Tipping into Transgressiveness:

A Critical Enquiry into the Subversive Holocaust Fiction of Nathan Englander and Jonathan Safran Foer

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Declaration

I declare that this dissertation, “Tipping into Transgressiveness: A Critical Enquiry into the Subversive Holocaust Fiction of Nathan Englander and Jonathan Safran Foer”, is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Arts at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at any other university.

Daniella Hovsha

__31____of_____July_____2020

Abstract

The Holocaust, perhaps the most infamous crime of the twentieth century, has embedded itself in the collective consciousness of the Western World. In the seven-and-a-half decades which have succeeded the event, this genocide has been treated as sacrosanct. Such treatment has made the writing of Holocaust fiction contentious. As theorist Lawrence Langer argues, the genre of Holocaust fiction has been drawn into a narrow area of association, where creative licence is restricted, partly by the historical record and partly by awe. Indeed, Robert Eaglestone notes the complexity of the assumed right to represent the dead, an issue which plagues few other genres of fiction in quite this way.

The last three decades have seen a shift in the way writers engage with this topic. In an effort to counteract prevailing sentiments, works of gratuitous violence and subversion have been produced. Mathew Boswell has identified the extreme versions as "Holocaust impiety", although many argue that these works show too little restraint and thus alienate their audience. Specifically, Nathan Englander's short stories 'The Tumblers', 'What We Talk About When We Talk About Anne Frank', 'Camp Sundown' and 'Free Fruit for Young Widows', as well as Jonathan Safran Foer's novel *Everything Is Illuminated*, grapple creatively with the trauma of the Shoah, in addition to the problems of its representation. Englander's stories are characterized by what Bonnie Lyons describes as stylistic 'edginess', being unsettled, innovative and dark.

'The Tumblers' takes recognizable characters from Jewish folklore and inserts them into the extraordinary circumstances of the Holocaust, while 'What We Talk About When We Talk About Anne Frank' uses the realism of Raymond Carver to probe contemporary responses to the *Shoah*. Both 'Camp Sundown' and 'Free Fruit for Young Widows' explore the impact of the trauma of the Holocaust on its survivors, thus subverting traditional assumptions about their sanctity. Foer's *Everything is Illuminated* draws on folklore, postmodern tropes and comedy to tell the story of its protagonist's quest to find the woman who saved his grandfather from the Nazis.

Englander and Foer's mode of subverting the conventions of Holocaust fiction is linked to the Bakhtinian tradition of the Carnivalesque, a licensed overturning of dominant social structures and normative moral requirements. These authors' exploration of normative morality opens up grey zones, where the lines between good and evil collapse into what Tzvetan

Todorov describes as the responses of ordinary people, who are neither saints nor monsters. The Derridean concept of “cinders” also weaves its way into these works as both writers explore absence and loss in the wake of the Shoah. This dissertation contends that the works of these two writers, as well as other secondary texts, constitute a transgressive tipping point in the literary genre, a new modality for navigating the Holocaust, in fiction and in fact.

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Introduction

In the short story "Everything I Know about my Family on My Mother's Side" Nathan Englander writes:

> If you were to climb into my childhood head and look out from my childhood eyes, you'd see a world of Jews around you: the parents, the children, the neighbors, the teachers -- everyone a Jew, and everyone religious in exactly the same way. Now look across the street at the Catholic girl's house, and at the house next door to hers, where the Reform Jews live. Now what do you see? Is it a blur? An empty space? If you are seeing nothing, if your answer is nothing, then you are seeing as I saw. (122-123)

Brought up as an Orthodox Jew myself, in the north-eastern suburbs of Johannesburg, my childhood eyes saw in much the same way as Englander's character did. My world was made up of a small set of streets, in which my school and my synagogue were located, a select number of restaurants which upheld the same strict dietary laws which I and everyone I knew followed, and a sect of Jews who defined and practised Judaism in exactly the same way.

My childhood head understood anyone outside of my community in the negative, as "non-Jews", or as those Jews who did not practise Judaism our way and thus practised it the wrong way – the Jews who were not real Jews. My identity was, and to a certain extent still is, defined by my Jewishness and the pillars which supported it were: religious observance, the state of Israel, and the Holocaust. I cannot remember when I was first told about the Holocaust; it was something which I seemed always to have known. At my Jewish school, it was an integral part of my education. Many days in a year were dedicated to memorialising the Shoah: these included International Holocaust Day and *Yom HaShoah*, which translates simply as "the Day recalling the Holocaust", which is Israel's commemorative day[1]. Apart from these official days, every other day of mourning included some reference to the Shoah.

[1] Holocaust and Shoah are generally agreed to refer to the same set of events. Holocaust, meaning "burnt offering", evokes the concentration camps and their crematoria, whereas Shoah is a Hebrew word which can be translated variously as "calamity", "whirlwind" or "catastrophe" and is used to refer

I grew up hearing first-hand accounts from survivors, watching documentaries, seeing images of corpselike Jews. From this we were to understand two lessons, that we had been hated by the gentile world and that we had survived its greatest efforts to annihilate us. This I was never to forget. To be frank, the Holocaust terrified me. I avoided the ceremonies, did not attend class trips to museums, and whenever opportunities arose for me to go to Poland to visit Auschwitz and other concentration camps, I refused. The Holocaust was a presence defined by the absence of six million Jews, and even though I would not engage with it, its spectre was ever-present.

In 2012, having matriculated or obtained my school-leaving certificate, I did what everyone else in my community had done for decades–I took a gap year. In my community, a gap year does not provide an opportunity for backpacking around Europe, or taking up an internship to gauge whether one wants to pursue a career in a particular field, nor does it mean staying at home to recuperate from twelve arduous years of school education. Rather, the religious youth of South Africa, Australia and predominantly North America, go to Israel, the Holy Land, and we study.

Learning (in Hebrew *limmud*) in the Orthodox vocabulary relates to Jewish texts: to a tradition stretching back to thousands of years of written and oral debate and discussion, to the examination of the minute details of the laws and narratives which govern our existence. The year is spent in gender-separated institutions which proliferate across the small Jewish state, filling its crevices and disputed areas with enthusiastic nineteen-year-olds. Departing slightly from the practice of Johannesburg Jewry, I opted to attend, alone, a *midrasha* – a seminary– with a focus upon studies usually reserved for men, the oral traditions of *Midrash* and *Gemarrah*, the ancient commentary on and analysis of biblical texts. I was separated from my closest high school friends by a twenty-minute bus ride and a viscerally different environment.

My seminary was not as I had expected: it was cold, it was clinical, it was unengaging. I was miserable. In this environment, I found myself questioning, for the first time, the Jewish identity which had been offered to me. I also found that I was not alone. There was a small

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to the catastrophe which struck European Jews during the Second World War. They will be used interchangeably in this dissertation.

group of us who decided that these classes would not define our experience or our identity. That is to say, in that pretentious way in which teenagers justify their actions, we skipped out. We chose to explore the city of Jerusalem, a cartographic attempt to understand Judaism in modern terms. We had grown up hearing that every four steps a person takes in Israel constitute a positive commandment – a *mitzvah* – so we reasoned, rather feebly even to our own ears, that our wandering was at least as sanctified as the studies we were missing.

