do not know also.' After that there was a famine of words for a long time" (*Ell*, 156). Silently Alex waits for Jonathan's childhood memories. He only wants to listen:

I did not utter a thing, so that he would persevere. This was so difficult at times, because there existed so much silence. [...] I refused to utter even one word. [...] Be silent, Alex. You do not have to speak. [...] With my silence, I gave him a space to fill. (*Ell*, 157f)

Touch

Touch is an essential means of establishing contact. Touch can give consolation. Touch can both hurt and heal. Touch is also a means of showing community. In this brief section, the issue of sexuality is excluded as it will be dealt with in a later chapter. Pain is subsumed under this heading because even if its origin may be psychological injury its impact is felt in the body. I would even go so far as to conceptualise pain as the sixth sense of Holocaust survivors.

Jakob's rescue can indeed be seen as a second birth. When fleeing Poland, Athos carries him under his clothes. Again Jakob's world is reduced to sound and tactile sensations. He cannot understand Athos, only Athos' own memories could have provided for Jakob's account. Here the narrative construction is foregrounded. Jakob relies on other witness accounts for his narration, for his own and that of the millions who have died. Furthermore, the voice of the adult narrates sense impressions, thoughts and fears of the child Jakob. During their flight from Poland Jakob disconnects from his parents and his best friend. Now Athos is his family. "But Bella clung. We were Russian dolls. I inside Athos, Bella inside me" (*FP*, 14). He carries his sister inside himself; his sister, who is actually a lack, leaves a void inside the boy. "Athos said: 'I will be your koumbaros, your godfather, the marriage sponsor for you and your sons...'" Athos said: "We must carry each other. If we don't have this, what are we..." (*FP*, 14). This doubling is countered by the loss of his parents and especially his sister who, due to her unknown fate, is constantly meditated on.

In Athens, preparing for their move to Canada, Jakob's senses awaken again after he felt numb for most of the time in hiding. He becomes sensitive to touch and smells, the taste of food. The comfort of caring and loving company is new to Jakob who spent the past years only in Athos' company. The following quotations show how Daphne's touch triggers memories of his family. Touch functions as a connection to his path opening the way to hidden feelings and memories.

I remember Daphne, on that last night, turning back at the doorway of my room after saying goodnight and coming over to give me one more fierce squeeze. I remember her cool hands on my back under my cotton pyjamas, her gentle scritch-scratch, my mother's, Bella's, soothing me to sleep. (*FP*, 75)

Daphne squeezed my face goodbye, and I felt my mother patting my jaw to make me a beard with her floury hands. (*FP*, 85)

Memory is imprinted on the skin, on the body. Memory is triggered by touch as it was created. These tactile impressions indicate that

[i]mages brand you, burn the surrounding skin, leave their black mark. Like volcanic ash, they can make the most potent soil. Out of the seared

place emerge sharp green shoots. The images my father planted in me were an exchange of vows.(FP, 218)

Everything is Illuminated similarly mentions the instruments of perception, only this novel claims the Jews do not only have five but six senses. One entry of the “Book of Antecedents” is: “JEWS HAVE SIX SENSES”.

Touch, taste, sight, smell, hearing...memory. While Gentiles experience and process the world through the traditional senses, and use memory only as a second-order means of interpreting events, for Jews memory is no less primary than the prick of a pin, or its silver glimmer, or the taste of the blood it pulls from the finger. The Jew is pricked by a pin and remembers other pins. It is only by tracing the pinprick back to other pinpricks – when his mother tried to fix his sleeve while his arm was still in it, when his grandfather’s fingers fell asleep from stroking his great-grandfather’s damp forehead, when Abraham rested the knife point to be sure Isaac would feel no pain – that the Jew is able to know why it hurts. When a Jew encounters a pin, he asks: *What does it remember like?* (EII, 199)

For Gentiles memory is only a means of interpretation, while Jews even perceive through memory. Memory is a sensory system that responds to certain inputs. This conception is a bit lopsided as the senses are triggered from the outside and mostly respond to certain triggers. Memory can usually be accessed at random although specific memories are, of course, triggered by sight, smell, touch etc. But the integration of memory into the body, its physical importance is what should be stressed here. Memory is another sense that connects the individual to the world and lets it get into interaction with their fellow human beings. Memory is a sign of life. The broader concept of memory will be explored in more detail in a separate chapter.

As mentioned above, the sense of pain is generally accepted as an additional sense. For Holocaust survivors pain has in some form become part of their identity, be it in mourning or melancholia. In order to not let pain kill him Leo claims he can direct pain away from his heart onto other parts of his body. Much of his pain is connected with shortcomings of his personality. Failures of memory are inextricably linked with what keeps erect, what keeps one up.

The pancreas I reserve for being struck by all that’s been lost. [...] Disappointment in myself: right kidney. Disappointment of others in me: left kidney. Personal failures: kishkes. I don’t mean to make it sound like I’ve made a science of it. It’s not that well thought out. I take it where it

comes. [...] The pain of forgetting: spine. The pain of remembering: spine. [...] Loneliness: there is no organ that can take its all. (*HL*, 10)

Leo's great fear is to be invisible, to die without anybody noticing or caring. Clearly, his body is the instrument to make himself seen. Not only when he poses as nude model for a painting class he presents them with his body to make them see, to make himself seen. He communicates through his body. There are many occasions when he tries to communicate via touch. Once he meets his son at a reading of one of Isaac's novels. "But my hands fought to tell him everything" (*HL*, 25). An intriguing incident of communication via touch is in the last section of *The History of Love* when Leo meets Alma. He is so overpowered by his feelings that he can only tell her yes by tapping her twice. Finally she understands and responds to him in the same manner. Here touch replaces all other replies with its effective simplicity. Leo connects again with another human being not just by destroying something or irritating somebody. Alma is very conscious of his presence, she listens and responds to him because she genuinely wants to know. These taps also feature in his communication with Bruno. He taps on the radiator to affirm that he is still alive. Here sound and touch combine to form a very simple but effective way of communication without words.

Smell

Smells are frequent triggers of memories. In his descriptions Jakob often records smells, the smell of rain, of food, of things familiar and unfamiliar. They root the narrator firmly in the present, but still trigger memories, just like on a hot Toronto Sunday:

The afternoon heat was thick with burning flesh. I saw the smoke rising in whorls into the dark sky. Ambushed, memory cracking open. The bitter residue flying up into my face like ash. (*FP*, 105)

This scene set in afterwar Toronto is eerily reminiscent of the accounts of the killings at Auschwitz. The memory is like an attack on the body, overpowering in its vividness. The sensory impressions that Jakob records may not only be due to the fire that burned his village but may also come from the reading of the burning of the bodies after being gassed. This collective memory seems to be

part of him as well although he can only have seen photos or read about these events. This trigger seems to release more of his past. The same night he dreams of Bella's beauty and imagines the reaction of the Nazi soldiers in the night of the assault. Her hair is particularly special to Jakob, being the first attribute he writes about when he first describes his sister.

On Idhra he begins to write his memoirs. "There are places that claim you and places that warn you away. On Idhra the pang of smells opened in me with the prickly sting of memory" (*FP*, 157). Here, his past is released and he has access to what has been repressed in order to survive. Now is the time that he can reactivate what he experienced and mourn his loss. Writing becomes a channel through which he can reach for his past. Ben is similarly impressed by the island. The wind there cleans the air and polishes the surroundings, "every thought will be new, and you will be filled with an appetite for clarity. [...] You will feed pinches of your past like bread to the seabirds" (*FP*, 259). He is impressed by the tremendous beauty that Jakob has praised in his metaphors. The return to this island is supposed to bring some resolve.

The third chapter, "Phosporus", begins with the evocation of the image of lightning. Lightning cannot be controlled, rocks can make sounds, metal can melt. Lightning changes the physical condition of things and it seems to strike Ben after weeks on the island. The heat has diverse effects on objects. Knowledge that has been collected finally makes sense. This is compared to a lightning bolt that melts everything and brings an epiphany. Ben believes that Petra is the one who makes him complete but just like a lightning bolt the fire burns fast and leaves only scars.

A thousand accumulated moments come to fruition in a few seconds. Your cells are reassembled. Struck, your metal melted. Your burnt shape is branded into the chair, vacancy where once you inhabited society. Worst of all, she appears to you as everything you've ever lost. As the one you've missed most. (*FP*, 274)

Roots – Family and Naming

As has been remarked, the motivation for authors of Holocaust novels is often a preoccupation with the legacy from their ancestors and an exploration of personal questions on one's own family history. This is clearly shown in the dedications of two of the novels analysed in this thesis. Foer's novel is preceded by "Simply and impossibly: FOR MY FAMILY" (*Everything is Illuminated*, dedication) and fictionally tries to fill a gap in his family history caused by the Shoah. Foer's maternal grandfather Luis Safran actually survived the Shoah but lost his wife and first child (cf. Solomon). *The History of Love* begins with a dedication to Krauss' grandparents and four passport photos showing women and men in their twenties who taught her "the opposite of disappearing" (HL, dedication). Now they reappear on the dedication page of the novel, being disseminated just like the novel itself. Now they are permanently saved from disappearing. Foer's and Krauss' novels are dedicated to their respective families and show the preoccupation of third generation writers with their roots.

The present, like a landscape, is only a small part of a mysterious narrative. A narrative of catastrophe and slow accumulation. Each life saved: genetic features to rise again in another generation. "Remote causes." (FP, 48)

The previous chapter traced the relevance of the senses for a re-humanization of the victims. In this chapter the meaning of the family, of one's name and one's roots in a community will be looked at in more detail. Similar to the other authors, "Michaels eliminates the racist and nationalistic ties of the essentialist family" (Estrin, 296). The family is re-established as a community of trust and love, by "volitional kinship" (Gubar, 263). A sense of belonging can stabilize personality and individuality. Naming is important for this sense of belonging. A name shows affiliation and where one comes from. The first name is generally chosen with care and can express love and familial ties through being named after someone in the family to show honor, respect or reverence. Traditionally, Ashkenazi Jews, that is, Jews of Eastern European and German descent, name children after deceased relatives. When Alma realises her namesake is dead, she complains

that everyone I'm named after is dead. Alma Mereminski, and my father, David Singer, and my great-aunt Dora who died in the Warsaw Ghetto, and for whom I was given my Hebrew name, Devorah. Why do 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? (HL, 176)

While for history names have a documentary significance, they also have a commemorative significance that counters the anonymity of the dead. It is here that the notion of memorial sites comes up again. Memorial books were the first memorials to the Holocaust and thus made space textual in their desire to compensate for the missing tombstones (cf. Whitehead, 77).

In each novel the young protagonist is in search of their place and role in life, these "lost children are the central narrative crux" (Estrin 287). Jakob lost his parents and finds a new father figure and eventually his happiness in his relationship with Michaela. In *Everything Is Illuminated* Jonathan is lost and in search for his roots while Alma in *The History of Love* has lost her father and is left with an absent mother.

Estrin analyses the motif of adoption in Michaels' novel and comments that "[e]mphasizing the pluralization of identities, she reinvents the notion of family" (Estrin, 280). "Michaels's story challenges two elements of the plot: that the bloodline matters and that the foster parents provide merely a stopgap, an "oblivion" overcome in the formulaic ending" (Estrin, 285), because "[s]ustenance rather than heritage links one family to another" (Estrin, 295).

Our relation to the dead continues to change because we continue to love them. All the afternoon conversations that winter on Idhra, with Athos or with Bella, while it grew dark. As in any conversation, sometimes they answered me, sometimes they didn't. (FP, 165)

Athos and Jakob depend on each other. Jakob was saved by Athos who carried him under his coat which reminds of the safe haven of the womb. What the reader learns later is that Jakob saved Athos as well. The city he and his colleagues were excavating was overrun by the Nazis, killing some of the scientists, sending the others to Dachau. Only because he left earlier was he spared (cf. FP, 51).

“If you hurt yourself, Jakob, I will have to hurt myself. You will have proven to me my love for you is useless.” Athos said: “I can’t save a boy from a burning building. Instead he must save me from the attempt; he must jump to earth” (*FP*, 45)

Love and hurt are so closely connected. They are connected now. Jakob has to prove himself worthy of Athos love by keeping alive, by pulling through. If one loves, one has to save the other from sacrificing oneself for the other, in Athos’ opinion.

Ben has a difficult relationship with his parents. Their two children died in the ghetto. Ben is their third and only child. His parents were so desperate and afraid that they denied their third son, their first son, a name. Small gestures of intimacy suddenly fill him with hopelessness. The last paragraph of the first chapter informs about his father’s suicide. Resigned, he writes that “suddenly able to answer the dilemma of hunger that had plagued him so long, he took them all” (*FP*, 256). He does not seem to be able to forgive his parents this exclusion, this terrible secret that they kept from him until after their death.

My parents prayed that the birth of the third child would go unnoticed. They hoped that if they did not name me, the angel of death might pass by. Ben, not from Benjamin, but merely “ben” – the Hebrew word for son. (*FP*, 253)

“The memories we elude catch up to us, overtake us like a shadow” (*FP*, 213). Ben claims when he introduces an important memory of his father. Ben has thrown a rotten apple into the garbage. His father finds it and forces Ben to eat it as food is not to be wasted. This triggers other memories of his parents connected with food. His mother kept food in her purse while his father eats even though he is not hungry. Eating is not a pleasurable experience. It is a necessity and when his father is really hungry he stuffs himself methodically, disgusted by himself. “The spirit is most evident at the point of extreme bodily humiliation” (*FP*, 214). His father is trapped in his knowledge as a survivor and executes this bodily humiliation on himself. After his death, Ben remembers his father, “who used food to forget his body. Who was alive in music, where time is an instruction” (*FP*, 255).

Ben and his mother share a world of secrets, she wants to impart to him

the absolute, inviolate necessity of pleasure. My mother's painful love for the world. [...] Loss is an edge; it swelled everything for my mother, and drained everything from my father. (*FP*, 223)

His mother finds pleasure in new things, in taste and smells. In his marriage with Naomi he is hesitant, almost anxious. "But for me, love was like holding my breath" (*FP*, 233). Nothing that can be done for longer. He praises her beauty and her wisdom, appreciating her talent finding right to the heart of things. She collects lullabies from around the world, little songs about saying goodbye. Again, this penchant revolves around absence. The lost child is given a song, a song to remember and that remembers itself.

"The only thing you can do for the dead is to sing to them. [...] Because there was nothing else she [a mother] could offer of her self, of her body. [...] And these lullabies were overheard and passed along and, generations later, that little song is all that's left to tell us of that child..." (*FP*, 241)

In the first section of *Everything is Illuminated* Alex begins with his name and how the different members of his family call him. He speaks about his family, his origins. "In the end, though, the family of men (Alex, the grandfather, Alex, the father, Alex, the older son) falls apart" (Ribbat, 213). The grandfather Alex is not even called Alex, his name is Eli. The names of his son and grandson are built on a lie. The father is violent and despotic. Only Alex, the son, takes on responsibility, for himself and his brother and tries to begin a new life that is not built on lies, clichés and violence. The first section of Jonathan's story about Trachimbrod similarly begins with an act of naming. A wagon drives into the river. Its contents rise in the water and among these things is a baby. In the first chapter of the story numerous inhabitants of the village are introduced. Their names are given, their characteristics, their family members, et cetera.