It was on one of these trips into the centre of town that we ducked into a small bookstore, filled with the secular writings we had not engaged with for months. There, in prominent display, was Nathan Englander's *What We Talk About When We Talk About Anne Frank.* The title story of this collection, which arrested me in that small bookstore, centres upon a game which is described by the characters variously as "the Righteous Gentile game" (29), "Who Will Hide Me?" (29) or simply "What We Talk About When We Talk About Anne Frank" (29). This thought experiment invites the characters to imagine a scenario, a second Holocaust, with the Gestapo knocking down doors, rounding up Jews. In this situation, the question posed is whether there is a gentile in your life who would risk his/her/their safety to protect you. Reading this story, what first struck my nineteen-year-old self was not the edginess of the narrative, a literary modality that I had never encountered before. Rather, what I found compelling was the familiarity of the "Anne Frank Game". I had never played this game, I had never even heard of it; yet it was familiar.

Despite the dread that had always enveloped me when confronted by the Shoah, I found myself reaching for the Englander book before me, reading that story and returning to that store to reread it. Though the "game" Englander described felt familiar to me, its purpose was not to instil fear, or even reverence for Holocaust survivors. The story was playing with these tropes, subverting them, and using a variety of stylistic approaches to do so, including humour. I did not flinch from it; instead this alternative type of representation opened up new entry points into what had always been a tightly constricted narrative. I was beginning to see beyond my childhood vision, towards a more nuanced and complex way of viewing my past as well as my identity.

I ended my time in Israel a few months early, leaving when the first group of Americans did rather than staying on until December with the other South Africans. On my last day in Jerusalem, I finally bought Englander's book.

I have chosen to share my ethno-autobiographical account in order to contextualise my investment in what I take to be a transgressive turn in the genre of Holocaust fiction. This transgressive turn shows authors moving away from traditional Holocaust fiction, and instead embracing alternative literary methods, including dark humour, liminality, fantasy, and folklore. This dissertation is focused on Englander's four stories about the Holocaust– "The Tumblers", "What We Talk About When We Talk About Anne Frank", "Camp Sundown", and "Free Fruit for Young Widows"– as well as Jonathan Safran Foer's novel *Everything Is Illuminated.* These texts offer creative and complex responses to the Holocaust, as well as the problems of its representation in subsequent generations.

Nathan Englander published his first collection of short stories *For the Relief of Unbearable Urges* in 1999. Since then he has published three novels, *The Ministry of Special Cases* (2007), *Dinner at the Center of the Earth* (2017), and *Kaddish.com* (2019), as well as his 2012 work, which first caught my attention, *What We Talk About When We Talk About Anne Frank.* His short stories have garnered him more acclaim than his novels, with *For the Relief of Unbearable Urges* winning the PEN/Malamud Award in 2000 and *What We Talk About When We Talk About Anne Frank* winning the Frank O'Connor International Short Story Award, as well as being short-listed for the Pulitzer Prize. The short story is the better vehicle for Englander's quick-wittedness, his sharp reversals, ironies, and surprising revelations. His novels, as David Galef puts it in his review of *Kaddish.com,* "are a somewhat different affair" (*The Yale Review*). They tend to read as extended short stories, losing some of his literary restraint owing to their extended length.

Jonathan Safran Foer's debut novel *Everything Is Illuminated* was published in 2002, when the author was only twenty-five years old, and was greeted with critical commendation. The novel was hailed as a "work of genius" by *The Guardian* and earned him a National Jewish Book Award (2001) and a Guardian First Book Award (2002). He also shared the PEN/Robert W. Bingham Prize in 2004. He has since published two more works of fiction: *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* (2005) and *Here I Am* (2016), a "paper sculpture" presented as a novel: *Tree of Codes* (2010), and two non-fiction works, *Eating Animals* (2009) and *We Are the Weather: Saving the Planet Begins at Breakfast* (2019). Both of these non-fiction works focus on the ethical and environmental implications of consuming animal products. *Everything Is Illuminated, Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* and *Here I Am* share the themes of loss,

family, and discovery. All of Foer's works are written in his idiosyncratic language and irreverent style. *Here I Am* and *Eating Animals*, like *Everything Is Illuminated*, use their page layout to emphasize key points. Chapter One of *Eating Animals* opens with a box, which Foer informs us, approximates the space in which a chicken lives its life.

Foer and Englander collaborated on *The New American Haggadah* (2012), editing and translating, respectively. The two authors share an interest in modern American Jewish experiences. Foer's protagonist in *Everything is Illuminated* imagines his family history within the chasm created by the Shoah. Meanwhile, Englander's characters explore the psychological ramifications of the Holocaust, from those who experienced it to those who grew up in its shadow. Englander himself is descended from Russian Jews, and his story "Twenty Seventh Man" delves into the oppressive and absurd policies of Stalinist Russia. In "Twenty Seventh Man" he uses the same devices as he does in his Holocaust stories.

Englander's stories are characterised by what Bonnie Lyons describes as stylistic "edginess" (64), being unsettled, innovative, dark and functioning in liminal spaces. In "The Tumblers", Englander transplants recognisable characters from Jewish folklore – the fools of Chelm – into the extraordinary circumstances of the Second World War, and in so doing explores the absurdity of the Nazi war machine. The folkloric logic of "The Tumblers" is contrasted with the Carveresque realism that Englander uses in "What We Talk About When We Talk About Anne Frank" (Chapter Two). Here, Englander is writing back to and reimagining Raymond Carver's "What We Talk About When We Talk About Love" in order to probe contemporary responses to the Shoah. Both "Camp Sundown" and "Free Fruit for Young Widows" (Chapter Three) explore the impact of the trauma of the Holocaust on its survivors. In "Camp Sundown", a group of survivors become obsessed with the idea that a former Nazi concentration camp guard has infiltrated their Jewish summer camp, whereas "Free Fruit for Young Widows" is concerned with the moral grey area of survival and its impact upon modern-day Israel.

Foer's *Everything Is Illuminated* (Chapter Four) tells the story of its protagonist's quest in travelling to the Ukraine in order to find the woman who had saved his grandfather from the Nazis during the Shoah. An ambitious novel, it mixes folklore and magical realism with linguistic experimentation and dark humour in four alternating narrative modalities, in order explore questions of trauma, absence and loss, as well as the ethics of survival. Divided across the realist account of the fictional Jonathan Safran Foer's trip to the Ukraine and that same character's invented family history, *Everything is Illuminated* seems to ask: what is a good

enough reason to write fictionally about the Shoah? This question, posed by one of the characters, opens up the mechanisms of the novel to the reader, and thus helps inform the reading process.

Foer's question is by no means new; writing on and representations of the Holocaust have, and continue to be, questioned, debated, and scrutinised. In analysing what this dissertation calls "Englander and Foer's transgressive turn", it is necessary first to understand more traditional approaches to writing Holocaust fiction. Lawrence Langer is the main theorist whom this dissertation will use, and his work will be triangulated with the approaches of Robert Eaglestone and Matthew Boswell. These theorists have been selected for this study because of their interest in the conventions of Holocaust fiction, and their different responses to them. In *Admitting the Holocaust*, Langer discusses the constraints he has observed in Holocaust fiction:

> When the Holocaust is the theme, history imposes limitations on the supposed flexibility of artistic license. We are confronted by the perplexing challenge of the reversal of normal creative procedure: instead of Holocaust fictions' liberating the facts and expanding the range of their implications, Holocaust facts enclose the fictions, drawing the reader into an ever-narrower area of association. (62-63)

Langer thinks it anomalous that the Holocaust in fact resists displacement by the Holocaust in fiction. He contends that in taking on the Holocaust as subject matter, the writer is asking a great deal of his/her/their reader. The reader is confronted by an event which appears fictional in its scope and inhumanity, yet is disquieting in its historical actuality. According to Langer, the suspension of disbelief is stretched too far by this genocide and thus the Holocaust cannot contend with fictionalisation. However, the scope of Langer's claim is too broad and too stringent. He elevates the Holocaust above all other historical events and tragedies. Langer accords secondary status to the genocides which followed the Holocaust. The Cambodian genocide (1974-1979) and the Rwandan genocide (1994) had both happened before *Admitting the Holocaust* was published in 1995, unsettling Langer's claim.

Langer argues that the purpose of Holocaust literature is to memorialise, thus making his claim an ethical imperative, casting the act of invention as a betrayal of those who have made their experiences known. This leads to another of the constraints attached to the genre, the sacrosanctity of the survivor. Langer argues that writers have adopted a language of

consolation, in which the Holocaust experience is one of resistance and survival, or victimisation and memorial, through which all those who perished are recalled with the solemnity of saints (66). This language is prominent in many works of Holocaust fiction– including Spielberg's film entitled *Schindler's List*, *The Boy in the Stripped Pyjamas*, *The Devil's Arithmetic*, and *The Tattooist of* Auschwitz–leaving little space for the nuances of ethical grey zones, or for imagining complex human beings.

According to this interpretation, the imagination is limited in its scope and representation is frustrated. To these restrictions Langer adds the effect on words themselves. With regard to the Shoah, there is an "impurification" of language; specific words have become intrinsically associated with the genocide, a catalogue of nouns such as "train…smoke…chimney…gas" (Langer 65), the use of which limits the artist's control over them. "How do we," asks Langer, "verbalise the enigma of a language that alienates even as it struggles to connect?" (66). Langer believes that only time will break down these constraints and that once the historical imperatives of Auschwitz recede, attention will once again rest upon the fictional form, the way in which the text is constructed.

In investigating the Holocaust as genre, I will be triangulating the conventions recommended by Langer with the theories proposed by Robert Eaglestone and Matthew Boswell. Eaglestone examines the parameters of Holocaust fiction, from its conception to its limits, in terms of the rights of representation. In his book *The Holocaust and the Postmodern* (2004) Eaglestone works through testimony, autobiography, fiction and history in an attempt to understand how the post-Holocaust world has responded to these kinds of writing. Ideas which are particularly pertinent for this dissertation relate to: language and reference; identification; genre; and memory. Regarding language and referentiality, Eaglestone reverses Lawrence Langer's argument that certain words have become "impurifed" by the Holocaust, so that they have lost reference to anything outside of it. Eaglestone contends that within the lexicon of survivor language there is a break between reference and the sense of these words. Terms such as "hunger" and "cold" in relation to the Holocaust are removed from their traditional understanding.

> Writers and survivors, and many others, believe that it is not possible for those who did not survive to understand, in a truthful way, the events of the Holocaust. Language is not enough. This is not mystical nor does it suggest that the Holocaust is

> unapproachable or sublime: it is only to suggest that there is an insurmountable difficulty in understanding the existential truth of the events using "free words". (18)

Eaglestone claims that the Shoah exceeds the languages of those who did not experience it, that they cannot comprehend such singular events. This lexical gap has been called "Planet Auschwitz" (Eaglestone 18), which alienates those who were not there and complicates any attempts at representation of the Shoah.

Eaglestone further offers a useful and thorough evaluation of the genre of Holocaust fiction: here "genre" is understood as "a horizon of understanding where interpretation, text and readership come together" (101). He emphasizes the importance of the Holocaust, identifying various questions, issues and approaches that typify this reading. He argues against a definition of Holocaust literature which is based upon content or the inclusion of the Holocaust as an event within the text. Eaglestone observes that such a definition would be too all-encompassing, thus embracing a large portion of twentieth- and twenty-first-century literature. Integral to this notion is the extent to which fictionalisation is feasible in relation to the Holocaust, for it is inherently an historicized genre, tied to the events of the past. Eaglestone reflects on the same issues constraining the genre as Langer does, namely that "even in novels set in 1939 the events are inescapable and … these do overshadow any writing about [the Holocaust and the anti-Semitic events related to it]" (108-109). In addition, Eaglestone contends that Holocaust fiction, arguably more than any other genre, is problematized by the author-narrator function, by who is given the right to "speak or write" (109). When referencing an historical event that affects the families of those who went through it, even as those who survived it are dwindling in number, as well as an entire group of people, public concern about "who uses the lives of the dead?" (109) is a fair question. However, like Langer, Eaglestone elevates the Holocaust above all other historical tragedies, contributing to what this dissertation sees as a false sense of untouchability.

Whereas Langer and Eaglestone are concerned with the difficulties and moral questions related to writing Holocaust fiction, Matthew Boswell advocates for those works which make use of gratuitous violence and/or irreverence in depicting this genocide. These include Quentin Tarantino's *Inglourious Basterds*, and W.D Snodgrass's *The Fuehrer Bunker.* These works are aggressively transgressive. The film *Inglourious Basterds* is a violent revenge fantasy shaped as an alternative history. The film includes a task force of Jewish-American soldiers, whose

job it is to instil fear in the Nazis by killing and scalping them. In one scene they carve a Swastika onto the forehead of a German soldier, so that he will never be able to hide his allegiance to the Third Reich. Snodgrass's "cycle" of monologues from the bunker of the German high command in the month before Germany fell is a "poetic exploration of the genocidal mentality" (Boswell 58). The bunker becomes a "central symbol for [the] buried personal histories and psychological energies" (58) of the highest ranking member of the Third Reich. Boswell argues that works like this are so powerfully transgressive that they shock their audience out of traditional responses to the Holocaust, forcing a confrontation upon our present-day selves. This reorientation is a moral one, as it seeks to narrow the ethical distance between the era of the Holocaust and the present day, highlighting humankind's ability to perpetrate such atrocities, and thus warning us against them.

Boswell has termed this approach to Holocaust fiction "Holocaust impiety". He derived this term from Gillian Rose's "Holocaust piety". Adopted by Rose in *Mourning Becomes the Law* (1996), "Holocaust piety" has become integrated into the discourse of the Shoah and has been applied to critique "particularly sentimental or sanctimonious responses to the genocide" (Boswell 1). "Holocaust piety" references a certain type of redemptive tale, one grounded in an optimism which distances the audience from the realities of the Holocaust. These works adopt the language of consolation, which Langer articulates. Moreover, Rose's critique extends not only to what is present in these stories of humane concern and hopefulness, but what is absent. By removing the suffering of the Holocaust to the realm of the ineffable, such pious works representing the Shoah are deemed to create a barrier between those events and the present day, leaving unexamined the "cycle of historical victimhood and predation" in humanity's oppressive tendencies (Boswell 4). For Rose, the atrocities endured during the Holocaust are not ineffable, but historically rooted and, if not inevitable, then neither are they unexpected. Rose does not view the Holocaust as exceptional, but rather as a recent atrocity in an arc of human history where technological advances also offer a greater capacity for violence.