The tradition to name children after a deceased relative takes on comic significance when Brod names her children. "Jewish custom forbade the naming of a child after a living relative. It was said to be bad luck. So instead she named him Yankel, like her other two children." (*Ell*, 139) One section of Jonathan's narration contains Safran's conversation with his great-great-great-grandfather about what is love. He turns to his ancestor for advice. The Kolker claims that after losing someone,

The timbre begins to fade. The edge dulls. The hurt lessens. Every love is carved from from loss. Mine was. Yours is. Your great-great-great-grandchildren's will be. But we learn to live in that love. (*Ell*, 266)

The chapter titled "I SEARCHED OUT OTHER FORMS OF LIFE" in *The History of Love* deals with Alma's ethnic roots. "'It's just that you, for example, are one-quarter Russian, one-quarter Hungarian, one-quarter Polish, and one-quarter German'" (*HL*, 95), her mother tells her and dives into family stories of Polish grandparents and borderlines before and after the war and finally concludes: "'You can actually make sixteen different pie charts, each of the accurate!'" (*HL*, 96), showing Alma different versions of her ancestry. While Alma's mother presents her different versions of identity, a multitude of configurations and experiential horizons, Alma vigorously claims "I'M AMERICAN!" (*HL*, 97), while Bird says "'No, you're not. You're Jewish'" (*HL*, 97). *The History of Love* is as much about a search for a particular person as for Alma's identity.

Alma's fascination with her father's ability to survive in the wild is a metaphor for her fight to survive in her own world. She studies numerous books in order to be able to identify poisonous plants. She keeps a survival bag in her room and starts to keep a notebook called "How to Survive in the Wild". This is, however, transferring her real problem onto a different area. She feels suffocated by her mother's love and care, always asking "'What can I do for you I love you so much,'" and I always wanted to say, but never said: Love me less" (*HL*, 43). "'From now on,'" she said, "I'm going to treat you like an adult." I'm only eight, I wanted to say, but didn't" (*HL*, 43).

Leo never stops loving Alma. Every year he sends her a birthday card. He watches his son when he enters and leaves school, he imagines what he would talk about with him and fantasizes how he would "sweep him up under my coat" (*HL*, 163) in case of catastrophes. This protective gesture is reminiscent of Jakob's rescue by Athos. Leo's loneliness makes him a bitter man. Alma married another man, he cannot raise his own son. The result of this abandonment is obvious in the following quote. However, he tries to change and then he finds Bruno.

There were times in my life, whole years, when anger got the better of me. Ugliness turned me inside out. There was a certain satisfaction in

bitterness. I courted it. It was standing outside, and I invited it in. I scowled at the world. And the world scowled back. We were locked in a stare of mutual disgust. I used to let the door slam in people's faces. I farted where I wanted to fart. I accused cashiers of cheating me out of a penny, while holding the penny in my hand. And then one day I realized I was on my way to being the sort of schmuck who poisons pigeons. People crossed the street to avoid me. I was human cancer. And to be honest: I wasn't really angry. Not anymore. [...] One day I woke up and said to myself: *It's not too late*. [...] I let go of something and something let go of me. A couple of months later, I found Bruno. (HL, 18)

There are numerous occasions when he imagines what he would talk about with his son, how he would explain his absence.

What would I have said to him, my only child? Forgive me, your mother didn't love me the way I wanted to be loved; perhaps I didn't love her the way she needed, either? And yet. There was no answer. (HL, 164)

He does not find an answer but seeks forgiveness for not being there for his son. "Perhaps that is what it means to be a father – to teach your child to live without you. If so, no one was a greater father than I." (HL, 164) He accepts that he could not live with his son but always longs for eventual recognition. He visits him at book-signings and keeps every newspaper article on him. He even attends his memorial service.

Leo's only friend is Bruno. They grew up together but lost contact, "I didn't know he was still alive" (HL, 5). They live in the same house, established some kind of code in cases of emergency and spend their time together. In his descriptions he ridicules his friend although a deep affection is obvious. "I haven't done you justice. You have given me such company at the end of my life" (HL, 6). Bruno even tried to commit suicide once by taking pills but Leo finds and saves him. "We never spoke of it after that. Just as we never spoke of our childhoods, of the dreams we shared and lost, of everything that happened and didn't happen" (HL, 7). They fall silent on the painful memories and refuse to mention them. Shortly before the end it is furthermore revealed that Bruno died in 1941 and Leo only imagined his former friend sharing his life.

The senses in action, or Gendered bodies

As already established the senses play an important role in the novels as an attempt to re-humanise the victims of the Shoah. Sexuality has been excluded so far despite its proximity to the sense of touch. Rather, it can be seen as a form of communication, a way to establish contact and to activate memory. Especially *Fugitive Pieces* makes use of this aspect. Nevertheless, the other novels also focus on the body and (awakening) sexuality.

For Susan Gubar the “conventional approach” of the novel shows “Jewish survivors [...] as male protagonists, while female characters play supporting roles as sacrificial muses or nurturing helpmates.”(Gubar, 250) Cook supports Gubar’s argument that only male bonding and creativity are perpetuated and states that “women are allowed to experience very little in this text compared to their male counterparts”(Cook, 17-8) Gubar understands Michaels’ approach, however, as a reinterpretation of “traditionally male-dominated approaches to the Shoah”(Gubar, 250) She argues that the patrilineal communities of European Jewry have been disrupted because of Aryanization and genocide. Their heritage has been stolen, leaving them bereft in a double sense while men could not fulfil the traditional role of protecting the family. Thus, the endeavour of re-establishing broken genealogies and an investment in a “re-masculinization of men, a refeminization of women shattered by their inability in the calamity to be men and women”(Gubar, 252)

As Nazism showed the “moral bankruptcy of models of heroic virility” this “regendering”, as Gubar calls it, happened in a context of “post- or even antipatriarchal masculinity [...], a masculinity beyond masculinism”(Gubar, 252). Furthermore, Michaels’ choice of a male protagonist shows dissimilarity and entails distance between writer and character and her “effort to replace the concept of sympathy, which supposes affinity among people, with the mechanisms of empathy, with its recognition of disparity” (Gubar, 253). This strategy emphasizes the difference between writer and protagonists, between reader and protagonists. The reader witnesses an individual survivor’s history and has to recognize them as fellow human beings. Individual suffering is

extracted from the huge number of losses. Moreover, Jakob's subject formation is different as he incorporates Bella into his development and even into his body. This duality is, according to Gubar, "distinct from normative masculinity"(257). To Oliva's comment that her novel focuses on male characters Michaels answers that "[t]here's no overt politicism in that decision" (Oliva).

Fugitive Pieces

In October 1968, Jakob marries Alex, his first wife, and records how they met and fell in love. Her use of puns fascinates him, her eyes show him "eagerness, strength, and energy" (*FP*, 127), "[h]er passion was music; she was a professional listener" (*FP*, 130). This seemingly strikes the chord that tied him to Bella. Again, the combination of her words, her language, her eyes and her ears draw him to her. Sound turns into a narrative arch. The following quotation shows the emphasis on her body and how character and age are shown in gestures and features.

She was all legs and arms, gangly and elegant, all bits and pieces with one united appeal. The teenager peeped from her face or her limbs just when she was trying to be most sophisticated. This unsettled innocence was like iron filings to a magnet; she was everywhere on my heart, spiky and charged, itchy and there to stay. (*FP*, 130)

She grew up with fantastic stories about the British military while Jakob is always reminded of the fate of the Jewish people. She is undecided, unstable, and seems as lost as he is. Alex' language is littered with palindromes and anagrams, avoiding the true meaning of a term. Meaning has to be guessed at or relied on as an agreement. "She shrugged off expectation with language; her hardness was a form of swearing. [...] Alex was a sword-swallow, a fire-eater. In her mouth English was dangerous and alive, edgy and hot. Alex, Queen of the Crossword." (*FP*, 132) Her language is part of a game while for Jakob it is a matter of life and death. For him it is essential to find a way to express his loss and his grief. With her and her friends he often feels out of place as if he did not fit. From the beginning of their relationship the reader is informed that it will not last, but "[g]ood intentions are the last thing to vanish in a relationship." (*FP*,

131) They hold on to each other because they seem to sense security in the other one. This is deceptive as none of them can commit him- or herself fully. The synesthetic experience of his body reacting to a smell, the ability of a word to rob him of his vision is emphasized in the following quotation. One sensual impression triggers two or more senses. Jakob's body reacts very strongly to Alex. What draws him to her, however, is smell and sound again:

She knew I was immobilized just standing close enough to smell the perfume at her hairline, the back of her neck. When I was with Maurice and Irena, an ordinary word – jacket, earring, wrist – blinded me in the middle of a conversation. (FP, 133)

Sexuality is a very important aspect in all the narratives but especially in *Fugitive Pieces* sexual encounters trigger dreams, memories and epiphanies. Gubar claims that the "heterosexual relationships serve as a conduit to the beloved sister who becomes his muse" (261). After his dream of Bella, lying beside Alex on the wedding night, Jakob feels alienated from himself, Bella is now looking for him, cannot find him. He feels he has lost everything that connects him to his former self. He wants to turn to her for the names of musical pieces, humming them to her so she would tell him their names (cf. FP, 126).

But there's no sound. Bella and I have entered a dream, the animate colour surrounding us intense, every leaf twitching as if on the verge of sleep. Bella is happy: the whole birch forest gathers in her expression. Now we hear the river and move towards it [...] I turn and Bella's gone; my glance has caused her to vanish. (FP, 125)

The Orpheus and Eurydice motif is linked to trust. Eurydice can only be saved if Orpheus trusts that she is following him. To rescue her he must rely. Finally, Jakob is looking for Bella everywhere, he sees her in every tree, the light and the river. Jakob is the only survivor of his family, his trust is shattered but will be reinstalled at a later stage in his marriage with Michaela. But at this stage Jakob only trusts his senses. He wants to see Bella and thus loses her. The journey of finding Bella is one to the inside. Coping with the loss of her and thus recovering her is intertwined with an inner development. Athos' and his attempts to find her in the many documents proved futile, so Jakob has to rely on his own memories and knowledge. Back in Athens he felt disconnected to his own body, a shell that did not really belong to him. Now sexuality ("the deep achievement

of our marriage [...] our nocturnal happiness" (*FP*, 135)) and corporeality further remove him from Bella.

"Night after night, I endlessly follow Bella's path from the front door of my parents' house. In order to give her death a place. This becomes my task" (*FP*, 139). Jakob wants to locate her death, connect time with place and find the locus of her disappearance. He hopes that through letting Alex in on his secret his mind will be eased, but his hopes are frustrated. "And then the world fell silent. Again I was standing under water, my boots locked in mud" (*FP*, 139). His confession makes him silent and immobile as Alex cannot give what Jakob needs.

Fugitive Pieces places particular emphasis on the body as vessel of memory that can be opened up by sensory perceptions. Memory is engraved in the body. "In *Fugitive Pieces*, the human body is where human life is eventually determined and in relation to which life's important decisions are made" (Korte, 528). It is this corporeality that will eventually heal Jakob. Back in Canada, spending time with Maurice's family, he realises its eternalizing potential. Maurice and Irena's two sons are like his nephews and his relation to them is close. But even when he speaks about Tomas's birth he is reminded of the Shoah. At that time he meets his future second wife Michaela, "[t]he catastrophe of grace" (*FP*, 175).

Her mind is a palace. She moves through history with the fluency of a spirit, mourns the burning of the library at Alexandria as if it happened yesterday. She discusses the influence of trade routes on European architecture, while still noticing the pattern of light across a table....(*FP*, 176)

This description of Michaela is quite different to Alex'. The contrast of spirit and body is striking in this regard. Having matured over the years his interest is with the mind. His fear that memory is only skin, part of the body, doomed to vanish seems to have triggered a new focus, although Michaela is twenty-five years younger than he is. Still, after realising that she feels the same, sexuality and the image of the body enter his memoirs again. Michaela's body "deafens" (*FP*, 180) him. What characterizes her is that "there is no tinge of death in Michaela's skin. Even as she sleeps, I see in her nakedness the invisible manifest, flooding

the surface of her" (*FP*, 181). Jakob here seems to perceive life as something manifest, just as as he appears to see himself marked by death. Therefore, Michaela seems to be his route to life. Her interests mirror his, her knowledge is profound. "In Michaela's eyes, ten generations of history, in her hair the scents of fields and pines, her cold, smooth arms carrying water from springs..." (*FP*, 178). Her eyes can see ten generations, her hair smells like nature, her body provides him with water – she fulfils all of his needs. On top of that, she gives him memories, positive memories that speak of love. Her love of detail builds a world for him.

Michaela offers her ancestors to me. I'm shocked at my hunger for her memories. Love feeds on the protein of detail, sucks fact to the marrow; just as there's no generality in the body, every particular speaking at once until there's such a crying out...(FP, 179)

His body is marked by the horrors he has not even witnessed and fears that "[s]he'll see in my body the terrible things that have marked me" (*FP*, 179). He lived through the war in the sheltered atmosphere of Athos' house. But as a Jew who lost his parents and Bella he is nevertheless branded with the horrors. This destiny drew him to reports and records, looking for the one familiar face he would never see again. He tells her about his history, "her heart an ear, her skin a ear" (*FP*, 182). When he is dreaming after this revelation, his dream is in sunlight. Before, it was always moonlight he was dreaming of. "Every cell in my body has been replaced, suffused with peace" (*FP*, 182). "To be saved by such a small body" (*FP*, 183). Finally, "[e]ach sound – touch" (*FP*, 184). Michaela, too, shares her memories with Jakob: "I cross the boundary of skin into Michaela's memories" (*FP*, 185). Together they roam the country, driving to rural villages, towns and places of memory. She even takes him to a birch forest. This motif of the birch forest was introduced earlier as the site of his Orpheus/Eurydice dream with Bella. Birches stood close to the barracks at Auschwitz, the epitome of annihilation, another name for the horrors called Holocaust and Shoah. "This is where I become irrevocably unmoored. The river floods. I slip free the knot and float, suspended in the present" (*FP*, 188). Finally, he has reached the present, no longer tied to the past.

This relationship of mutual listening and commemoration completes his coming to terms with language, silence, memory, and history, and he is

finally able not only fully to inhabit the present, but to forge tentative links with a hoped-for future. (McCullough, 833)

Michaela is both absence and presence, lost in her mind's world, though in a positive way. Bella's death is now a fact for him. Her memories and movements trigger memories of his parents, not from his hiding place inside the wall but of a secret family recipe living on his mind and now in his memoirs, ready to be traded on (cf. *FP*, 193).

There's no absence, if there remains even the memory of absence. Memory dies unless it's given a use. Or as Athos might have said: If one no longer has land but has the memory of land, then one can make a map. (*FP*, 193)

During his first marriage with Alex Jakob begins to imagine Bella's torments and her death and finally he accepts that he must (re)turn to the living so that he can communicate Bella's and his parents' death. Instead of joining them by keeping them in a present they cannot inhabit he needs to face the present and future. It is in his second marriage with Michaela that he finds the attentive ear and body to listen to his story.

Inevitably, the idyllic union of Jacob and Michaela seems dependent on the traditional secondariness of a self-abnegating helpmate; however, the troubling presence of Bella behind Michaela represents a primal loss heterosexuality salves. (Gubar, 263)

Gubar concludes that

[j]ust as Bella's inspiring absence bases masculine imaginative growth on a muted, sacrificed, and thus idealized femininity, Jacob's two marriages demonstrate that the emergence of a new sort of masculinity – drawn to physical intimacy with men, pacific, predicated on awareness of lack and on emphatic identification with (not rejection of) the feminine – nevertheless hinges on the continued instrumentality of women. (Gubar, 265)

Everything is Illuminated

One could argue that the love stories in *Everything is Illuminated* and *The History of Love* are there for marketing reasons but the following chapter will show that their significance runs deeper. Love and sexuality are essential qualities of human existence, necessary for survival.

Sexuality is celebrated in Jonathan's magical realist strand of narration as a sign of life. One entry in "The Book of Antecedents" demonstrates this unflinching affirmation of life in the face of death – Jonathan's extensive foreshadowing of the catastrophe – "CUNNILINGUS AND THE MENSTRUATING WOMAN" with the addition "For a complete listing of rules and regulations concerning you know what, see APPENDIX F-ING" (*EII*, 201).

However, these stories have the sole purpose to fill an absence. As Trachimbrod is devoid of a story / a history, it has to be invented. The extravaganza of this strand owes everything to the author's imagination.

After eroticism was eviscerated throughout the years of the Holocaust, after citizenship was cancelled throughout those same years, to the survivor both take on the fragility of legislated privileges that can never be taken for granted, brittle fictions that tend to be regarded as utilitarian in the subordination to the major aim of continued survival. (Gubar, 264)

Criglington agrees with Gubar in her view of the "erotic objectification – and thus the diminished sense of agency – of her female characters" (89) in *Fugitive Pieces*. The same is true for Foer's *Everything is Illuminated*. Brod's sexuality is reduced to her rape and childbearing. Brod's first rape is another entry. She uses her future husband for her revenge on the mad squire Sofiowka:

Sofiowka was found the next morning, swinging by the neck from the wooden bridge. His severed hands were hanging from strings tied to his feet, and across his chest was written, in Brod's red lipstick: ANIMAL. (*EII*, 205)

This image is eerily reminiscent of pictures of people hanged by the Nazis, humiliated even in death by signs hanging from their necks. Here is strangely reversed. Sofiowka is guilty of a crime. His rape is abominable, his revelation that Yankel is not her father is cruel. The following quotation marks the end of the narration of the Kolker's life. Brod puts the hole through which she communicated with her husband and through which she had sex with him, on her necklace. The hole she decides to live with is her husband's absence as well as the fact that life consists of holes. The hole is not empty, it is surrounded by emptiness.

She cut around the hole that had separated her from the Kolker for those last months, and put the pine loop on her necklace, next to the abacus

bead that Yankel had given her so long ago. This new bead would remind her of the second man she had lost in her eighteen years, and of the hole that she was learning is not the exception in life, but the rule. The hole is no void; the void exists around it. (*EII*, 139)

The novel concentrates primarily on male sexuality. Safran's sexual appeal is based on his numb arm which makes his lovers so sad that they all want to console him. Safran is ten years old when a widow from the shtetl makes love to him or rather his arm for the first time. Like all the other women before her, the Gypsy girl feels drawn to Safran's dead arm. "They loved him and he fucked them – ten, jack, queen, king, ace – a most straight and royal flush" (*EII*, 195). Sex is a game here; but the desire for Safran and his dead arm is more complicated. He is deficient and so is his love, something will always be missing. Desire is triggered by the impossibility of its fulfilment. It will never be consumed. The state of desire is constantly upheld and no circular structure of desire and fulfilment is feasible.

It was not the death that had so attracted her to it, but the unknowability. The unattainability. He could never completely love her, not with all of himself. He could never be completely owned, and he could never own completely. Her desire had been sparked by the frustration of her desire. (*EII*, 237)

This inherent sadness in his love life is countered by the Gypsy girl. It is she who he loves, for seven years, but he marries another. The parents of Safran, Jonathan's grandfather, have arranged a marriage with a Jewish girl, Zosha. He sacrifices the Gypsy girl for status and social acceptance. No one knows of this relationship. They always deny that they are in love with each other knowing that they can never be together. He betrays his wife even on her wedding day. Safran's sexuality is egoistic, selfish, as well as consolatory for the widows, generous and playful.

Die literarische Gestaltung und Ergänzung von Augenzeugenberichten und das Schweigen, das diese fiktionalen Um- und Überschreibungen in Foers Roman durchsetzt und umgibt, wahren den Abstand zur Erfahrung des Traumas und agieren zugleich dessen emotionale Präsenz für die Nachkommen von Opfern und Tätern. (Haselstein 210)

Celebrating the marriage of Safran and Zosha the

Double House was brimming with organized pandemonium. Even up to the last minute, even past the last minute, hangings were still being hung,

salads mixed, girdles clenched and tied, chandeliers dusted, throw rugs thrown...It was extraordinary. (*Ell*, 253)

While Safran's father holds his speech the Gypsy girl slips a note into Safran's hand, but a "haunting gust" blows it away and he never reads it. The following paragraph follows the note to a field where trash is being burned. The description is eerily reminiscent of those of burnings of the victims of the Holocaust. The note said "Change". As Zosha told her bridegroom that he should never change, this could be considered the Gypsy girl's expression of true love. On the other hand, the note implies that change is immanent.

Jonathan's narration of Safran's wedding day is followed by that of the wedding night. This section is interlocked with onomatopoeic renderings of the German bombing. These sounds, at the same time, represent Safran's climax. Finally, he is falling in love. However, it takes another nine months until Trachimbrod will be the site of the German massacre. After the night of this unintended bombing people begin to cling to their memories.

Activity was replaced with thought. Memory. Everything reminded everyone of something, which seemed winsome at first [...] but quickly became devitalizing. Memory begat memory begat memory. Villagers became embodiments of that legend they had been told so many times, of mad Sofiowka, swaddles in white string, using memory to remember memory, bound in an order of remembrance, struggling in vain to remember a beginning of end. (*Ell*, 258)

The History of Love

Alma's sexuality is thematic in *The History of Love* in a similar way as it is in *Everything is Illuminated* and *Fugitive Pieces*. Alma is falling in love with Misha; she begins to take an interest in her body and describes Misha's body and her sensual impressions. This blossoming sexuality is again a sign of life and of a continuation of life in spite of the catastrophe. Leo's body is often described as well and thus contrasted with Alma's awakening sexuality. One of Alma's subchapters is titled "WHAT I LOOK LIKE NAKED". Her first self-description says "I am tall like my father. I am also black-haired, gap-toothed, skinny in a bad way, and fifteen" (*HL*, 38). The body is a palpable sign of presence and a

medium to decode the world. Love, for Alma, is the motor of life. This is why she tries to find a new husband for her mother because otherwise, she fears, she might never be able to leave and lead her own life.

“And at night, when it’s too dark to see, we find it necessary to gesture on each other’s bodies to make ourselves understood” (*HL*, 74). This is a quotation from Leo’s novel. Similar to Jakob’s understanding the body is a means of efficient communication. In “The Age of Silence”, another chapter of *The History of Love*, it says “The first language humans had was gestures” (*HL*, 72). Communication was at first based on touch and sight, not on sounds. Language was a more integrative process. This language offered endless possibilities of expression, people communicated more. “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*” (*HL*, 72). Misunderstandings were common as were the apologies for these, *Forgive me* became an ubiquitous gesture. Forgiveness became inflationary, not an impossible act as is in the aftermath of the Shoah. The use of the body for communicating meant a more profound acceptance of it. This led to a more unified conception, and thus an appreciation of human life. The memory of this union is still retained in the hands, just like in Jakob’s understanding.

if you find yourself at a loss for what to do with them [your hands], overcome with sadness that comes when you recognize the foreignness of your own body – it’s because your hands remember a time when the division between mind and body, brain and heart, what’s inside and what’s outside, was so much *less*. (*HL*, 73)

Writing

The integration of the act of writing is the most ostensible similarity between the three novels. All of them meditate on this process and all of them use metafictional techniques to emphasize the constructedness of identity, memory and history. Korte claims that for “both Athos and Jakob, writing plays an important role in re-creating a meaningful existence” (Korte, 519). The same is

true for Alex, Jonathan, Alma and Leo. Trauma is addressed in all of their texts, via acting out and working through their trauma wounds can scar over. These texts are therapeutic; their protagonists overcome denial and repression and search for ways to find some peace. Their narrative styles and generic affiliation vary greatly. Jakob and Ben write memoirs, very personal musings on their lives. Alma records her efforts to make her family happy in diary form while Leo's story is written by an omniscient narrator. Jonathan writes a hyperrealistic simulacrum, using elements of Ashkenazic folklore, Alex explores the consequences of their journey in his letters, once one word is crossed out in the book by a straight line. It appears as if Alex has corrected his own manuscript. This points to the correction process that follows his writing and his envisioning of an audience.

(With our writing, we are reminding each other of things. We are making one story, yes?) [...] I think that this is why I relish writing for you so much. It makes it possible for me to be not like I am, but as I desire for Little Igor to see me. I can be funny, because I have time to meditate about how to be funny, and I can repair my mistakes when I perform mistakes, and I can be a melancholy person in manners that are interesting, not only melancholy. With writing, we have second chances.[...] It is true, I am certain, that you will write very many more books than I will, but it is me, not you, who was born to be a writer. (*EII*, 144)

As the story progresses the reader realises that Alex becomes smarter, he asks the right questions, he is wiser than before and this is mirrored in his command of the English language. As both narrations, Alex' account of their journey and Jonathan's magical realist tale, are written after their "illumination" his development seems to be a result of his reading Foer's story and writing his own. This beneficiary effect of collecting, ordering and writing strengthens the message of the novel, that writing is necessary. Writing frees, oneself and others. The process of writing, however, is strenuous and painful for both. Alex argues that they could give the characters what they deserve, a happy life, two functioning arms and a happy ending for Alex' grandfather. "I do not think that there are any limits to how excellent we could make life seem" (*EII*, 180).

"“Write to save yourself,” Athos said, “and someday you’ll write because you’ve been saved”” (*FP*, 165). Writing takes on a redemptive quality for all of the protagonists. In the act of testifying the individual can resurface again and to a

certain degree immortalise itself and those who died are commemorated. "Pinchas T's, a philosopher of Trachimbrod, argues in one of his papers that it would be possible, in theory, for life and art to be reversed" (*Ell*, 213). This is mentioned iteratively throughout the book, so it seems to be part of the intention of the author to reverse life and art, he strives for his art to substitute life. Art is indeed substituted for life in Jonathan's narration. His fictional recreation of the shtetl's history replaces the void that is left by the inhabitants' death. Its history reaches only so far as Lista's memory lasts. Jonathan's narration has a consolatory effect that never conceals the fact that the shtetl and its history were destroyed in a horrendous massacre. Through its use of hyperbole, magical realist effects, weird characters and unbelievable storylines it exposes, even boasts with its constructedness. Still, it is an act of affirming presence. It feels like a prosthesis, a foreign limb one has to live with despite its artificiality.

Meaning can be created via language, language does things. Athos' scientific papers and Jakob's poetry both function in similar ways as the shtetl narration. Trying to make sense of their existence and finding sense in their lives, the act of writing both affirms presence in the act and in the material product. The texts exist as self-contained. On Idhra Jakob regains his trust in language, the English language, so far as to write his memoirs. "I became obsessed by the palpable edge of sound. The moment when language at last surrenders to what it's describing: the subtlest differentials of light or temperature or sorrow" (*FP*, 162). As a victim, what he said had no impact, was denied taking effect, effectively denied meaning. Now, language becomes touch-able. Language can touch, that is affect, again. Jakob sees a power relation between signifier and signified, the object and its linguistic cover. For him, both fuse to become an organic union that takes on a tangible quality. A potency of language is achieved that adapts to the user's will. Jakob feels at home in language at last, his existence becomes manifest in language.

He turns to poetry as his first means of expression. Neurons transmit and process information, they communicate. This desire for language taking effect bears religious qualities. Language as such is an instrument of reverence or doing justice to the world around, no longer used to devalue and hurt as in the

years of war. Jakob sees desire as a motivation, as a motor of language, that has to be forever unfulfilled and thus flattens, extends time to give the impression of arrested time. At this point in his life, language is still a deserted home, beautiful again but a lonely place to be.

A poem is as neural as love; the rut of rhythm that veers the mind. This hunger for sound is almost as sharp as desire, as if one could honour every inch of flesh in words; and so, suspend time. A word is at home in desire. No station of the heart is more full of solitude than desire which keeps the world poised, poisoned with beauty, whose only permanence is loss. (*FP*, 163)

Leo's career as a writer is interrupted by the war and the separation from Alma. Leo was a prolific writer already when he was a child but only after his heart attack does Leo start writing again. Aware of his own mortality he wants to leave something permanent. He is afraid of dying without anybody caring or noticing so his writing functions as a sign of life. Another reason is that by describing his life and the world around him he takes possession of it. He "wanted to describe the world, because to live in an undescribed world was too lonely" (*HL*, 7). Everyday Leo writes more. The reader is presented with different beginnings, all starting with "Once upon a time there was a boy", thus transferring his stories into the realm of the fairy tale where the reader cannot distinguish any more what is true and what is not. They all deal with the boy's – Leo's – love for a girl in a small village. That way the terrible events are removed thrice, through temporal and spatial distance and finally through narratorial distance.

I did it for myself alone, not for anyone else, and that was the difference. It didn't matter if I found the words and more than that, I knew it would be impossible to find the right ones. And because I accepted that what I'd once believed was possible was in fact impossible, and because I knew I would never show a word of it to anyone, I wrote a sentence: *Once upon a time there was a boy.* (*HL*, 9)

Litvinoff passes off Leo's novel as his own and sends it to several publishers, all of whom refuse to print it. Once he gets his manuscript back with the lines: "The enclosed dead matter is no longer needed by us and is being returned to you" (*HL*, 70). The text is dead matter for the world but for him it is alive, the book and the story. He thinks of them as birds that return to their home and tell of their success.

Staring out the window, Litvinoff imagined the two thousand copies of *The History of Love* as a flock of two thousand homing pigeons that could flap their wings and return to him to report on how many tears shed, how many laughs, how many passages read aloud, how many cruel closings of the cover after reading barely a page, how many never opened at all. (HL, 71)

Even Leo perceives his life and his later novel to be one and the same. His life has become textual. In the following quotation the syntax is interesting: it is his book that will end first, not Leo's life. Wind would take the pages – his life – away and no one would ever know about Leo Gursky.

At times I believed that the last page of my book and the last page of my life were one and the same, that when my book ended I'd end, a great wind would sweep through my rooms carrying the pages away, and when the air cleared of all those fluttering white sheets the room would be silent, the chair where I sat would be empty. (HL, 9)

Alma's first section of the novel begins with the heading "MY MOTHER'S SADNESS" and is divided into thirty-four small subsections. All of them are like flashlights on different aspects of Alma's world and give small anecdotes, descriptions, memories. They often seem to be very random; just like in any other diary Alma unfolds her motifs, plans and actions against the backdrop of her difficult family. Still it seems directed to an audience, explaining. "MY NAME IS ALMA SINGER" is the first subsection where she explains that her name comes from a book called "The History of Love". Most of this subsection, however, explains why her brother is called Bird instead of his real name Emanuel Chaim. The next subsection begins with the description of a childhood game between the siblings, denying existence to material objects, the weather, etc. – "THIS IS NOT A TABLE" (HL, 38) – but ends with Bird's implicit confession that he has been unhappy his whole life. This subsection is tellingly headed "MY BROTHER BELIEVES IN GOD". Bird starts to write God's name on everything he can find; books, furniture, walls etc. He tries to codify God's existence in the house believing the power of the written word to invoke a higher agency.

The headings often seem to be only arbitrarily related to the short paragraphs that follow them. Subsection eleven is titled "I WAS SIX WHEN MY FATHER WAS DIAGNOSED WITH PANCREATIC CANCER" and deals with Alma's

mother always losing things, only the last sentence returns to the heading: “In the end, though, it was my father who lost everything: weight, his hair, various internal organs” (*HL*, 41). Her ironic voice is sometimes shocking, her intelligence shines through on closer inspection of the entries and the headings. Alma’s diary establishes her as a relatively reliable narrator despite her age and difficult childhood. Neither Alma’s nor Leo’s writing includes metalinguistic considerations on the consequences of the Holocaust on their existence. Leo’s metafictional comments are very personal, centred on his individual case.

Figures of Speech, Elements of Style

My metaphors are my wounds. (Sachs, quoted in Kremer, 1067)

Metaphors play an important role in Holocaust fiction. They establish relations between concepts or objects that have no obvious connection, and they often require some decoding effort. Due to this transference of meaning the metaphor provides an effective stylistic means to avoid stating the original meaning. This can prevent the hurtful or disrespectful articulation of a traumatic event, protect such events from voyeuristic curiosity, veil them to invite readers to more complex analyses and demonstrate the complete otherness of the source meaning so that “metaphor frequently serves to transmit this “otherness”” (Lewin, 163). In this chapter I will concentrate on the powerful and productive aspects of metaphor in creating meaning. Alphen summarizes the unfavourable views on figuration in Holocaust literature and contradicts them with a cognitive approach that sees “figurative expression as necessary. Because a literal expression is lacking, the figurative one is the only one that affords precision” (Alphen, 28). But first, there will be a brief explanation of the concept of ‘metaphor’ itself.