There is a plethora of such "sentimental works". While it is not the intention of this study to examine them in any detail, *Schindler's List* and *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* will be briefly juxtaposed to Englander and Foer's works. Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List*, based on the Thomas Keneally novel *Schindler's Ark*, is a seminal work of Holocaust fiction. Both a critical and commercial success, *Schindler's List* fictionalises the story of Oscar Schindler, a

"Righteous Gentile"[2] who saved the lives of 1,100 Polish Jews. The film was critical to the spread of Holocaust fiction, as well as to the language of consolation that came to be used in reference to the Shoah. In examining Keneally's book, scholar Sue Vice writes that the choice to find "a crumb of comfort in universal destruction" (3) can be unsatisfactory. The story of Schindler's Jews being saved "amid [the] notable failure" (Vice 94) of the millions who were not, can appear ahistorical in its focus on "general suppositions of human motive and the role of the individual in a time of crisis" (94). This is to say that the narrative of *Schindler's List* can appear divorced from the realities of the Holocaust. In a catastrophe of such proportions, the glorification of a single figure, and the inclination to attribute near divine motives to him and his story, whilst comforting, obscures the tragedy of this genocide. The film's stark contrast between the "righteous" Schindler and the Nazi characters is not a nuanced one. It is a saviour narrative, which invests in "miracles"– none more memorable than when a group of Schindler's Jewish women are sent into what the viewer assumes to be a gas chamber, only for water to come pouring out of the shower heads instead of Zyklon B.

The Boy in the Stripped Pyjamas, a novel written by John Boyne in 2006, is similarly sentimental. The story focuses on the friendship between Bruno, the nine-year-old son of the Auschwitz Commandant, and Shmuel, another nine-year-old imprisoned in that camp. This friendship plays into tropes of childhood innocence. The book's central indictment of racism relies on the simplistic assertion that children do not see difference, nor understand the idea of hatred without being taught it. In an almost unimaginable turn of events, Bruno joins Shmuel in the camp and they go to their death together. Bruno's family's values are completely alerted by their loss and they are redeemed.

Boswell is interested in works which are antithetical to the sentimental and the silenced. In his view, films, music and literary texts which are characteristic of Holocaust impiety reject redemptive conventions. Furthermore, these works initiate a crisis within the audience "by attacking the cognitive and cultural mechanisms that keep our understanding of the Holocaust at a safe distance from our understanding of ourselves" (3). Thus, they span genres from hyper-realism to hyper-surrealism, designedly including the full range of atrocities related to the genocide, from torture to mass murder and everything in between. This is done neither to

[2] "Righteous Gentile" is the expression used to describe those non-Jews who risked their lives to save Jews during the Holocaust.

controvert convention nor to serve those aesthetic sensibilities that are associated with the subversive and perverse. These works are meant as an "affront to the living" (4), confronting those who "see no connection between historical atrocity and their own values, political systems and day-to-day lives" (4). Thus, for Boswell, the excess within these works is at its core a moral one, evoked against the apathy which breeds tyranny.

Langer and Boswell's views on Holocaust fiction are at opposing ends of the spectrum, both looking at works which they believe to be appropriate ethical responses to the Shoah. However, between these two approaches are fictional works which are neither sentimental nor sensational, but are ethically and aesthetically constructive. Before looking at Englander and Foer's transgressive approach to fiction, it is useful to engage with other responses within this spectrum. Anne Michaels' acclaimed first novel *Fugitive Pieces* is a story of trauma, memory, location, and family. The story begins dramatically with the seven-year-old Jakob Beer emerging from the mud of an archaeological site in Biskupin, Poland, only to be discovered and saved by Athos Roussos in the middle of the Second World War. Jakob survives the war in Greece with Athos, who becomes his entire family. The two eventually relocate to Toronto, where Jakob becomes a translator as well as a poet.

A poet herself, Anne Michaels' first novel functions as a "provisional zone between poetry and fiction" ("Anne Michaels, Fugitive Author"). She reflects that poetry is "a way of holding experience; not holding on to, but holding" ("Anne Michaels, Fugitive Author"); this approach helps the reader to absorb large experiences which would otherwise become abstractions. Michaels believes that poetry is "such a good discipline for a novelist: it makes you aware that even if you have four or five hundred pages to play with, you mustn't waste a single word", whereas fiction is expansive: "it offers a way of layering things; of having images and gestures that connect between page 100 and page 303. It gives you the chance to bring the reader in slowly, via as many strands as you can" ("Anne Michaels, Fugitive Author"). In *Fugitive Pieces,* Michaels interlinks these two forms: the novel is self-reflective and not driven by plot; fragments of memory, art, music and ideology are sewn together to make a whole. In *Fugitive Pieces* Michaels introduces a new form of Holocaust fiction, one which is engaged in the relationship between ethics and fictional form.

David Grossman's *See Under: Love* expertly deploys complicated postmodern tropes to tell a moving tale of the Shoah. Published in Hebrew in 1986 and in English in 1989, the novel seems

to serve as a forebear of the transgressiveness of Englander and Foer. Divided into four parts, the novel begins with Momik, a nine-year-old child of survivors growing up in 1950s Israel. Momik learns about the Holocaust in snippets, with history reduced to the phrases "over there" and "the Nazi Beast". Momik creates a fantastical monster out of this Nazi Beast, one which controls the "over there" which his family talk about in whispers. He believes that if he can destroy the Beast, he will set his suffering family free. The fantastical follows through, as Momik becomes a bitter adult and an author writing about a series of encounters between a narrator and the Polish writer Bruno Schultz who was killed during the Holocaust.

The most striking section in the novel is a twisted and shocking reinvention of Momik's great uncle Wasserman's experiences during the war, told in the mode of a fable or fairy tale. Wasserman is frustrated that he is unable to die in a gas chamber and makes a deal with the Nazi commandant, in a reversal of the story telling of Scheherazade in *One Thousand and One Nights*, through which he exchanges stories about an invented figure in return for the Nazi's attempting to kill him. Yet, it is Wasserman who ultimately destroys the Nazi's sense of self and even his marriage.

These stories within stories within the novel are similar to the way in which Foer divides *Everything Is Illuminated,* making use of postmodern devices and magical realism. The fantastical beasts, the reimagined histories and proliferating stories emphasize the silence which permeated Israel after the Holocaust, as well as its psychological ramifications for survivors. Grossman's novel is transgressive and shocking, and there is a great similarity between it and Englander's and Foer's works.

Englander and Foer's transgressiveness is nuanced, neither gratuitously violent nor sentimental, but capable of addressing moral issues as they arise. They offer alternative methods of representing the Holocaust and its issues of trauma, memory, absence and loss. The effects of the Holocaust seem to transcend those who were directly involved in it. The Shoah has been adopted largely as a Jewish trauma; in its intergenerational and global impact and weight, it has affected and to some extent unified subsequent generations who may or may not have direct family ties to the Holocaust.

Marianne Hirsch defines the transfer of trauma from one generation to another which did not directly experience it as "postmemory". Hirsch views postmemory in the context of other

"post" movements, where "post" implies both "critical distance and profound interrelation" (5). It suggests more than "temporal delay or a position in the aftermath" (5), but in a similar manner to poststructuralism or postmodernism, it represents a complex building on an original set of assumptions, being influenced by them as much as responding to or critically continuing them. In defining postmemory in this way, Hirsch embeds her work as a way of thinking connected to its predecessors and also clearly differentiating itself, as the already mentioned theoretical trends have done in their turn. However, when the forebear is memory, the question of transmission is different. Here lies the role of literary representations. Such movements are dependent on an account of prior intellectual movements; they must draw on a specific conceptual terrain. For Hirsch and other second-generation individuals, the resources are their family members, whose intimate accounts have been passed down. When viewed as such, postmemory entails "an evolving ethical and theoretical discussion about the workings of trauma, memory and intergenerational acts of transfer" (1-2). Postmemory can be defined as the "quality" of Hirsch's experience in relation to her parents, as well as her observations concerning the accounts of other children of survivors, which are resituated in an academic setting. Framed in this way, postmemory is an academic discourse which is problematized by the ethical implications of representing the Shoah. These implications are prominent concerns for both Langer and Eaglestone.