The concept of metaphor is heavily disputed in philosophy, criticism and theory of the arts. In 1936 I.A. Richards made the proposition, refined by Max Black in 1954-55, that making metaphors “mean” depends on the interaction of the properties and associations of both “tenor” and “vehicle”, as Richards calls the source referent and the transporting substitute. A metaphor is consequently not

a one-way process of understanding but depends on sender and receiver. While at first glance a metaphor evades concretisation, the generation of richer meanings becomes possible by uncovering covert, hidden or unknown “traces” of meaning.⁷

From the beginning language is metaphoric due to an arbitrary attribution of meaning. Thus being a member of a certain “culture”, a “code community” is necessary to understand. Metaphor is a continuous *différance* of meaning, an associative dreamwork to decode. It is a deformation of established sense relations. The meaning of the source, the reference, is never redeemed as meaning is forever suspended since neither the referential origin is given nor does the substitute literally “mean” in the context given. The processes of association and recombination in decoding a metaphor therefore refer back to the culture in which the metaphor originated

In der Form der Übertragung funktioniere die Metapher immer schon als Defiguration des Sinnes, da die Übertragung auf keinen Bereich der eigentlichen Bedeutung zurückführe, sondern Bedeutung im tropologischen System der Metaphern suspendiert werde. (Geisenhanslüke, 119)

Especially Michaels’ novel makes ample use of metaphors. Her novel has generally received raving reviews, but this area has been subject to criticism. Berel Lang specifies that representations are always representations as “requiring choices among the alternatives for which the space provides a means” (Lang, 300). Michaels’ choices have not always been deemed successful. The danger of Michaels’ approach is that the Holocaust is reduced to just another layer of the vertical time-line she proposes. Cook criticizes Michaels’ linguistic devices, claiming that they often fail at crucial moments. A romanticizing image of the Jews of the sunken ship is seen as a conciliatory illustration of their fate. Cook sees an inflationary use of these stylistic devices which results in their ineffectiveness when narrating the Holocaust. The “metaphorically (over)lush language” (Cook, 17) levels the different contexts and results in the readers’ inability to assign relative importance (cf. Cook, 16f). At times meaning is endlessly transferred until actual information is hidden

⁷ Cf. Abrams, s.v. Metaphor, theories of.

under layers of metaphor that do not seem to contribute to extended comprehension.

Michaels contemplates the unfathomable simultaneity of horror and beauty. The passage assumes a metatextual significance, as Michaels reflects on the consequences of juxtaposing the aesthetic with the violent, which forms the heart of her own writing style. (Whitehead, 73)

Through its metafictional structure *Fugitive Pieces* draws attention to the position and role of the reader of testimonies. As Ben finds Jakob's memoirs at the end of the novel and his part of the book, readers are led to reflect on their own attitude towards this fictional rendering of a testimony that takes a "Stellvertreterfunktion" (Bölling, 176), i.e. functions as a substitute for all those memoirs that were not written or were lost. Méira Cook's study on the motifs sound and language traces significant patterns and motifs of the novel. For Cook, Michaels' "lyrical, highly poetic and densely metaphoric" (Cook, 12) writing is "a response to Adorno's implicit challenge: if it is no longer possible to write after Auschwitz is the only alternative to remain silent?" (Cook, 12-3).

Both Jakob and Ben realise that what is told becomes textual and thus representable. It is no longer a black spot that exists only in the witness's consciousness but an actual happening. This awareness of guilt due to this textual enactment of the horrors is countered by the feeling of responsibility as survivors and witnesses to make heard – the victims and themselves. Although it is Jakob's individual development that the reader witnesses in his memoirs, Jakob, nevertheless writes for the dead and silent. He feels compelled, if not to give them their names back, at least to make their voices heard. The allusiveness Cook speaks of points to the infinite accumulation of fragments that actually makes up history. Michaels at the same time aims at a more precise meaning through her use of metaphors, but they always encompass more than the original source concept.

In this sense Michaels' project in *Fugitive Pieces* might be perceived as an attempt to metaphorize history, memory, and narrative precisely in order to challenge the literal, to articulate catastrophe in language that is poetic and densely allusive. (Cook, 16)

The most important tenor for the metaphors of the novel is certainly memory. Countless metaphors struggle to narrow down its components. The number of

similarities that are constructed overpower the reader at times. For example, memory is seen as something contagious, spreading in the body, a burden and mark that has to be carried. Memory is troublesome, painful and disturbing, eventually a “broken trajectory, an intangible but metaphorically disseminated figure” (Cook, 20). Considering the materiality and presence of the dead this process might be reciprocal.

When the prisoners were forced to dig up the mass graves, the dead entered them through their pores and were carried through their bloodstreams to their brains and hearts. And through their blood into another generation.[...] And those lost lives made molecular passage into their hands.(*FP*, 52)

This metaphor is further extended onto the love story of Jakob and Michaela. For Cook, this is a severe shortcoming of the novel. The conflation of the love discourse with the Holocaust discourse taints the subject and weakens the strength of Michaels’ language, rendering it sentimental and clichéd (cf. Cook, 18f).

History is amoral: events occurred. But memory is moral; what we consciously remember is what our conscience remembers. [...] History and memory share events; that is, they share time and space. Every moment is two moments. (*FP*, 138)

History and memory are not the same story, they may happen at the same time and at the same place but they are inherently different. Each and every moment is perceived differently by different people, recorded differently by a different mind. Jakob lists incidents of the war where cruelty and horror collide, the two sides of victim and perpetrator are diametrically opposed. “A mother felt the weight of her child in her arms, even as she saw her daughter’s body on the sidewalk” (*FP*, 138). Memory is a matter of perspective. From that paragraph onwards, there are many instances where the present moment triggers a memory of his history. For Jakob, music is a productive tenor as well and releases memories of his sister. He speaks about Bella meticulously practising her musical pieces, strengthening her fingers and memorizing the movements until her fingers remembered the sequence. Memory is rehearsal, is a matter of training as much as it is a welcome or unwelcome visitor. Played out these sequences are no longer independent parts but flow together until they become unrecognizable in their harmony.

Memory is a fleeting reaction and a transient distraction of the mind. "But each time a memory or a story slinks away, it takes more of me with it" (*FP*, 144). A person consists of their memories. As each memory is lost, a part of one's personality is lost, too. His life with Alex causes Jakob to forget more and more. As he is building a new life, his first one is slipping away. Therefore, his marriage is removes him further from himself. Eventually, "it's I who have abandoned her" (*FP*, 145), but it is Alex who leaves Jakob. The chapter ends with the testimony of a boy left alone by his parents starving to death, presumably because his parents have been arrested. This involuntary abandonment seems to parallel his need for his parents and his sister, his longing for their return.

A striking metaphor which Michaels uses in varied form is the body; "her personified earth is a traumatized body, and bodies are described as being made of earth" (Coffey, 45). The body came from earth and returns to earth just as Jakob metaphorically does in the beginning of the novel. He buried himself to hide from the Nazis and reappeared again to be rescued by Athos. Generally, Michaels' novel connects nature and the body by stressing the organic nature of both. The landscape is a frequent metaphor for the body. Similarly the landscape is metaphorised as corporeality. Nature is often anthropomorphised so that the Shoah has an impact not only on society, the individual human being and on culture. The Holocaust has left a permanent mark on the earth itself, guaranteeing in diegetic terms that it will never be forgotten. In *Everything is Illuminated* the body is similarly presented as a container of memory.

At some point when a basis of trust is established between Jonathan and Alex, Jonathan tells Alex some of his childhood memories, such as that he hid under his grandmother's dress where he experienced real peace and security. His grandmother, traumatised by the war, weighs him each time he comes to visit her. What he long thought was a hug was actually a reaction to her wartime experiences. He also tells how he ran his fingers up and down her varicose veins, tracing life in her body. Memory is a gift that can be given to others.

Many reviewers lauded Michaels' lyrical language in her first novel. Before *Fugitive Pieces* she published two poetry anthologies. Her fragmentary style is characterised by heavy use of diverse figures of speech such as similes, metonymy and metaphor. The previous section had a closer look at metaphor. The following paragraphs will analyse certain sections of the novel that exhibit striking repetitions and permutations of sounds and sound patterns.

Montgomery et al. describe five possible functions of these sound patterns. Beginning with an accidental or random occurrence of a sound pattern, the authors identify a cohesive function that "can enhance the memorability of an utterance" (Montgomery et al., 105). The emphasis on an utterance through sound patterning may have the effect of making "a passage seem as though it expresses great feeling" (Montgomery et al., 105) or "creating or reinforcing a parallelism" (Montgomery et al., 105). Another level of significance is added through sound symbolism, "the view that sounds in language may have symbolic meanings or expressive effects, on the other hand, is based on a musical belief that sound itself carries meaning" (Montgomery et al., 105). However,

it is rarely, if ever, possible to prove an effect of sound patterning or sound symbolism. Caution is therefore needed in putting forward interpretative arguments based on the connotations or symbolic qualities of sounds. (Montgomery et al., 109)

In the analyses below I will primarily focus on sections "where the evocative effect of the sound connects with other indicators of what is meant" (Montgomery et al., 109).

Darkness is the dominant element after Jakob's flight from his parents' house. Hiding in the river, in the woods, trying to blend in.

My head between the branches, bristling points like my father's beard. *I was safely buried*, my wet clothes cold as armour. *Panting like a dog*. My arms tight against my chest, *my neck stretched back*, tears crawling like insects into my ears. (*FP*, 8, my emphases)

The sentences that are marked have a similar rhythm, with a stressed syllable following an unstressed syllable. With each sentence one syllable is reduced until there are only four. The tempo is slowed down while Jakob becomes part

of the earth. The sentence structure struggles to emulate the quality that is described. When Jakob describes his daily hiding routine, the pain, the hunger and desolation are mimicked by the language again. The forest is indeed incomprehensible in its own rhythm. The vowels and diphthongs in the pairs of the second sentence are contrasted until the sentence ends with a simile that compares what has before been only aligned. The third sentence is striking because of its repetition of the s-sound. Alliterations occur frequently in Michaels' novel. They often emulate the sound or quality of what is described in order to create a more palpable effect of language. A change of vowel frequently marks a new constituent which breaks up the sentences into multiple fragments. On a different level, this fragmentation is mirrored in the short paragraphs.

The night forest is incomprehensible. Repulsive and endless, jutting bones and sticky hair, slime and jellied smells, shallow roots like ropy veins. Draping slugs splash like tar across the ferns, black icicles of flesh. During the day I have time to notice lichen like gold dust over the rocks. A rabbit, sensing me, stops close to my head and tries to hide behind a blade of grass. The sun is jagged through the trees, so bright the spangles turn dark and float, burnt paper, in my eyes. The white nibs of grass get caught in my teeth like pliable little fishbones. I chew fronds into a bitter, stringy mash that turns my spit green. (FP, 10)

Describing Athos, Jakob surmises what Bella would have said about Athos. Memories about Bella and her dedication to Beethoven and music in general come up. Jakob feels Bella's presence everywhere, he hears her singing and feels her touching him. This closeness to the dead haunts him, terrifies him. Jakob, however, not only feels Bella's presence.

They waited until I was asleep, then roused themselves, exhausted as swimmers, grey between the empty trees. Their hair in tufts, open sores where ears used to be, grubs twisting from their chests. The grotesque remains of incomplete lives, the embodied complexity of desires eternally denied. They floated until they grew heavier, and began to walk, heaving with humanness; until they grew more human than phantom and through their effort began to sweat. Their strain poured from my skin, until I woke dripping with their deaths. Daydreams of sickening repetition – a trivial gesture remembered endlessly. (FP, 24)

The repetition of vowels and consonants creates a staccato rhythm, stress is generally on the second syllable. The transformation of the spirit into materiality metaphorically represents Jakob's connection to the past. He is tied to his past;

his second life, born from Athos' back, is lived wholly inside, under Athos' table, beside his feet, and on rare occasions on the rooftop. His connection with the living seems to have been cut when his parents died. Here, again, the motif of the duplication of time is mentioned. Memories become fragmented, missing parts in pictures (cf. *FP*, 25).

When I awoke, my anguish was specific: the possibility that it was as painful for them to be remembered as it was for me to remember them; that I was haunting my parents and Bella with my calling, startling them awake in their black beds.(*FP*, 25)

Athos and Jakob live on Zakynthos in a small house overlooking the sea. Only at night does Jakob leave the house to lie on the rooftop. The Easter procession through the streets at night triggers memories of his own village. Again, impressions of smell and sight dominate his description. No feelings enter his account. "I watched the Easter procession and placed this parallel image, like other ghostly double exposures, carefully into orbit. On an inner shelf too high to reach."(*FP*, 18) The recurrent use of similes that find similarities in everything. This relates to Jakob's conviction that every moment is two moments. Nothing is ever singular, unique. These double exposures will feature prominently in later stages of the novel. He remarks that one moment is always two moments.

Language

Language is the primary means to communicate the traumatic experience, but it is often an inadequate one. Not only does it lack the words to represent what exploded the conceptions of human behaviour. Language is also dependent on its emotional significance for the speaker; for example, German is once called "that most terrible horrible ugly disgusting vile monstrous language" (*Ell*, 250). The mass of subjective adjectives in this passage shows the possible extent of this tainting.

In the writing of Holocaust survivors, inability to attest to the reality of the horror is usually associated with the inadequacy of language and the sense that conveying the facts of the matter – were it possible – would nevertheless fail to convey their experiential nature and so their essential quality. (McCullough, 833)

The creative use of language is extremely important in Jakob's life. Having lost his parents with whom to use his mother tongue, he learns his godfather's languages and even in his professional life works with language.

[L]earning language, playing with language, working with language, but also the misuse of language, is a *leitmotif* in the novel. Michaels is explicit about the destructive functions which language can fulfil." (Korte, 525)

For Jakob language is an imperfect means of expression while the body turns into ear and mouth. "I wanted a line in a poem to be the hollow ney of the dervish orchestra whose plaintive wail is a call to God. But all I achieved was awkward shrieking" (*FP*, 112). Through the body, Jakob can express himself and relieve himself of the burden of his memory and put it onto or even into Michaela's body. The body, as already exemplified in earlier images, is again shown as a repository of memory, a living memorial. "The true witnesses were those who did not return to tell about it or returned mute. The survivors speak on their behalf" (Myers, 277).

The lyrical and metaphoric style of this novel [*Fugitive Pieces*] affirms this thematic insistence on the healing power of language. Beginning with the fragmented and discontinuous narration of Jakob's flight and discovery, the narrative becomes progressively more coherent in form as his life proceed toward the realization that, in language, memories of suffering can be transformed from a negative burden into a positive force. (McCullough, 833)

Language both covers and uncovers the essential unrepresentability of traumatic experiences and personal memories. Connected as there are to perceptual impressions and followed by psychological reactions human language is simply not an adequate means of expressing one's perspective. Jakob acknowledges this impossibility, this shortcoming but nevertheless makes language and writing his mission and profession. "By writing into this silence in a manner that does not seek to fill or replace it, Jakob is able to distinguish himself from the victims yet bear witness to their loss." (McCullough, 833)

Jakob and Athos come to Canada because of a position at university. They reach Toronto in the fourth chapter, "The Way Station". Toronto, a port city on Lake Ontario, intersected by two rivers, the Humber river and the Don river.

Disparate facts and images are introduced by the clause "It's a city..." (*FP*, 89) which connects the passage that is littered with nouns. Nouns that pretend to make up a city, a rush of imagery, an impetus of impressions. Jakob is again confronted by a new language. "The English language was food. I shoved it into my mouth, hungry for it. A gush of warmth spread through my body, but also panic, for with each mouthful the past was further silenced" (*FP*, 92). Language becomes a product for consumption, nourishment.