In *After Such Knowledge,* Eva Hoffman (another child of survivors) upholds Hirsch's idea of the transmission of trauma as a sacred duty. Hoffman expresses an acute anxiety about the preservation of these experiences. In so doing, she increases the burden already placed upon this second generation, when she addresses it as "the hinge generation in which received, transferred knowledge of events is being transmuted into history or myth" (5). Hoffman makes it clear that their task is to consolidate the past in order that fictionalisation may not replace actual events, as Eaglestone has observed (Hoffman 23). Yet, as in the case of Foer, where there is no historical evidence left, mythmaking serves as a surrogate form of remembrance.

In examining the potential transferability of trauma, this dissertation will rely on the definition of trauma proposed by Cathy Caruth in her 1996 work *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, a text which is considered seminal in trauma theory. In explaining trauma, Caruth draws on Freud's depiction of the story of Tancred in Tasso's epic *Gerusalemme Liberata*. As she summarises:

> Tancred unwittingly kills his beloved Clorinda in a duel while she is disguised in the armor of an enemy knight. After her burial he makes his way into a strange magic forest which strikes the Crusaders' army with terror. He slashes with his sword at a tall tree; but blood streams from the cut and the voice of Clorinda, whose soul is imprisoned in the tree, is heard complaining that he has wounded his beloved once again (2).

For Freud, as for Caruth, this narrative represents the ways in which a trauma repeats itself, exactingly and unremittingly, through the unknowing acts of the survivor and "against his very will" (3). Tasso's text expresses more than the unasked for re-enactment of a crisis, brought to the mind of one who has suffered it, but the "crying out" of that trauma, the irrepressible urgency of the wound. In *Everything Is Illuminated*, that cry launches a quest which leads three men to confront what is, and is not, left of the past. In Englander's stories, however, "the wound" takes different forms, including a game of "Who Will Hide Me?".

According to Carruth's definition, trauma is associated with the significance of an original event which cannot be ignored. Trauma "is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available. This truth, in its delayed appearance and its belated address, cannot be linked only to what is known, but also to what remains unknown in our very actions and our language" (Caruth 4). Langer and Eaglestone see the need for limits on language when discussing the Shoah, but Caruth suggests that trauma must be addressed so that we can understand our own language.

Trauma has several dimensions. Firstly, the traumatic event or moment cannot be fully understood at the time of its unfolding. To compound this, the traumatic episode recurs in the lives of those who have experienced it. That is not to say that (as with Tancred) the survivor will physically act out or experience the same pain again, but rather that it recurs mentally and emotionally, that it can be triggered by other moments, giving the latter great importance. It would appear that there is more to this event than can initially be understood; it must be interrogated in order to be grasped. Finally, and according to Caruth most significantly, trauma demands address (Caruth 1-5). It is impossible to withdraw from or ignore the traumatic event and its effects. Recurrence compels recognition; but such confrontation Caruth considers necessary in order to heal from the trauma. Englander and Foer play with this confrontation, negotiating its necessity and representing various reactions through their characters. Englander's couples in "What We Talk About When We Talk About Anne Frank" physically

manifest this confrontation by playing their game in the confines of a pantry closest, whereas in "The Tumblers" Englander confronts the need to readjust Jewish literary traditions in response to this trauma. In *Everything Is Illuminated,* the narrative builds to an ultimate confrontation with the Shoah.

Caruth's work is useful for a psychological understanding of trauma; however, as Buelens, Durrant and Eaglestone emphasize in the introduction to *The Future of Trauma Studies*, this field lies at a turbulent locus of intersection of multiple disciplines (1). The essays in this collection expand upon and critique the definitions of trauma which were arguably solidified by Caruth's work. Michael Rothberg notes that the category of trauma created by Caruth is "necessary but not sufficient" (xiii). In this same work, Stef Craps correctly points out that trauma theory is Eurocentric, and "risks appropriating other, non-Western events into a Western model of traumatic suffering" (13). Kanister critiques Caruth for creating "misleading symbolic equivalencies" (194) between the traumatic components of "all human conversation" (194) and the suffering of victims of trauma. He argues that Caruth is uninterested in the particular histories of traumatic events, "and more interested in using such events to demonstrate [her] view of language itself" (13).

While it is important to consider the limitations of Caruth's definition, in the case of this dissertation her focus upon the historical trauma of the Holocaust and perhaps the Eurocentrism are not a disadvantage; when related to Hirsch's own Holocaust-centric study of postmemory, Caruth's definition of trauma adds plausibility. Trauma is at once latent and insistent, demanding a place in the life of the sufferer but also, to continue Caruth's metaphor, infecting outwards from the point of origin. Thus, as Hirsch asserts "descendants of victim survivors as well as of perpetrators and of bystanders who witnessed mass traumatic events connect so deeply to the previous generation's remembrances of the past that they identify that connection as a form of memory" (3). If trauma evokes trauma, then too the traumatized create, to an extent, new victims.

Both Caruth's rendering of trauma and Hirsch's definition of postmemory relate closely to Jacques Derrida's notion of "the trace". Derrida first began writing on the trace in the 1960s, describing the absences that always infuse presence in language: every word holds within it all those words that are unspoken but which it connotes, while encompassing "the fire that is still burning at the origin of language" (Lukacher 1). This burning is a deconstructive incarnation

of the wound about which Caruth speaks; it is insistent and unavoidable. Derrida came to see cinders as an apt metaphor for the structure of the trace, arguing in his book of the same name that "if a place is itself surrounded by fire (falls finally to ash, into a cinder tomb), it no longer is. Cinder remains, cinder there is (*il y a la cendre)*" (37). Of Hirsch's own post- memory, the generational inheritance of a trauma, one may say "cinder, there is". In the introduction to the 1991 edition of *Cinders*, translator Ned Lukacher describes Derrida's cinders as the "quarks of language … keeping a space open into which the truth, or its impossibility, might come, a space, as Derrida calls it, for the invention, the *in-venire*, the incoming of the other"(1). The cinder is liminal, situated at the intersection of "what remains and what is" (37), becoming a physical reminder of what no longer exists, whilst holding a space for something new, for this other.

Derrida's cinder is inextricably linked to mourning, or rather what happens beyond mourning, when mourning burns itself out. Mourning and melancholia intertwine and extend indefinitely, looking to what "persists within the 'enigma' of mourning, of what still 'clings', what still continues to burn and cannot be consumed" (Lukacher 12). This is the transition from "high mourning" to "partial mourning" which Derrida believes is the indestructible cinder. In this sense the cinder becomes "the memory of a cenotaph" (Derrida 53), the inscription on an empty, "impossible tomb" (53). Derrida's examination of mourning leads him to the Holocaust which he sees as the only "up to date phrase" for cinders. The Holocaust and the crematory ovens tell of "the all-burning … in German in all the Jewish languages of the world" (57). All five of the works considered in this dissertation are preoccupied, in one way or another, with uncovering and understanding these cinders, with representing what is left behind in the wake of the Holocaust and how it continues to burn today. Englander and Foer's transgressive turn is a response, or rather consists of representations of responses, to this burning.

In describing Englander and Foer's approach as transgressive, I am drawing on Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of the Carnivalesque, as well as Bonnie Lyons' description of "edginess". First formulated in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (pub. 1929, tr. 1973) and fully expressed in *Rabelais and his World* (pub. 1965, tr.1968), the Carnivalesque refers to a literary approach that uses humour (specifically folk humour), the bizarre, the grotesque and the chaotic to subvert the constraints of the dominant conventions of the time, or in a literary sense, the dominate genre (Bakhtin 10). In the case of this dissertation, the "dominant genre" refers to conventional Holocaust fiction.

The term "Carnivalesque" was coined in the English translation of Bakhtin's *Rabelias and his World* and is "surely the most productive concept in this book" (Holquist xix). Bakhtin chooses Rabelais because "in him is manifest for the last time the possibility of expressing in literature the popular, chthonian impulse to carnival" (xv). Yet, Bakhtin's examination of Rabelais' subversively open form of folk humour, liminality and laughter are also the crystallization of that concept into a literary mode of transgression. Moreover, Bakhtin's own work, which is inextricably linked to the period of Stalinism in which it was published, recreates that same subversion. Rather than having a single focus, *Rabelias and His World* is "double voiced" (xv), holding in its very language a duality of implicit interpretative modalities and foci:

> …it is doing two things – at least two – simultaneously, for the multitude of shattered unities we call revolution brings forth texts with peculiar forms of unity. At one level *Rabelais and His World* is a parable and guidebook for its times, inexplicable without reference to the close connection between the circumstances of its own production and Soviet intellectual and political history. At another level, directed to scholars anywhere at any time, it is a contribution to historical poetics with theoretical implications not limited by its origin in a particular time and place. (xv)

Focusing on these "theoretical implications", the Carnivalesque is at its core about laughter. As Bakhtin explains: "the four-hundred-year history of the understanding, influence, and interpretation of Rabelais is closely linked with the history of laughter itself" (59). This laughter is specific, located in the Renaissance and emerging from "the depth of folk culture" (72).

> The Renaissance conception of laughter can be roughly described as follows: Laughter has a deep philosophical meaning, it is one of the essential forms of the truth concerning the world as a whole, concerning history and man; it is a peculiar point of view relative to the world; the world is seen anew, no less (and perhaps more) profoundly than when seen from the serious standpoint. Therefore, laughter is just as admissible in great literature, posing universal problems, as seriousness (66).

Focusing specifically on the "feast of fools", Bakhtin emphasizes the peculiar position of a licensed celebration which was aimed at mocking the seriousness of the medieval Church (71-

76). “Nearly all the rituals of the feast of fools are a grotesque degradation of various church rituals and symbols and their transfer to the material bodily level” (74). Carnival was the “second life” of the people, made necessary by the severity of their daily existence, in which laughter itself was outlawed. During a carnival the “walls between official and nonofficial … were inevitably to crumble” (72). As with the Carnival, both Englander and Foer use laughter, satire, and irony in order to disrupt the “official”.

Carnival consisted of four concepts, which would later make up the Carnivalesque literary mode of Rabelias and Bakhtin himself: free and familiar interaction, eccentric behavior, Carnivalistic misalliances and the sacrilegious. These notions interact both psychically in the feast of fools and in a literary discourse aimed at according recognition to the unofficial while allowing for chaos. This chaos is by no means negative, as Bakhtin is at pains to make clear: “Let us stress once more that for the Renaissance (as for the antique sources described above) the characteristic trait of laughter was precisely the recognition of its positive, regenerating, creative meaning” (71). This act is freeing and revolutionary, as Terry Eagleton has expressed it in *Towards a Revolutionary Criticism*: “in a riot of semiosis, carnival unhinges all transcendental signifiers … by the radical humour, power structures are estranged” (145).

In this dissertation, I have chosen to explore transgressiveness from the multiple perspectives already noted, as well as the Carnivalesque and Bonnie Lyons’ explanation of “edginess”. The texts of Englander and Foer, I believe, work to defy accepted conventions, to remake signifiers associated with the Holocaust (what Langer describes as “impurified language”) and to incorporate chaos, liminality and laughter. The authors’ representations of the Shoah create room to engage with the complications and grey areas which have arisen from this set of events. Like Rabelias, like Bakhtin, this choice is an act of positive reconfiguration, and perhaps even of revolution.

In “Nathan Englander and Jewish Fiction from and on the Edge”, Bonnie Lyons defines Englander’s work as “edgy”, meaning

> unsettling, exciting, dark, daring, provocative, trend-setting, nervous, irritable, having a sharp or biting edge; but also having to do with borders, margins, and boundaries, lips or rims, or at a brink or on the verge. That is, fiction that is not calm, easy going, or laid back. (65)

Lyons notes that Englander's edginess, and as I argue Foer's too, is apparent in their style, themes, and context. Foer and Englander's works are uncomfortable and indeed unsettling, resisting languages of consolation, probing and expanding the limits of Holocaust literature. Inherent in Englander and Foer's exploration of Holocaust fiction is the question of morality. However, morality does not restrict these writers in the ways in which Langer and Eaglestone argue is necessary. Rather, Englander and Foer rely on their fiction to imagine and comment on moral dilemmas, making space for ambivalence.

In discussing morality within these literary works, this dissertation turns to Tzvetan Todorov's *Facing the Extreme: Moral Life in the Concentration Camps*. His theoretical framework for morality is linked to the two ways in which he classifies human activities: the teleological and the intersubjective (286). While the former refers to actions that are defined by their purpose, and judged by their ultimate outcome, the intersubjective is defined by its ability to establish a relationship between individuals. It is "communicative in the broadest sense, these actions have to do with understanding or emulation, love or power, or the constitution of self or other" (286). It is to this second category, Todorov asserts, that morality belongs.

For Todorov, moral actions are rational, because one takes them upon oneself and directs them towards another individual or individuals (287). It is thus that in acting morally "I treat the other person as a person, which is to say he becomes the end of my action" (287), and so the person is not treated as a means to an end. Even dignity is defined as moral, since on such occasions the beneficiary is the subject himself who "is, as it were, another person to himself" (287).

However, within camp structures – as in the one Englander creates in "Camp Sundown"– the conditions are vastly different from any other circumstances previously known. While acknowledging that in "the literature of the concentration camp…evil is the main character" (121), Todorov makes it explicit that the people within the camps were neither monsters nor beasts, and neither saints nor martyrs (47-160). He notes that acts of courage, self-sacrifice, and revolt were exceptional, as were those acts of outright sadism. He refers to those within the camps as "ordinary people", placed in extraordinary situations and attempting to save their own lives, as well as those of their families (123). Within these limit conditions anyone may become "monstrous", though notably few people become "saints". Todorov will be used in this

study to help navigate through the morality of perpetrators, bystanders, and victims. Englander and Foer resist the uncomplicated binaries of saints and beasts, and their works are ambiguous, refusing definite classifications and condemnations of actions and people. Yet, neither author accepts Alex Perchov's reasoning near the end of *Everything Is Illuminated* that everyone would have done what his grandfather did in those circumstances, and that everyone is implicated in the moral failures of the Shoah. Foer, however, shows compassion for the grandfather's predicament, where a single "right" decision is imponderable. Certainly, ambiguity is central to the works in this dissertation. Englander and Foer inhabit liminal spaces, where "fixed" certainties are probed and disrupted, replaced with the unsettling, provocative, and dark- as Lyons defines it, the edgy.