"And later, when I began to write down the events of my childhood in a language foreign to their happening, it was a revelation. English could protect me; an alphabet without memory" (*FP*, 101). Contrary to his mother tongue, English endows Jakob with security. He can record his memories in a language without memory. The words are not familiar to him, it is not the language his father or mother spoke, not the words his sister used. When he hears his mother tongue at the Jewish market he feels "fear and love intertwined" (*FP*, 101).

The first night in Canada, Jakob feels "a stunning despair" (*FP*, 91). When Jakob's level of competence in English rises, he and Athos play with puns and other figures of speech, a language game which will eventually lead Jakob to poetry.

From puns I attempted poetry, hoping that in my sonnets the secrets of English would crack open under my scrutiny. [...] I wrote about plants, rocks, birds. I wrote lines without verbs. I wrote only using slang. Until suddenly a word seemed to become itself and a quick clarity penetrated (*FP*, 100)

"For a long time I believed one learns nothing from a man's face" (*FP*, 93). For Jakob truth is in the hands (cf. *FP*, 93). Only the deeds tell the truth about a somebody's nature. He tries to cover his memories and all the images with foreign languages, arbitrary to what he experienced and saw.

"Language. The numb tongue attaches itself, orphan, to any sound it can: it sticks, tongue to cold metal. Then, finally, many years later, tears painfully free" (*FP*, 95). The tongue, the body is desperate for sound. Jakob loses his language when he lives with Athos in Greece and then in Canada. Greek and

English become his tongues. "There's a heavy black outline around things separated from their names" (*FP*, 94). Jakob learns the basic vocabulary and the scientific diction of geology and palaeontology. Furthermore, Athos "continued to take care of my soul" (*FP*, 97). Athos' command of language is endowed with mythic qualities:

With a few words [...] and the sweep of his hand, Athos sliced a hill in half, drilled under the sidewalk, cleared a forest. He showed me Toronto cross-sectioned; he ripped open cliffs like fresh bread, revealing the ragged geological past. [...] Instantly, the streets were flooded by a subtropical salt sea. [...] Like diving birds, Athos and I plunged one hundred and fifty million years into the dark deciduous silence. (*FP*, 97-8)

Metaphorically, Athos' language is able to open up a whole different universe, removed from the difficult present, the horrible past. Science offers both him and Jakob a world of redemptive hope. "Athos' backward glance gave me a backward hope. Redemption through cataclysm; what had once been transformed might be transformed again" (*FP*, 101). Geology and palaeontology relativize the concept of time by widening the scope, laying bare layers of hidden existence. "These weekly explorations into the ravines were escapes to ideal landscapes; lakes and primeval forests so long gone they could never be taken away from us" (*FP*, 102). However, Jakob cannot get rid of the dead: "But at night, my mother, my father, Bella, Mones, simply rose, shook the earth from their clothes, and waited" (*FP*, 93).

When he starts at university, Jakob begins to work as a translator, first translating poems from Greek into English. For Jakob, "Translation is a kind of transubstantiation; one poem becomes another" (*FP*, 109). You can either translate verbatim and lose meaning or sacrifice exactitude for meaning, "both, like the immigrant, try to identify the invisible, what's between the lines, the mysterious implications" (*FP*, 109).

At university Jakob befriends Maurice Salmon. The three of them, Athos, Jakob and Maurice, going to the cinema all develop a crush on some actress, transferring their needs onto unreachable personas. Soon, however, Athos dies. "It is impossible to reach the emptiness in each cell. His death was quiet; rain on the sea" (*FP*, 114). Jakob loses his father figure, the one who saved his life,

carried him, literally and figuratively, raised him and most important of all, educated him. Athos “often applied the geologic to the human, analyzing social change as he would a landscape; slow persuasions and catastrophe. [...] He constructed his own historical topography” (*FP*, 119). This is what Jakob learned from his rescuer: to work and think in an inter- and transdisciplinary way and thus to measure the immensity of life. He asks himself what Athos’ death contains. He questions the intimacy Athos might have known with his wife Helen and the historical catastrophes he lived through and finally comes to the conclusion: “When a man dies, his secrets bond like crystals, like frost on a window. His last breath obscures the glass” (*FP*, 114). So many lives, so many secrets cannot be seen anymore after the war. He finds Athos’ letters to Helen and reads: “When you are alone – at sea, in the polar dark – an absence can keep you alive” (*FP*, 115). After Athos’ death Jakob falls silent again; lost for words, he finds out how Athos has searched for Bella all of his life with Jakob. “The heart is a fistful of earth. *The heart is a lake...*” (*FP*, 117, emphasis in original). Later he learns that “true hope is severed from expectation” (*FP*, 117).

After Athos’ death Jakob continues his work, buries himself in the notes and essays Athos left, relieved that he can explain and rationalize these forces and phenomena. He feels Athos’ presence so intensively that his senses of smell and touch react. Jakob observes that in his research

Athos descends so far that he reaches a place where redemption is possible, but it is only the redemption of tragedy. I knew that, for me, the descent would go on and on, long after my work for Athos was finished. (*FP*, 120)

The dedication of “Bearing False Witness”, Athos’ book that is finished by Jakob, reads: “Murder steals from man his future. It steals from him his own death. But it must not steal from him his life” (*FP*, 120). The untimely death that murder brings robs human beings of their fate. Their life, however, must be recovered, retraced and recorded. Athos’ death brings another important lesson on his way and the fourth chapter closes with an insight that becomes crucial in the novel’s progress: “to make love necessary. But I do not yet understand that this is also my promise to Bella. And that to honour them both, I must resolve a perpetual thirst” (*FP*, 121).

One strand of narration in Foer's novel is written in Alex' strange English. He seems to consult thesaurus and dictionary throughout the creation of his text. This results in a very awkward and incorrect version of English. Alex' English sounds strange, it does not fit. During their journey they meet construction workers. He does not find the right words for what he wants to express. linguistic conflict reveals the Ukrainian identity to be unstable in two ways: it shows the legacy of the Soviet past and the difficulty a "new" nation has in extricating itself from a forced union (cf. Varvogli, 90). Kohns wants to uncover the "trügerische 'Natürlichkeit'" (Kohns, 201) of language and trace new perspectives in literature. Foer employs a Ukrainian protagonist writing in English. His approach to the language seems to be guided largely by dictionaries, through handbooks that try to grasp reality through matching words and reality. However,

Durch den verfremdeten Blick des Nicht-Muttersprachlers verschiebt sich der Blick von dem mitgeteilten Inhalt der Sprache auf die Sprache und ihre Materialität *selbst*. (Kohns, 202, emphasis in original)

"Die Sprache des Fremden zerstört den Glaube an die Selbstverständlichkeit und 'Natürlichkeit' der eigenen Sprache." (Kohns, 203) Attention is directed to language, not content. In Alex' writing the defacement of language draws attention to the act of writing and the process of meaning making in communication, eventually to the success or failure of communication as such. Language becomes alien, the arbitrary nature of what seems so natural is exposed.

Unmenschlich ist Sprache, indem sie a priori der menschlichen Erfahrung unangemessen bleibt, indem sie sich jeder Kontrolle und Beherrschung durch den Sprechenden entzieht. (Kohns, 204)

If language as such is shown as a deficient means of communicating experience, criticism is anticipated and met at a different level.

"Das Sprechen in einer fremden Sprache entstellt so die Erfahrung des Sprechens überhaupt." (Kohns, 206) As the perspective of the non-native speaker makes any indiosyncrasy strange and unrecognisable the result is a dislocation that corresponds to an anamorphosis. I do not, however, agree with Kohns' claim that representation is „dauerhaft entstellt durch ein nunmehr nicht

mehr übersehbares, die Darstellung *störendes Element*“ (Kohns, 206), but would rather suggest that Alex' writing demands a more intensive reading process, interaction instead of consumption and a reconsideration of language as a means of communicating experience. The comical element of Alex' style is not to be ignored. The effect of comic relief is not to be underestimated for the progress of the novel. Alex' English casts "Konnotationen und Denotationen als auch die 'bildliche' und die 'wörtliche' Ebene in die größte Verwirrung" (Kohns, 211). The use of catachreses, inexistent verbforms and strange constructions shows the absolute inadequacy of language to reality. The possibility of cognition and communication is radically questioned throughout the novel. Language is presented as a failure (cf. Kohns, 212f). "Die entstellte Sprache [...] führt eine Entstellung der Sprache überhaupt vor: Die Sprache wird fremd, sie kann nicht mehr als Ausdruck oder Abbildung der Erfahrung gelten" (Kohns, 212).

This failed referentiality alienates everybody. Empathy and understanding are precluded. Connection is established through other means, humorous episodes and body language seem to substitute the shortcomings of language. It is, however, not only communication as such that is questioned, it is the communication of experience and by that the creation of a past that is in immanent danger. As the Book of Antecedents, the record of the Trachimbrod Jews, states,

Since the beginning of time, we (the Jews) have been looking for a new way of speaking. [...] (Words never mean what we want them to mean.) [...] But until we find this new way of speaking, until we can find a nonapproximate vocabulary, nonsense words are the best thing we've got. (*Ell*, 203)

Kohns claims that

[d]urch die radikale Entfremdung zwischen Sprache und ‚Wirklichkeit‘ wird zweitens vorausgesetzt, dass jeder Versuch der Vergegenwärtigung des Vergangenen im Medium der Sprache (als Erzählung) an der Einsicht in die Missverständlichkeit des Gesprochenen und in die Unerzählbarkeit des Geschehenen scheitern muss. (Kohns, 213)

The story of the massacre, however, is told in the novel. There is access to the past, as volatile as it may be through photographs, memorabilia or the memory of an old woman, who has to save herself from the truth by disintegrating her own personality. These signs mark the absence of the villages. They are still present in memory, though. Foer shows that, as Kohns claims with reference to Heidegger,

die Sprache [hintergeht] jeden Versuch, das Nichts auszudrücken, indem sie es jederzeit zu einem 'Etwas' macht. Nicht einmal das völlige Nichts, das die Reisenden an dem Ort vorfinden, an dem das Dorf Trachimbrod gewesen ist, kann vorstellbar werden. (Kohns, 210)

Imagination and creative thought are prerequisites for empathy, they allow one person to imagine the other's inner life, motivations and trains of thought. They will, on the other hand, always be fantasies that need confirmation and may even preclude deeper understanding. For Kohns, „[d]as eigentliche Thema von *Everything is Illuminated* ist demnach [...] die (unmögliche) Möglichkeit der Erfahrung von Alterität“ (Kohns, 209). Indeed, the question of the possibility of empathy is central to Foer's novel. However, this reading has to be understood in relation to the Holocaust and the debate of representation.

Geschichten und Phantasien sind jedoch nicht nur ein Weg zur Erfahrung des Anderen, sie *verstellen* diesen Weg zugleich auch, indem sie das Bild des Anderen entwerfen, das nichts als eine Projektion und ein Phantasma des *eigenen* Ich ist. (Kohns, 209)

Kohns analyses Alex' assertion that his competence of English is lacking. "In Russian my ideas are asserted abnormally well, but my second tongue is not so premium" (*Ell*, 23). The term second tongue seems to relate to the notion of mother tongue, because the word does not exist, however, the literal meaning is imagined. A second tongue would literally impede normal communication. Second tongue can also be related to the term "double-tongued" and reminds the reader of Alex' extenuations and lies. Kohns concludes that

[d]ie Sprache leistet in *Everything is Illuminated* keinen problemlosen ‚Transport‘ eines Inhalts oder eine eindeutige ‚Darstellung‘ einer Örtlichkeit [Trachimbrod], sondern sie macht doppelzünftig auf ihre eigenen Defizite aufmerksam. (Kohns, 211)

The History of Love is written throughout in easily accessible language. It is neither written in Michaels' dense poetic style nor in Foer's "thesaurusized"

English. It also refrains from thematizing language and its powers. Writing is indeed a project constituting identity for Alma and Leo but this is based on the act and the product as such, not on its stylistic qualities. Gursky's section has a very conversational tone. His musings are littered with qualifications such as "And yet." and "But." that always suggest that there is something more to be said, that this is not the end. And if he would drop dead that very second, these apodoses would show that he had so much more to say. Leo's sections feature many brand names and epitomes of consumer culture, McDonalds, Starbucks or Athlete's Foot. Gursky is already rooted in American culture. He talks and writes in English, Yiddish is dismissed as a tainted language, contaminated by war.

If we do talk, we never speak 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." (*HL*, 6)

He feels foreign in his own memories. His life does not belong to him and can be laid out on paper.

Magic Realism

In all of the reviews and analyses of Foer's debut novel there is one aspect that is foregrounded: namely, his use of magic realist elements in one strand of the narration, that is, Jonathan's fictional recreation of his grandfather's home town. Before turning to examples of magical realist elements a brief excursus will explain how magic realism is defined and what its effects are on the texts and on the reader.

For Hancock, magic realist fiction demonstrates that memory is "in a state of crisis" (Hancock, 33). Our picture of the past is not least based on memory. Memory becomes a text the moment it is expressed. But any text is a construction. So any vision of the past is a construction as well. The use of magic realism effectively illustrates that what is considered normal, real or objective is only an illusion.

But what exactly is “magic realism”? [...] A few features can be identified: exaggerated comic effects; hyperbole treated as fact; a labyrinthine awareness of other books; the use of fantasy to cast doubt on the nature of reality; an absurd re-creation of “history”; a meta-fictional awareness of the process of fiction making; a reminder of the mysteriousness of the literary imagination at work; a collective sense of a folkloric past. (Hancock, 36)

The use of these features effects a defamiliarization that shocks or at least disturbs the reader. Hegerfeldt claims the defamiliarization produced by magic realist strategies of supernaturalization and the “matter-of-fact presentation of the unreal” (Hegerfeldt, 200) results in reader hesitation, it

interrupts the process of reading, drawing attention to the unspoken norms and assumptions by which a reader will judge a fictional world as realistic or fantastic. In destabilizing received notions of the real and the fantastic, magic realist fiction reveals the extent to which both categories are a matter of social and cultural consensus, or even of rhetorical effect. (Hegerfeldt, 200)

The supernaturalization mentioned by Hegerfeldt is achieved through the introduction of elements of the fantastic into a realist setting, thereby questioning established order and values and thus exposing elements of this realist setting as outrageous. This contrast between real and fantastic reverses attributions of good and bad, right and wrong and displaces the reader's perspective.

Techniques reminiscent of the literary fantastic are applied to empirically real elements, thereby marking them as violations of the fictional world [and] rendering elements from the extratextual world fantastic by relating them in the calm, everyday tone of the realist mode. (Hegerfeldt, 200)

To have an impression of what to expect from this modern-day fairly tale/tragedy, Eaglestone summarizes the characteristics of Foer's account:

It mixes narrative with comedy, satire, and tragedy. Different forms of writing are mixed together: third-person narration, dialogue in imitation of *Ulysses's* ‘Circe’ chapter, excerpts from books written by the Trachimbroders, dreams. There are also some technical experimental uses of text: a flow chart (*EII* 259), a page and a half which repeats the phrase ‘We are writing...’ (*EII* 212-13), and, in place of a description of the bombing of the shtetl, simply two pages of ellipses with the occasional phrase (*EII* 279-81) (Eaglestone, 129)

The storyline of the Jewish shtetl is set in the Ukraine, a setting that nowadays seems foreign and strange per se to an American writer. Foer's choice of style

can therefore also be interpreted as a grotesque overstatement of the author's confusion on being confronted with this very "otherly" country. Nevertheless, the magic realist elements come to mean so much more. The first chapter begins with an accident, dating to March 18th, 1791. A coach falls into a stream, its belongings floating on the water. Amidst the wreckage a baby is found – naked, no umbilical cord, no corpse, no sign of its parents. It just appeared miraculously from the river. Various suspicions as to the course of events are given in detail in a hilarious dialogue between the inhabitants of the shtetl. The comicality of their conversation is heightened by their names, "the good gefiltefishmonger Bitzl Bitzl R" and the "mad squire Sofiowka N" (*EII*, 9) take part in the discussion. That the hyperrealistic elements are never questioned on a diegetic level is achieved by "unifying the narrative with a voice that never questions what it tells" (Hancock, 42).