Chapter One: "The Tumblers"

"The Tumblers" is Englander's first and perhaps most successful experiment in transgressive Holocaust fiction. He expands and challenges the conventions of this genre by integrating another prolific Jewish narrative form: Eastern European folklore. Englander adopts the stories of Tevye the Dairyman and the Fools of Chelm, translating them for a post-Holocaust generation.

In *The Holocaust and the Postmodern*, Robert Eaglestone argues that postmodernism, in its poststructuralist, Eurocentric incarnation, is a response to the Holocaust, as it has changed what identity, memory, and identification–and in this limited case reading– actually are. The issue of identification is problematic because after the Holocaust it is not clear what the human is: it is not clear how or with whom we can or should identify (109). Identification, Eaglestone explains, is integral to reading fiction; the reader must be invested in and able to relate to the narrative, if it is to be successful. However, he is wary of readers' identifying with fictionalized versions of the Shoah, concerned that the realities of the Shoah will be obscured and replaced by the imagined accounts.

Conversely, in this story Englander reimagines the past and its traditions in the wake of their destruction, encouraging identification by using familiar characters of folklore. "The Tumblers" is located both within the historical context of the Second World War and within a Jewish literary tradition. Englander is merging two genres–Holocaust fiction and Eastern European folklore–and subverting both of them in search of a new form of identification.

In this story Englander connects himself directly to the legacy of folklore, which stretches back to the nineteenth century in its engagement with the comic traditions of European Jewry best represented by the author Sholem Aleichem (Bernuth 19). Sholem Aleichem is the penname chosen by Yiddish writer Solomon Naumovich Rabinovich. This *nom de plume* is taken from a Yiddish expression which can be translated as "peace be with you". Sholem Aleichem, born in 1859 in the Ukraine, has been described as the most influential Jewish writer of the nineteenth century and is perhaps best known for his collection of stories *Tevye the Dairyman* which formed the basis for the 1964 musical *Fiddler on the Roof* (Frieden 96). Aleichem's

“polyphony of colloquial monologues” (2) which are at the core of his works, gave expression to the manifold characters of Jewish life (1).

The Fools of Chelm and their History was written by Nobel prize-winner and writer Isaac Bashevis Singer in 1973, although it drew heavily on the work of Sholem Aleichem (Yudkin 820). Yudkin contends that no writer “has so reflected the typical and changing condition of the Jew in the current era, from the Polish Jewish heart-land to present-day [1980s] New York, taking in and assessing the multifarious ideologies of Yiddishism, socialism, assimilation, and Zionism” (818). Singer is credited with filtering the modern Jewish experience through its pre-Holocaust traditions.

Sholem Aleichem’s stories of Tevye the Dairyman and Singer’s *Fools of Chelm* focus on the eccentric and extraordinary lives of the shtetl Jews of Eastern Europe. The characters are self-centered but good-hearted fools, whose absurd logic and predilections for tall tales add whimsy and adventure to the mundane activities of Jewish life. Englander juxtaposes these beloved characters of Jewish Eastern European folklore to the very forces which attempted to destroy this tradition. His Chelmites grapple with the Third Reich, and in so doing, reaffirm their relevance in a world that has forever been changed by the Holocaust.

Singer’s *The Fools of Chelm,* is a satirical civics lesson, an absurd examination of society’s failures in this microcosm of a community which readily embraces the title of "fool". The literary device of the “fool” has a long tradition; “after playing a minor role on the stage throughout the late Middle Ages, [the fool] steps forward at the height of the Renaissance to assume one of the main roles in life's drama ... he [the fool] gives articulation to the doubts and uncertainties of one of the great ideological upheavals in human history” (Kaiser 11). In “Natural Fools and the Historiography of Renaissance Folly”, Paromita Chakravarti further details

> the momentousness of the fool's appearance in Europe, on the cusp between collapsing Medieval values and an emergent Renaissance ethos, as a spokesperson and an icon of the new age, identified with its defining philosophical movement, humanism. The texts and contexts of folly were developed by humanist scholar-reformers like Cusanus, More and Montaigne, by its ideologues, Erasmus and Burton, and Rabelais,

> Shakespeare and Cervantes, its literary practitioners. However, the relationship between humanism and folly was complex. (208)

The literary interest in the artificial fool, one who uses artfulness and laughter as satire and critique (Hornback 309), was a staple of Renaissance writing and is exemplified in Shakespeare's *King Lear*. Here he transfigures the fool from a mere court jester into the truth-teller who accompanies Lear on his journey of exile and self-exploration, refusing to abandon him (Milward 21-27). The audience is first made aware of the Fool's capacities by the song sung to Lear upon his abdication of the throne:

> Fools had ne'er less grace in a year,
> For wise men are grown foppish,
> And know not how their wits to wear,
> Their manners are so apish. (1.4.137-140)

At this moment it is the world of the wise that has "grown foppish" (1.4.138), while the fool, whose part inherently rejects those civilities of court by which others are bound, is empowered to inform Lear of his own, natural foolishness. The Fool's vision is already reflecting what is happening in Lear's unnatural abdication, and the strife of war and conflict which has been generated by it. He understands, like Englander's fools, when the old rational order is undone and when it is the rational that is truly foolish. Though still relying upon his wit to temper the bleakness of his message, the Fool's clarity of the situation is not scathing nor necessarily satirical. It is not the Fool who is artificial, but rather it is the artifice of the world around him which he seeks to expose (Milward 21-27). The foolishness of Bakhtin's Carnivalesque, is used much in the same way as in *King Lear*, exposing the artifice of Medieval Church life, and its unbearable control.

Englander's fools serve the same function as the artificial fools of the Renaissance and the Bakhtinian Carnivalesque but are equally closely aligned with the "natural", or "holy fool", whose most famous representation is found in Dostoyevsky's *The Idiot*. Originally published in Russian in 1869, the novel is centered around Prince Myshkin, a "completely beautiful human being" (as Dostoyevsky put it in an 1868 letter to his niece Sofia Alexandrovna), who has to navigate a duplicitous, complex and privileged Russian society in which his utter sincerity has no place. As A. S. Byatt comments in a review for *The Guardian,* "Prince

Myshkin is a Russian Holy Fool, a descendant of Don Quixote, and a type of Christ in an un-Christian world" (June 2004). He is, in the end, a tragic fool, his downfall being his innocence, his steadfast belief in lost absolutes which have no place in the nineteenth century. Situated amid the egotism, vanity, and passions of Russian high society, he is declared an idiot and is eventually driven mad. However, like the fools of Chelm, Myshkin's assumed foolishness renders the actions of his contemporaries absurd, exposing the flaws in their ethos of self-advancement and egotism.

By contrast with the sanctioned communal practice of the Carnival, the fools of Chelm and Dostoyevsky's Prince Myshkin prove themselves exceptions to accepted societal configurations, so they are inevitably destroyed by the norms and demands of their societies. These two traditions, of Carnival and the "holy fool", critique the power structures within which they exist, inviting laughter, which is at once satirical, innocent and serious, in order to highlight the sometimes-fatal flaws of the contexts they inhabit.