The history of Trachimbrod ends on 18 March 1942, thus spanning 151 years. The murder of 1204 Trachimbroders concludes this part of the narration. The most heinous crimes have already been committed at the time of writing his narration so the supernatural, exaggerated and unbelievable effects do not seem so out of place "since the unbelievable itself has already come true, there is no reason why the fantastic should arouse any disbelief" (Hegerfeldt, 321). In Foer's universe babies listen intently to their parents' conversation, the squire wraps his entire body in white string to remember his body, a synagogue moves on wheels, the Jewish quarter is surrounded by the Gentiles' three-quarters – and no one objects to this distortion of reality. After his death the Kolker's body is bronzed and put at the centre of the shtetl square. People rub the dead man's nose or kiss his lips for good luck. He has to be rebronzed every month. "He was a changing god, destroyed and recreated by his believers, destroyed and recreated by their belief." (*EII*, 140) With each rebronzing, the Kolker's shape changes. The faces and shapes of the ancestors change with every new descendent. There is no stable memory or relic of a past time. "In magic realism, foreshadowing replaces objective reality. Imagining the future becomes an important cornerstone of magic realism" (Hancock, 46). This is Jonathan's inscription of his own being into the novel – one day the Kolker will look like him. He is the model for their lives.

For each recasting, the craftsmen modelled the Dial's face after the faces of his male descendents – reverse heredity. (So when my grandfather thought he saw that he was growing to look like his great-great-great-grandfather, what he really saw was that his great-great-great-grandfather was growing to look like him.) (*EII*, 140)

The narrator Jonathan Safran Foer is part of the community he creates, he is writing about his own ancestors, giving them similar characters traits, penchants and plans as he has thus stressing continuity and emotional attachment. A sense of community and continuity is established, something that longer exists is re-established. Consciously fixing what can not be fixed, what is out of reach for historians seems to be the project of Foer's narration. As it is possible for Foer to recreate a whole village, to give it a history, to make it come to life for the reader, so he could let more people survive or let them become happy in their lives as Alex demands in one letter. The death of all these people is in his hands. But his characterisations and life stories are owed to the tragedy that awaits them.

Foer integrates what Eaglestone calls “odd, marginal moments” (Eaglestone, 129) – absurd tragedies, weird couplings, bizarre twists of fate – in his narration, giving weight to these as alleviations that distract from the horrible events that are sure to happen in all three strands of the novel. Life in the shtetl seems to exist independently of other (apparently more “real”) historical events. Up until the moment of its annihilation it exists in a timeless bubble, progressing in its own dynamic. It moves in its own speed.

The significance of this choice of style is an admission that, after their massacre by the Wehrmacht, such construction is simply not possible. This explains the anachronistic lack of historical difference in the representation of the community. The shtetl can only be reconstructed, and that only in the light of what ‘Jonathan Safran Foer’ knows, in the light of his own unavoidable epistemological commitments. (Eaglestone, 129f)

Eaglestone mentions the chronological direction of the narrations. While “Jonathan Safran Foer”'s account of Trachimbrod moves toward its final destruction, the protagonists in the other strands of narration journey to try and uncover the past crime, to find some kind of illumination. At the outset they cannot imagine what the eventual epiphany will entail. This “illumination” is reached in Alex' narration, in Alex' words while the narration of the shtetl ends

in death and destruction. No new knowledge has been gained; “it is the illumination of a grey zone, where neither history nor moral judgements are simple” (Eaglestone, 130).

Jonathan’s narration is commented on and embedded in Alex’ letters:

within the narrative, it is the case that the stories of the two families, the victims and the bystanders, have become intertwined, and it seems as if – though it never occurs – there may be some possibility of forgiveness between the two. (Eaglestone, 131)

Alex is emotionally invested in Jonathan’s story through his reading its chapters. He takes part in their lives and empathies with its protagonists. He wants them to be happy and wishes against better knowledge that there is some kind of happy ending in store for them. This would make resolution easier for him, make life bearable. But is this the final goal? Should forgiveness be the eventual consequence? Can it ever be? Foer does not answer these questions, in fact his ending radically opposes any such answers. Eli’s letter ends in the middle of a sentence. Death has truncated life.

Jonathan’s quest for the woman who saved his grandfather is at the same time a quest for his own salvation and for identity. He substantiates his existence by romancing the lives of his ancestors. He is the product of many generations, their experiences and perceptions. His narration provides explanations for his existence and for what happened. The physical deficit of his grandfather is, for Jonathan, the reason he survives. This absurd detail seems a metaphor for coincidence and reverses the Nazis’ project to eliminate everybody who did not conform to the norm. It is just this attribute that saves his life. National-socialist ideology is mocked.

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 never worked in the menacing flour mill, but in the tannery just outside the shtetl, and that he was exempted from the draft that sent his schoolmates off to be killed in hopeless battles against the Nazis. His arm would save him again when it kept him from swimming back to Trachimbrod to save his only love (who died in the river with the rest of them), and again when it kept him from drowning himself. 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

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

There is no record whatsoever of any of Safran's Don-Juan-like affairs. Jonathan merges fantasy and reality. The journal may be real; Jonathan's comment on the conscious exclusion of these events from his journal is a narrative trick. "He was so afraid of being discovered that even in his journal – the only written record I have of his life before he met my grandmother, in a displaced-persons camp after the war – he never mentions them once" (*Ell*, 169). All of this story is rooted in Jonathan's imagination, in his fantasies. Considering Alex' and Jonathan's conversation about women this section is highly suggestive as to the real meaning. This section is quite drastic in its suggestions. When Safran meets the young Gypsy girl at the theatre the play is about Trachim's accident and Brod's birth, beginning with almost exactly the same words as Jonathan's narration, only now Trachim's death at the bottom of the Brod is presented as a fact. Safran's conversation with the Gypsy girl is integrated into the stage dialogue showing stage directions and the same typography. This lends a different quality to Jonathan's story line. He quotes himself and enforces the illusion of witnessing a play. The play continues when Safran and the Gypsy girl leave the theatre, the music is still playing and still the stage directions describe what is happening. The unreality of this scene corresponds to the level of knowledge of the narrator.

After this analysis of some elements of narrative style in the novels under consideration I will now turn to the element of memory. Memory, as has been shown above, is important in identity formation and for the development of a healthy self-image. "To lack memory is to be a slave of time, confined to space" (Mitchell, 194). One exists only in the present without roots and orientation. The authors of the three novels have all incorporated this lesson into their narratives.

Configurations of Memory

Memory, in short, is an imagetext. (Mitchell, 192)

There is a sign at Yad Vashem that says “Forgetfulness leads to exile, while remembrance is the secret of redemption” (Spiegel, 156). The irreverence of memory creates another form of diaspora, this time not a spatial one, but an emotional, psychological and intellectual one. The narration of memory or memories is important in identity formation. These memory narratives shape the construction of the self. Eaglestone quotes Ian Hacking who claims that the metaphor for memory is narrative (cf. Eaglestone, 75). Thus a narrative reconstruction of the past, of oneself is a reconstruction of a textual body.

““Memory” has become an alternative format for language, functioning in the manner of discourse less as a medium for the reconstruction of the world than as a semi-opaque and self-referential activity” (Spiegel, 161). Memory is a central component of identity, thus Foer’s attempt at reconstructing his ancestry in magic realist terms is as much a means of finding one’s place, taking root, as a means of commemoration. Leo’s novels constitute his textual life and his legacy to the world. What characterizes all of the three novels analysed here is that their “fundamental structure is based on the non-biological patrilineal transmission of memory [...] through their work as writers” (Criglington, 95).

Fugitive Pieces

Memory is a central tenor for metaphors in *Fugitive Pieces*. Michaels tries to explore the all-encompassing dynamics of memory for the lives of survivors. As Langer argues, there are two “currents” of memory realised as story and plot, one

flows persistently from source to mouth, or in more familiar historical terms, from past to present. The other meanders, coils back on itself, contains rocks and rapids, and requires strenuous efforts to follow its painful turns, that disturb the mind’s expectation of tranquillity. (Langer, 72)

This is a very poetic reformulation of Michaels' narrative strategy and even her imagery. Time is not only a linear experience but also a rocky road on which to stumble and get carried away. The imagery of fluidity (rapid) and impenetrability solidity (rocks) is reminiscent of *Everything Is Illuminated* as well. The population of Trachimbrod eventually drowns in the river, and is carried away, disappearing completely and only reappearing in the fantastical account of a young man. Time's indifferent flow carries their stories, the textual bodies away and leaves no trace of a former presence, just like rivers when they pave their way through the earth. In *Fugitive Pieces* memories accumulate. They do not have any linear chronology but are related to context, triggered by certain images and perceptions. "This is how one becomes undone by a smell, a words, a place, the photo of a mountain of shoes. By love that closes its mouth before calling a name" (*FP*, 17). Also, in the narration of the Alex' grandfather, Lista gets carried away by painful memories, completely changing the narrative flow. Alex' grandfather constructed a new man after the war, with a new name, with a new history, trying to get rid of his painful memories. His two lives only merge at the end of his life where he has to admit to his past and finally takes his own life. His memories are part of him, irrespective of time and will.

For a long time memory has been neglected as an unreliable source for historical veracity. Only in the last years have history and historiography acknowledged the value of personal accounts. Michaels' calls this a form of dishonesty because they happen at the same time, on the same place. Only the perspective is different. While history often claimed to present an objective version of the past and memory has been debased as a "water stain", an incidental disturbance. However, a water stain is so much more. It points to something hidden that has a definite influence on what is apparent.

Maps of history have always been less honest. Terra cognita and terra incognita inhabit exactly the same coordinates of time and space. The closest we come to knowing the location of what's unknown is when it melts through the map like a watermark, a stain transparent as a drop of rain. On the map of history, perhaps the water stain is memory. (*FP*, 137)

Langer notices a "haunting conviction of responsibility for the catastrophe at which they were not there" (Langer, 75) in many survivors. They feel guilty because they survived, although individual responsibility was suspended for the

victims and they had no power to decide over their circumstances, over their lives. This “inappropriate guilt” (Langer, 76) and “the penalty for survival is the loss not of innocence but of the *memory* of innocence [...] a tainted memory” (Langer, 77).

Criglington relates Michaels’ style to Walter Benjamin’s “thinking in images” (Criglington, 98). Also, his view that the past is “always open to (re)construction, (re)interpretation and (re)appropriation” (Whitehead, 67) is reflected in Michaels’ novel. The fragments of the past have to be assembled like the pieces of a mosaic and assembled into a whole which in turn grants a “fleeting and ephemeral moment of illumination” (Whitehead, 68). One fundamental consequence is that a unified version of history is a myth, “the historical past is irrecoverable; memory alone is the only access to it, and memory is a malleable narrative always open to retroactive re-description” (Luckhurst 1999b, 91).

The dead can never be forgotten when their traces are inside their descendants. They are part of their fellow sufferers, literally and metaphorically. Memories are carried away from these pits and traded into further generations. These memories, the lives of the dead, that are passed on through touch, through the bloodstream, are a burden. “[T]he effects of memory are often experienced by Jakob in relation to objects and in bodily terms.” (McCullough, 832) They never leave their progeny and thus become immortal. Their lives are lost, nothing can make their senseless killing undone but they are kept in heart and mind. This existence permanently accompanies their descendants.

When the prisoners were forced to dig up the mass graves, the dead entered them through their pores and were carried through their bloodstreams to their brains and hearts. And through their blood into another generation.[...] And those lost lives made molecular passage into their hands. (*FP*, 52)

Not only the mind remembers, carrying the lives of those who died, but also the body remembers touch and smell, hands are imprinted on the body.

The physicality of Bella’s fingers practicing phrasing on the piano link such empathy directly to the body; learning an adopted score by heart generates fleshly memory in the muscles, on the skin. (Gubar, 257)

As it has already been argued Michaels' style is a complex web of metaphors and associations. In one paragraph the muscles and the skin remember, memory is a reaction of the body. In another paragraph it is feared that memory is manifest, that it is skin, superficial and eventually disappearing with its bearer. When the body dies, memory dies, too. When the victims died in the concentration camps they were buried by their fellow inmates and the memory of their existence was taken along. The mind wants the memories of his loved ones to disappear but they will not go as they have become instinct. This way memory is transmitted to one's offspring as instincts generally are.

I long for memory to be spirit but fear it is only skin. I fear that knowledge becomes instinct only to disappear with the body. For it is my body that remembers them, and though I have tried to erase Alex from my senses, tried to will my parents and Bella from my sleep, this will amounts to nothing, for my body betrays me in a second. (FP, 170)

Ben remembers one summer when his parents rented a cottage close to a forest. As a test of courage Ben walks through the woods to fight the terror of having become blind and also so that he feels that his father would not be disappointed who had to walk days and nights during his time in the concentration camp. However, he conquers the wood but not the darkness of his own room. The dark has the texture of skin, trees are equated with legs, ghosts accompany him. The darkness takes on qualities of the body and assumes a corporeality.

Slowly the trees began to emerge from the differentiated dark, as if embossed, black on black, and the dark itself was a pale skin stretched across charred ribs. Above, the far surf of leaves, a dark skirt of sky rustling against skeletal legs. Strange filaments from nowhere, the hair of ghosts, brushed my neck and cheeks and would not be rubbed off. (FP, 220)

Ben's memories of his childhood are a disparate accumulation of impressions. He writes about his fascination with tornadoes, comparing them with the Nazis' destruction; and his love for comic books. The first one he buys himself is chosen for its beginning: "I have asked for pen and paper to write this account of all that has happened...to ward off loneliness already upon me..." (FP, 227). This memory connects the triad of aspects that are repeated in all of the novels analysed in this thesis: writing, memory and the individual. This loneliness will become more pronounced in later sections. He remembers the pain he feels

and the pain that he inflicts. Memory is a painful experience for Ben. What he remembers is that he knowingly hurt his parents and that their relationship deteriorated. He then slips into Jakob's memories and repeats the healing process that Jakob himself experienced. Through Beer's memoirs he himself can find a resolution.

Memory is so important in all of these novels because the Nazi regime not only attempted to annihilate the Jewish population but all traces of their existence. Approximately six million Jews were killed, many of whom will never be identified by their names. Their histories have been obliterated. So it is a moral duty preserve what still exists in memory. The task of witness accounts and testimonies is to form part of historiography. Testimony

holds out the promise of a certain emotional and gestural vividness – vividness strongly reinforced by the customarily oral form of its delivery – that operates to transform testimony into a virtually transparent form of transmission (signifying a return of presence, as it were) (Spiegel, 157)

However, “[t]his promise is deceptive [...] and hence occludes the narrative dimension intrinsic to memory” (Spiegel, 157). It must never be forgotten that memory is a narrative construction, a text that, despite its subject, still has to undergo analysis.

The difference between the three novels under consideration is that *Fugitive Pieces* primarily muses on memory on a metafictional level; if the protagonists tell some of their memories they do so in a stylistically complex way. They employ diverse figures of speech to attribute additional meaning. In *Everything is Illuminated* and *The History of Love* memories are there for means of characterisation and furthering the progression of the story. Reflections on the role and function of the Holocaust for survivors are up to the interpretation of the reader.

Everything is Illuminated

In Foer's novel the reader finds an example of the relation of material objects and memory. Lista gives Jonathan, Alex and Eli a wedding ring in a box labelled

Just in Case. She claims that the ring does not exist for them but that they exist for the ring. She does not understand why her friend Rivka buried her ring in a jar. Jonathan thinks it is for evidence, documentation, testimony but the woman says that people are remembered without things. Things do not mean anything without memories. The old woman's fetishisation of the belongings of the former inhabitants of Trachimbrod cannot bring them back to life, and neither can Jonathan's narration restore them. In *Everything is Illuminated*, memory is embodied; a woman is the vessel of the past. But the "only thing more painful than being an active forgetter is to be an inert rememberer" (*EII*, 260). The old woman mistaken for Augustine is the last person to tell of the village as it has been seen by human eyes.

In Jonathan's magical realist tale memory becomes more important after the first bombing. The shtetl is paralysed by inaction. "Everything reminded everyone of something" (*EII*, 258). The need to collect the past is a direct reaction to imminent danger, they use "memory to remember memory" (*EII*, 258). Memory becomes a self-referential story in its abnegation of life. The inhabitants are overpowered by their memories and struggle to make sense. For women, it is especially hard to cope with their memories as they cannot convene at the synagogue. Eventually memory creates a bottomless pit, time is expanded because so many memories belong to one moment so that one moment seems like an eternity. In a Bakhtinian sense time and space are combined in their defeat by remembering.

Memory was supposed to fill the time, but it made time a hole to be filled. Each second was two hundred yards, to be walked, crawled. You couldn't see the next hour, it was so far in the distance. Tomorrow was over the horizon, and would take an entire day to reach. (*EII*, 260)

In Jonathan's narration it becomes most obvious that history is made up of countless interrelated details. It may seem an endless endeavour as each memory is linked to another memory and so forth. But this is history, no linear narration where everything stands in causal relation. For Kohns, the past event cannot be told as only loose fragments and mute signs point to that which is lost forever. Jonathan's story is marked by the awareness of its deformation. The story is not told, it is imagined and different stylistic devices constantly point to that (cf. Kohns, 214). Magical realism, for example, is such a device. Kohns

sees “ein Spiel mit der Darstellung der Unmöglichkeit der Darstellung” (Kohns, 215).

Insofern es aus historischen wie strukturellen Gründen in Foers Roman keine unverzerrte, ungebrochene und damit ‚eigentliche‘ Perspektive auf die Vergangenheit mehr geben kann, bleibt dem Leser allein die ‚schräge‘ Perspektive übrig. (Kohns, 215)

The History of Love

In *The History of Love* the primary form of memory is the remembrance of a dead person. Alma tries to remember her father who died when she was only a child. Her knowledge about him is mostly based on things her mother told her but her own memories seem to disappear. She needs another person to form an image of her father.

Every year, the memories I have of my father become more faint, unclear, and distant. Once they were vivid and true, then they became like photographs, and now they are more like photographs of photographs. (HL, 192)

Subchapter ten of Alma's fourth chapter “IF NOT, NOT” is a list of memories passed on to her from her mother, among them “xi Rain xii My father xiii Thousands of pages” (HL, 180). These memories include bodily sensations, her own history, and a body of knowledge. These memories are learned. They need not be connected in any way, they line her perceptual universe. To her mother memories of her husband are as consolatory as they sadden her. Similar to her daughter her memories shape her perception of reality, except that her point of reference is dead.

I finally understood that no matter what I did, or who I found, I – he – none of us - would ever be able to win over the memories she had of Dad, memories that soothed her even while they made her sad, because she'd built a world out of them she knew how to survive in, even if no one else could. (HL, 181)

Leo's days are filled with memories of his lost love Alma and his imagination of his son. When his son dies he decides to attend the memorial service but needs to hearten himself and drinks vodka, “repeating a gesture that was made a hundred times by my father and his father and his father's” (HL, 84). Here

again, memories are fixed patterns of action that shape life and serve to connect one with one's roots.

At the memorial service Leo meets Bernard, his son's half-brother, and is almost thrown out. Suddenly he mentions Slonim, the place Alma and Leo come from and they listen to him. Stories about Slonim follow, about the river where they used to swim, Alma's father's shop, but it is not clear if Leo tells Bernard or only the reader. His memories open doors. They go to Bernard's house but he feels like he does not belong. "I felt like a fool and an imposter. I stood by the window, making myself invisible." (*HL*, 89) His memories only belong to him and not one of them can understand them or even relate to them. After his emigration to the U.S., he has become used to living in his own world shared only by the memory of his former love.

My son's mother, the girl I fell in love with when I was ten, died five years ago. I expect to join her soon, at least in that. [...] I thought it would be strange to live in the world without her in it. And yet. I'd gotten used to living with her memory a long time ago. (*HL*, 85)

Resolution

The first part of this thesis looked at the dehumanization and subsequent traumatising of the protagonists, while the second part traced the re-humanization through an emphasis on the individuals and their abilities. The following section examines if the protagonists finally find some resolution at the end of their journeys.

It can be observed that eventually all protagonists do find a resolution of sorts of their traumatising. Despite the critics' warning that there can never be an easy resolution nor redemption the novels present what can fairly be called happy endings, at least for some protagonists, although they all have an open ending. Haskins muses "how pervasive and promiscuous is the desire for images of redemption in present-day popular culture" (Haskins, 379), and indeed, this weakness (if it is one) is satisfied in all the novels.

Fugitive Pieces

In *Fugitive Pieces*, Jakob Beer finally overcomes the loss of his sister through his love for and union with his second wife. Finally he can mourn what was taken from him. His restoration, however, comes at the expense of the female characters of the novel; to the extent that Michaels's female characters become repositories of memories not their own and thus bearers of the conscience memory lends consciousness, they represent the connection between posttraumatic mourning, healing retrospection facilitated by witnesses of witnesses, and highly conventional forms of feminine caregiving (Gubar, 267).

Jacob can only find access to his past through the sexuality and solace of female characters subordinated to his psychological and aesthetic quest, that heterosexuality serves the purpose of curing the traumatized protagonist by putting him back in touch with his lost female origins. (Gubar, 265)

In the end, he makes peace with Bella, his lost sister muse. The following quotation shows one stage in his process of separation. He imagines Bella to be happy, the sound of the river, sign of fluidity and jouissance is in the

background together with a classical piece Bella used to play. Like Orpheus he turns and his beloved disappears.

Bella and I have entered a dream, the animate colour surrounding us intense, every leaf twitching as if on the verge of sleep. Bella is happy: the whole birch forest gathers itself in her expression. Now we can hear the river and move towards it, the swirls and eddies of Brahms's Intermezzo No. 2 that descend, descend, andante non troppo, rising only in one final gust. I turn and Bella's gone; my glance has caused her to vanish. I wrench around. I call, but the noise of the leaves is suddenly overwhelming, like a rush of falls. Surely she's gone ahead to the river. I run there and dig for clues of her in the muddy bank. It's dark; dogwood becomes her white dress. A shadow, her black hair. The river, her black hair. Moonlight, her white dress. (*FP*, 125)

He even wants to become a father and transmit his memories to his own blood. The last paragraph is dedicated to the child he longs for. The lessons he learned are these: remember your dead but do not cling to them. Let us be with you in your thoughts, do not let your life be guided by someone absent. Accept love and its healing qualities. He tells his child of his fear after his flight and how he has been saved once by her name, by his constant search for her. Now that he has accepted her death he can begin anew.

Child I long for: if we conceive you, if you are born, if you reach the age I am now, sixty, I say this to you: Light the lamps but do not look for us. [...] You, my son, Bela [...or] you, Bella, my daughter [...] one day when you've almost forgotten, I pray you'll let us return. [...] My son, my daughter: May you never be deaf to love. Bela, Bella: Once I was lost in a forest. I was so afraid. [...] I saved myself without thinking. I grasped the two syllables closest to me, and replaced my heartbeat with your name. (*FP*, 194)

Thus, Jakob's memoirs end. A dedication to his unborn child full of love and promise. Survival has become an instinct, love is constructed as a call to be answered. Hope is restored in the transcendence of the body in the form of offspring. Jakob sees his body as both a means to ground themselves in the present and to find roots. "Night after night my happiness wakes me" (*FP*, 194). This quotation highlights the contrast between the beginning of his memoirs and the resolution he has reached at the end of his life. A testament of grace or the all too easy solution of an irresolvable dilemma? Michaels, however, does not fulfil his wish for immortality. She resolves both Jakob's and Ben's story and lets

them find peace in the end but Jakob's sudden death prevents a truly happy ending. She does not go so far as to let the protagonists find peace.

Michaels thus presents reproductive generational hope as uniting the past and the present in the form of a desired child who will embody individual reconciliation with traumatic collective history. (McCullough, 833)

On Idhra, Ben meets the American Petra and feels a sudden desire for her. The fact that she does not need him, will leave him, shocks him. He wants to own her, his "words inventing her dreams" (*FP*, 277). He wants to deeply penetrate her personality, to shape her completely. This time, it is he who will be left. He learns her smells, explores her body, mapping her characteristics, buys her jewellery but he cannot possess her. He tells her about the intimacies of Jakob's and Michaela's life together and wants her to take part in this invasion. He has been on the island for four months; "[h]aving emptied myself completely, I slept as though too full to move" (*FP*, 278). He even brings her to Beer's house where they finally find Michaela's letter to Beer: "If she's a girl: Bella| If he's a boy: Bela" (*FP*, 279). She was pregnant with his child when they died in the accident. Suddenly he tells about his father's escape from the concentration camp, the hardship, the terror, and realises: "Naomi says a child doesn't have to inherit fear. But who can separate fear from the body? My parents' past is mine molecularly" (*FP*, 280). He fears the influence his and his parents' past might have on his child. "You recognize the one whose loss, even contemplated, you'll carry forever, like a sleeping child. All grief, anyone's grief, you said, is the weight of a sleeping child" (*FP*, 281). After Petra has left the house, a storm comes up. "The established absence had been replaced by fresh loss. But all mysticism had vanished. The house seemed empty" (*FP*, 283). Ben finds the notebooks, written from June to November 1992. He remembers Naomi. "I know what she makes of her memories. I know what she remembers. I know her memories [...] and I wasted love, I wasted it" (*FP*, 285).

Ultimately Ben's narrative is open-ended. He finally realises that his father and his mother supported each other. "Ben realises that his parents' life after the Holocaust was also not without redeeming moments and that they were able to go on living because they had each other's love" (Korte, 521). Love seems to be the redemptive trigger and even though it cannot heal the wounds it can

alleviate the pain. Michaels seems to present a very simple resolution of the traumata of the protagonists. Loving and being loved promise to bring salvation. Ben realises “I see that I must give what I most need” (*FP*, 294). His homecoming, though, is only imagined. Readers may decide for themselves if they believe in a restoration of the couple or not.

Michaels [...] takes up the ongoing presence of the past in the continued effects of the Holocaust on the second generation, who are not, then, the anticipated recuperation of the past, but must themselves negotiate the demands of unassimilable history. (McCullough, 834)

Everything is Illuminated

The only resolution *Everything is Illuminated* presents is Alex'. In one of Alex' final letters he reveals that his grandfather is Herschel. Alex often claims that he should not have said or asked anything at a particular moment. Situations that do not need words, could not be furthered or helped. Especially in the letter telling about his grandfather Alex claims twice that he “should have uttered nothing more” (*EII*, 216) and “I should have again said “I will”, and again not said anything more” (*EII*, 216). However, he continues asking. His grandfather asks him for the money he has saved for moving to America. Alex has to choose between his dream and his grandfather's need to find Augustine. Jonathan is given a box by Lista marked IN CASE. Back at the hotel everybody removes something from this box. Jonathan takes out *The Book of Past Occurrences*. Alex translates the “time of dyed hands”. Fantasy and Reality merge.

The novel ends with a letter from Eli to Jonathan. Eli writes about how his grandson told his father to leave and never return. Truth should become the maxim of life. Because Eli kept silent for so long he kept up a life based on a lie. He sacrifices himself because he wants something different for his descendents. He had been happy once but one twist of fate changed his entire life. To have them cut all strings and prevent the transferral of guilt from one generation to the other once they are grown up to carry the burden he kills himself.

Try to live so that you can always tell the truth, I said. [...] All is for Sasha and Iggy, Jonathan. Do you understand? I would give everything for them to live without violence. Peace. That is all that I would ever want for them. Not money and not even love. It is still possible. I know that now, and it is the cause of so much happiness in me. They must begin again. They must cut all strings, yes? I am complete with happiness, and it is what I must do, and I will do it. (*EII*, 275)

Telling Jonathan about Alex' grandfather's death he writes:

But it was a situation without winning. The possibilities were none, between what was possible and what we wanted. And here I have to confer you some terrible news. Grandfather died four days ago. He cut his hands. (*EII*, 242)

His grandfather died by his own hands, having lived for so long with a terrible guilt. The one who begs for forgiveness is, however, Alex. "As with him, I ask for your forgiveness" (*EII*, 242). There is a positive ending. Alex has taken responsibility and stopped the violence that tainted his own life. America will not save him, truth will, he thinks. Truth will free all of them, him, his grandfather, Little Igor and the hero.

There is no chance for a happy ending anymore it seems. The shtetl has been destroyed thrice, textually, that is. Eli has killed himself and they never found Augustine. Alex even thinks that a continued search for Augustine would have made it all the more clear that she could not have made everything bad undone. Augustine is an imagined saviour figure who can save no one. "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" (*EII*, 241). The dead cannot be resurrected, the injustice cannot be mended. In a last hope that at least one strand of the narration might end with love Alex scolds Jonathan for the last part of his story before the German massacre. He wants them to admit love into their lives.

We have such chances to do good, and yet again and again you insist on evil. [...] This is not reasonable, Jonathan, and it is not good. [...] You are a coward, Jonathan, and you have disappointed me. [...] Brod is a coward, and Yankel is a coward, and Safran is a coward – all of your relatives are cowards! You are all cowards [...] I do not have any homage for anyone in your family, with exceptions of your grandmother, because you are all in the proximity of love, and all disavow love. (*EII*, 240)

The History of Love

The structure of *The History of Love* is one of labyrinthine intricacy. Leo's novel "The History of Love" connects the most diverse of characters, periods and locations. Beginning with Leo's writing of the novel in his home country in Eastern Europe it is published in Buenos Aires until it finally reaches the US. Written before the Shoah, it foreshadows some of its horrors and consequences but its chapters primarily speak of love, the love for one woman. This unwavering affection has an effect on all the characters and represents the continuous thread.

Dedicating his novel to Alma, Leo never cedes to love her and even visits her on her deathbed when no one notices. At the end of the novel it is revealed that Bruno died in 1941. His presence was only imagined, Leo is all alone. Zvi betrayed him. Isaac dies before Leo can tell him that he is his father. Leo has been touched by love but now his life is empty. He confesses "[t]he truth is the thing I invented so I could live" (*HL*, 167). His text is a fabrication that helped him cope with his loneliness and his own perceived insignificance. He does make efforts to connect to others but these efforts only result in more complications, as can be seen when he poses nude for a drawing class or when he sends his son his novel so as to inform him that Leo is his real father. After his death he tries to retrieve the manuscript from his house. Little does he know at that moment that his novel has been mistaken for his late son's last novel. Isaac is a writer himself. There, Leo admits that he could never throw anything away. He hopes that his possessions will recreate a vision of his life.

At the end all that's left of you are your possessions. Perhaps that's why I've never been able to throw anything away. Perhaps that's why I hoarded the world: with the hope that when I died, the sum total of my things would suggest a life larger than the one I lived. (*HL*, 165)

Alma, on the other hand, is part of a family even though it is dysfunctional. She is loved and cared for. The grief of her mother for her husband's death, however, inspires her plan to find her a new husband. In Alma's third chapter "FLOOD" she begins to search for her namesake. Starting out as a quest for someone who would make her mother happy and repair her family, soon she is looking to find out about the person she is named after and, eventually, about

herself. She wants to know who that woman was who inspired so much love. To Alma it is clear that there must have been a real life model because “to him, she was the only thing that was real” (*HL*, 137). Love has made her real. Alma imagines that on meeting the other Alma all her problems will be resolved. However, when she finally reaches Alma’s flat, she hears that Alma is dead. Her search has been successful but she came too late. Alma believes her search has been in vain and that her efforts led her nowhere.

It is Bird who eventually unites Alma and Leo. Bird thinks he might be the Moshiach, a chosen one, a lamed vovnik, one of thirty six righteous people in Jewish mysticism who justify the existence of humankind to God. Because of those the world is worth being saved. He believes the end of the world is immanent, that a Flood is coming – “What there’s going to be is a flood” (*HL*, 152) – and is therefore building an ark made out of trash. The little fatherless boy tries to save the world. And he does: Alma’s and Leo’s. It needs a psychologically disturbed megalomaniac boy to let one traumatised old man feel love and happiness again and a young girl to realise that there are others who suffer. He connects the generations, but it is only coincidence. Coincidence and curiosity replace what Bird perceives as a stroke of fate.

The History of Love ends in a grand finale bringing together Leo and Alma. Bernard Moritz calls and talks to Bird, explaining that his brother Isaac had found some letters that convinced him that the author of *The History of Love* was his real father. Bird is the one who sent the translated manuscript to Leo and it is he who finally arranged for Alma and Leo to meet. The last section of the novel, titled “A+L”, is the meeting between Alma and Leo. On alternating pages, their thoughts are given in first person narration. At the end the reader is thrown into the protagonists’ minds without narratorial interference.

On the bench waiting for Alma, Leo reminisces about his life and strikes a balance: “I found out how little is unbearable” (*HL*, 224). His life was so full of fear, pain and abandonment. Leo feels death coming and realises that the world will go on without him but still wants to be around. “I like to imagine my feet taking root in the ground and moss growing over my hands. [...] Leaves will

grow from my fingers" (*HL*, 222). He cannot really accept that he will disappear from the earth without leaving material traces.

Finally Leo and Alma meet. His mental state is already very confused, he talks to Alma as if he had known her all her life. "You're probably surprised that I'm alive, and sometimes I am, too" (*HL*, 190). Life is strange as it unites Alma and Leo, only it is the wrong Alma. "I looked into the eyes of the oldest man in the world for a boy who fell in love when he was ten" (*HL*, 251). She knows about Leo's desires because she read "The History of Love". She knows one part of his textual life. Leo eventually realises, "What if the things I believed were possible were really impossible, and the things I believed were impossible were really not?" (*HL*, 248). The truth about his flight is too traumatic to be fully integrated and his denial only let fleeting images of it into his textual life. "I wanted to say her name aloud, it would have given me joy to call, because I knew that in some small way it was my love that named her" (*HL*, 252). His love has consequence, he will not die without having left something permanent.

Alma asks who is Bruno and he says "*Talk about invisible. [...] He's the friend I didn't have. [...] He's the greatest character I ever wrote. [...] He's dead. It hurt so say it. And yet. There was so much more. He died on a July day in 1941*" (*HL*, 249, emphasis in original). Leo has taken Bruno in, literally. In the strand that Leo narrates he talks to Bruno, whose replies are given in his narration. Bruno died in the war and they never met again. Still, Leo imagines that he has found him again in New York. His mental state is to be questioned because now Alma's account gives confirmation. The Holocaust has deeply traumatised Leo and his life has been tainted, his social life is nonexistent. Finding Alma he experiences happiness for being identified as the man who loved Alma, who wrote "The History of Love" and as the father of Isaac. Isaac even knew Leo was his father. He can call someone Alma again.

The last chapter Litvinoff added to *The History of Love* after copying it from Leo's original manuscript is Leo's self-written obituary, "THE DEATH OF LEOPOLD GURSKY". His death started with his birth in 1920 and all his life and activities bring him one step closer to his death. His life is death, really. "Really,

there isn't much so say. He was a great writer. He fell in love. It was his life" (*HL*, not paginated). Writing and loving were Leo's life. Krauss' novel similarly ends with Leo's obituary, blurring the boundaries between reality and fiction but suggesting Leo died.

Conclusion

This thesis set out with the intention of locating tendencies and parallels in English prose fiction about the Holocaust. The novels under consideration all date from a relatively small period of time – 1996 to 2005 – and were written by English speaking authors, one Canadian, two from the U.S. Despite the fact that they differ very much in terms of plot, perspective and narrative voice, aspects such as the foregrounding of memory, of the process of writing and the quest for a restoration of humanity exhibit striking similarities. I argue that the de-humanization of the Jews by the Nazi regime through linguistic and political measures resulted in a traumatising that is countered in the narratives by a conscious re-humanization of the victims.

Starting out with a discussion of Adorno's writings on the Holocaust and other critical voices on the treatment and representation of the Shoah in literature I wanted to provide a broader framework of the study of the Holocaust in historiography and art theory before narrowing my focus to literature as an art form. By way of a brief outline of the development of Holocaust literature I established the novels under consideration as being within the distinct genre of Holocaust literature. A summary of recurrent themes and preoccupations of authors of novels thematising the Holocaust shows the novels under consideration as typical of that genre despite their narratological differences. The aporia of representing the non-representable appears as the quintessence of modern aesthetic.

All the protagonists set out to find someone or something on their literal or metaphorical journey towards mental health and self-awareness. All of them leave their familiar places to reconcile their legacy with their state of being. They delve into a world unknown to them in a quest for answers. Their reaching back in time paradoxically roots them more firmly in the present. I want to quote Eva Menasse, whose review summarizes so precisely what all these novels have in common:

Die Katastrophe überbrücken, die eigene Herkunft begreifen, die abgeschnittenen Wurzeln paradox in sich selbst hinein verlängern – das

steckt dahinter, wenn sich junge Menschen plötzlich aufmachen und nach Polen, Russland und in die Ukraine fahren. (Menasse)

The analysis revealed that there are indeed certain parallels in approach and execution. All three novels demonstrate an attempt at the restoration of individuality after its denial by the Nazi regime. The major parallel that emerges is the common endeavour to reaffirm the victims' human nature against the backdrop of their de-humanization during the Nazi regime.

The chapter on the point of view in these novels revealed the diversity of voices which are present in the narration. All of the novels include both a survivor narrator and a second- or third generation narrator. Through these narrators issues of communication, interaction and questioning are foregrounded. This similarity of theme is, however, not reflected in perspective. The diversity of voices shows that similarities are in subject rather than style. The "fugitive pieces" of Michaels' novel are told by ruminant voices meditating on principles of survival and remembrance. The comic voices in Krauss' and Foer's might at some points be disturbing for the reader. On the other hand, the comic strategies and sometimes casual references to the Holocaust draw attention to the horrifyingly grotesque nature of the events. The shocking effect is alleviating only at the first glance. Certainly, there is a distancing effect but that is exactly what some critics demand of Holocaust literature. Identification is hindered by shock.

The reader's sense of shock or surprise in these works derives from the apparent clash between the familiar characters, conventions, and storylines of Jewish folklore and the dreadful events that would destroy the culture that produced them. (Behlman, 58)

The traumatising in these novel happens through fictional events that include the debasement, torture and murder of Jews. The characters who had to witness or participate in such horrors are marked. To exemplify these traumatisations the aspects of place and time, and religion, science and spirituality have been analysed in more detail. The re-humanization of these victims means the restoration of a sense of individuality. Familial and love relations are stressed in all the novels, communication, linguistic style and writing feature prominently.

The first section on the attempt re-humanization undertaken in the novels exemplified the integration of the sensual perceptions primarily in *Fugitive Pieces*. The emphasis on the body and the senses in action, that is, communication via touch or sex all demonstrate an affirmation of presence. The trope of muteness, silence, absences and gaps is present on both a diegetic and extra-diegetic level in all the novels. The stories of traumatisations are concealed and have to be excavated in a painful process.

The focus on love and familial relations locates the protagonists within a community, be it marriage, family or friendship. Berger concludes that second generation literature testifies to “flawed parent-child relationships [... and the] difficulty of intergenerational communication” (Berger 1990a, 59) Parent-child relationships are indeed problematic, as the analysis of *Fugitive Pieces* has shown; in Jakob’s case his orphan status is partly mended by Athos, his father figure. Jonathan tries to get closer to his grandfather but really finds a friend in Alex, his translator, who constantly questions his motifs and challenges his world view. Alex is empowered to stand up against his violent father through their journey while his grandfather chooses suicide as the only option. Alma, the teenage narrator of *The History of Love*, is empowered through her search for her namesake that is eventually successful in a different way than expected.

The aspect of memory is integrated into the novels on a metafictional and a manifest level. In *Fugitive Pieces* memory is a frequent tenor for metaphors that locate remembering in the body. Memories take on a corporeality just as its process. In *The History of Love* the characters’ memories

[b]eide Modalitäten des Erinnerns sind auf das Reale bezogen und adressieren es als Abwesendes bzw. als Undarstellbares. [...] Während Foers Text einerseits die inhärente Latenz jeder historischen Erfahrung am Beispiel der Bewohner Trachimbrods, aber auch an Alex und Jonathan exemplarisch vorführt, zeigt er andererseits die symptomatische Kontur von transgenerationellen Erinnerungen an den Holocaust. (Haselstein 209)

The aspect of language was explored with regards to communication, narrative style and techniques. The chapter on metaphor sought to collect some further frequent tenors to demonstrate the extreme importance of commemorating what has been lost. The act of writing has been proven to be central to all three

novels as a wish to create something permanent and to make oneself. Alex' clumsy English has been shown as cleverly applied literary tool to underscoring the inadequacy of language to fully capture

Die Naivität des Erzählers macht es möglich, dass die Undarstellbarkeit und Unvorstellbarkeit des Genozids wortwörtlich zum Thema gemacht werden kann, während zugleich sein begrenztes englisches Sprachvermögen die Problematik der Zeugenschaft unaufdringlich markiert. (Haselstein 206)

In the resolutions of these novels all the aspects analysed come to fruition. One common trait of the novels is „[d]as Entsetzen, das Ungeschehenmachenwollen und die Verzweiflung angesichts der offenbaren Unmöglichkeit der Wiedergutmachung“ (Haselstein 208). There is no real happy ending in any of the novels. All of them conform to the common demand that fictional novels refrain from endings that promise easy reconciliation, forgiveness and redemption. Jakob dies before he gets to know that his wife was pregnant. Ben only muses on his homecoming, the reader is left uninformed as to his fate. Alex finally faces his violent father in order to protect his family and is thus left alone to support his family. His grandfather commits suicide. Alma eventually meets Leo but the novel ends with his obituary suggesting his death. Also, she is still living in a dysfunctional family with her traumatised brother. The novels let their protagonists indeed find some peace, some alleviation of their situation, but only within strict borders.

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Abstract

Der Holocaust markiert eine Zäsur in Geschichte, Historiographie, Philosophie und Kunst und veränderte das Verständnis von Repräsentation bzw. der (Un)Repräsentierbarkeit der Shoa in fiktionalen Texten. Die vorliegende Arbeit beschäftigt sich daher mit der Frage, inwiefern diese Veränderungen in amerikanischer und kanadischer Literatur reflektiert werden und welche Spuren der Holocaust in drei englischsprachigen Romanen aus den Jahren 1996, 2002 und 2005 hinterlässt.

Nach einer kurzen Beschäftigung mit Adornos vielzitierten und oft kommentierten Äußerungen zum Thema Auschwitz und deren Bedeutung für das Verständnis von Kunst und Kultur, führt ein kurzer Abriss über Literatur und Holocaust in das Thema ein. Eine Darstellung der Perspektive der drei analysierten Romane dieser Arbeit beleuchtet die Vielstimmigkeit und Dialogizität der Erzählstimmen.

Der Hauptteil der Arbeit gliedert sich in zwei Teile, aufbauend auf der Argumentation, dass in den vorliegenden Romanen der De-humanisierung durch die entmenslichenden und traumatisierenden Praktiken des Nazi Regimes eine Re-humanisierung der Opfer entgegengestellt wird. Diese De-humanisierung findet Ausdruck in den Ereignissen des Holocaust fiktional nachempfundenen Erzählungen der Charaktere und hat Auswirkungen auf verschiedenste Bereiche des Lebens. Ausgewählt aus diesen Bereichen wurden für die Analyse die Bereiche Religion/Spiritualität/Wissenschaft und Ort/Zeit.

Die Re-humanisierung der Opfer der Shoah findet durch eine Hervorhebung individualisierender Wahrnehmungen und Praktiken statt. Die Intensität der Betonung einzelner Aspekte variiert in den drei Romanen, doch werden in allen dreien die Sinneswahrnehmungen, die Kommunikation durch Berührung und dadurch auch die Sexualität der ErzählerInnen behandelt. Eine zentrale Parallele stellt der Fokus auf den Prozess des Schreibens dar. Wird in einem Roman stark die metafiktionale Ebene hervorgehoben, hat das Schreiben/Niederschreiben der eigenen Geschichte auch heilsame Wirkung für

die Charaktere. Des weiteren wird kurz auf einige zentrale Stilmittel der einzelnen Autoren eingegangen, um die Diversität der Behandlungsmöglichkeiten zu zeigen. Abschließend wird noch auf den Komplex der Erinnerung eingegangen, der in allen Romanen, häufig in Form von Metaphern, näher betrachtet wird. Erinnerung wird in den Romanen einerseits auf einer metafikionalen Ebene behandelt, andererseits wird ihrem manifesten Ausdruck und dessen Bedeutung nachgegangen.

Die vorliegenden Romane enden alle mit offenen Fragen. Eine vollständige Heilung der seelischen Wunden ist nicht möglich. Während für die Opfer der Shoah am Ende der Romane der Tod steht, bringt die Beschäftigung und der Dialog der nachfolgenden Generationen mit den Traumatisierten eine Ermächtigung, die eine Neuausrichtung des eigenen Lebens und Beantwortung von Fragen, die zentral für die eigene Identität sind, ermöglicht. Somit wird dem Ausmaß des Massenmords Rechnung getragen, ebenso wie dem Bedürfnis der Charaktere die Vergangenheit bedeutsam für das eigene Leben zu machen.

Curriculum Vitae

Persönliche Daten

Stefanie Anna Sandberger
 geboren am 20.6.1984
 geboren in Ried i. Innkreis
 Staatsbürgerschaft Österreich

Ausbildung

seit 08/2007	Beginn der Diplomarbeit am Institut für Anglistik u. Amerikanistik, Thema „Writing Novels after Auschwitz: Traces of the Holocaust in Three Recent Novels“
09/2005-06/2006	ERASMUS-Studium am University College Dublin, Irland
seit 10/2003	Studium der Geschichte
seit 10/2002	Studium der Anglistik/Amerikanistik und Politikwissenschaft
09/1998-07/2002	BORG Grieskirchen, Matura mit Auszeichnung
09/1994-07/1998	HS Waizenkirchen
09/1990-07/1994	VS Waizenkirchen

Berufspraxis

10/2009-01/2010	Tutorin am Institut für Anglistik u. Amerikanistik
03/2009-09-2009	Studienassistentin am Institut für Anglistik u. Amerikanistik
11/2008-02/2009	Verlagsmitarbeit und Datenaktualisierung, Indexverlag, Wien
07/2008-09/2008	DaF-Lektorin bei ActiLingua, Wien
02/2007-06/2007	DaF-Lektorin bei ActiLingua, Wien
07/2006-09/2006	Tätigkeit im Freibad Waizenkirchen, OÖ, (Kassa, Abrechnung)
07/2004-09/2004	Verkaufstätigkeit: Firma Guschlbauer, St. Willibald, OÖ
07/2001, 07/2002, 07/2003	Reinigungstätigkeit im Altenheim Waizenkirchen, OÖ

Berufsausbildung

10/2007-05/2008	Verlagslehrgang „Werkstätte Buchverlag“ an der Werkstätte Kunstberufe/VWV Kunst und Kommunikation
seit 2005	„Deutsch als Fremdsprache“ (DaF)-Modul, Institut für Germanistik, Universität Wien