In "The Tumblers", laughter and chaos are deadly serious. By inserting the staples of Jewish and Eastern European folklore into the extraordinary circumstances of the Holocaust, Englander can emphasize the absurdities of the Nazi project. The contrast between the intuitive folkloric reasoning of the fools of Chelm and the brutal rationality of the Third Reich's insidiousness that would attempt to destroy their "dot-on-the-map hamlet-called-city" (51) is one steeped in humour, irony and deep pathos. As the hamlet of Chelm becomes a ghetto and the ghetto is dissolved, the inheritors of this literary tradition find themselves "struggling to apply their common sense to a situation anything but common" (31). The use of "common sense" is ironic, Chelm's logic is decidedly, famously, foolish and ill-equipped to understand this invasion. Until this moment our fools have lived almost entirely isolated,

> [t]he Wise Men [having] seen to this when the town council was first founded. They drew up a law on a length of parchment, signed it, stamped on their seal, and nailed it, with much fanfare, to a tree: not a wind, not a whistle, not the shadow from a cloud floating outside city limits, was welcome in the place called Chelm. (27)

This decree emphasizes the illogicality of Chelm, in believing that a mere statement could prevent the wind itself from intruding and it serves to indict the hyper-rationality of the Nazis whose war machine did seem to defy nature, with its laws invariably and unpityingly applied.

This narrow obsessiveness renders the invasion of Chelm irrational as well as immoral, though it was consistent with the practices of the Nazi extermination. In her analysis of the 1965 novel by Jerzy Kosiński, *The Painted Bird*, Sue Vice looks at the "shocking disjunction between the 'everyday' lives of the peasants among whom the boy in *The Painted Bird* lives, and the intrusion of the Second World War" (71). Like the peasant in Kosiński's novel, the Chelmites way of life appears to be timeless, but is "intersected by pure historic detail" (71) of the Holocaust. The confrontation between the two is at the center of Englander's story.

Englander's Chelmites choose to follow the wisdom of their predecessors, which becomes an oddly empathetic response to their circumstances. They turn back to the wisdom of Gronom the Ox, the first sage and leader of Chelm who had sentenced a carp to death by drowning and had saved the festival of Shavuot[3] by declaring that "water was sour cream and sour cream water" (27). His logic was "still employed when the invaders built the walls around a corner of the city, creating the Ghetto of Chelm. There were so many good things lacking and so many bad in abundance that the people … renamed almost all they had" (28). When the inhabitants of Chelm transmute darkness into freedom and filth into hope, they resist defeat and determinedly endorse their core values of optimism and innocence. Their legendarily 'topsy-turvy' reasoning is given new life by Englander, even within the grip of a Nazi occupation.

In *Admitting the Holocaust,* Lawrence Langer argues that Holocaust fiction as a genre is constrained by the "urgency of the historical event [which] continues to exert its mysterious power over modern consciousness" (64). Among the limitations Langer notes is "the impurification of language": whereas "literature generalizes human experience … the events of atrocity we call the Holocaust insist on their singularity. The imagination seeks to link the two" (66) but is thwarted by the "associative despair" (66) of the genocide[4]. Englander elegantly subverts Langer's theory. The renaming of sorrows into joys stems from innocence that cannot be despised, as it adheres to a legacy of compromised common sense which is

[3] Shavuot, the festival which celebrates the giving of the Torah to the Jewish people, is marked by the eating of dairy products only. The simple explanation for this dietary decree is that the Five Books of Moses provide the basis for the commandments concerning the proper slaughtering of meat to render it kosher and so fit for consumption. Before the Jews received the Torah, they were not permitted to eat meat, and so tradition has it that they were confined to non-meat products.

[4] This is discussed in detail in this work's introduction, page 7, par. 2.

defiantly set against unimaginable oppression. This intentional use of folly counterbalances despair and horror, while offsetting an inclination towards Holocaust piety.

Death is exempt from such optimism, because Englander understands that there is "nothing to put in its place" (28). The success of his narrative depends on the ability to balance the absurdities and innocence of the fool without falling into "a language of consolation" (Langer 66). Thus, he pivots and reinforces the brutal reality into which he has transposed these beloved characters of Jewish folklore. Instead, when faced with impending death, Englander's characters choose action: "The *mahmir* Rebbe, the most pious of them all, [sends] Mendel outside the [ghetto] walls" (28).

Mendel is the grandson of Gronom the Ox, and a member of the smallest and strictest sect of Jews in Chelm; the *Mahmirim*. Outside the ghetto, Mendel and the reader alike are presented with another factual lunacy of the war: the re-appropriation of Jewish property after the owners have been forcibly removed. "The streets … were the streets of their town, the homes their homes, even if others now lived in them" (28). Mendel has become a criminal in his own home, or rather, being Jewish, he is the crime. Nevertheless, he is sanguine,

> happy to find that his grandfather's wisdom had been adopted among the peasants … potatoes were treated as gold, and a sack of gold might as well have been potatoes. Mendel traded away riches' worth of the latter (now the former) for as much as he could conceal of the former (now the latter). He took the whole business to be a positive sign, thinking that people were beginning to regain their good sense. (28)

However, Mendel's reappearance in the ghetto erodes this hope for the reader, if not the Fool. The ghetto of Chelm, "alive with hustle and bustle" (29) is being liquidated and our fools, the ultra-orthodox *Mahmirim*, are sent to the railway station, presumably for transportation to a concentration camp. Here, Englander subtly controverts certain ingrained connotations of Holocaust fiction. Confusion abounds among the Jews, who are unsure about their destination and the interpretation of the Nazis' order to bring only essentials. The *Mahmirim*, eschewing the relaxed attitude of the less observant sect of fellow-Jews (the *Meykylim*), decide that "the essentials" mean nothing more than their long underwear, for "an earthly edict, even one coming from their abusers, should be translated strictly lest the invaders think the Jews were not pious in their observance" (33). This obedience will ultimately spare them the boxcar.

Nevertheless, this interpretation comes with its costs, as our *Mahmirim* remove their ritual fringes, the women take off their head coverings and the men shave off their beards. In obeying the decree of their oppressors, the *Mahmirim* contravene the laws passed down to them from the sages. They remove these signs of their Jewishness, signs as recognizable as the yellow stars so infamously imposed upon Jews across Europe. Yet, this act is a voluntary one, responding to a decree handed down by their Rebbe. It is a thoroughly Jewish reaction to an inhumane system – taking a law and interpreting it to the best of their ability, as they have done for centuries with their sacred texts. The Chelmites act only on their terms and thus, even in their degradation, there is a sense of the resistance of the fool.

This resistance extends to the train tracks, where all the inhabitants of the now liquidated ghetto are waiting uncertainly. The *Mahmirim* move away from the crowd "in case – God forbid – one of [them], shivering in long underwear and with naked scalp, should be mistaken for a member of that [*meky*l] court" (33). The stubbornness of the *Mahmirim* in insisting that they are distinguished from the other Jews in the eyes of those who see them all as equally sub-human is not only that of the fool. Rather, Englander is here relying on tropes of Jewish humour. As Friedman and Friedman point out in *Humor and the Omniscient God,* "Jews are known to be a nation of thirty sceptics. According to the well-known joke, even Jews on desert islands have to build two Synagogues: the one they pray in and the one they never attend" (29). Jews happily make fun of their mulishness and here, in circumstances decidedly worse than being stranded on a desert island, the Chelmites again assert their Jewish identity.

It is this stubbornness which compels the *Mahmirim* to make their way through a tunnel, away from the certitude of the Nazi boxcars; "unaware of their good fortune" (36), they board a "gentile train" (36). Whilst they assume, ridiculously, that there is always a second train, just so that *Mahmirim* will never have to ride with *Meykilim*, they have instead joined "a train of showmen … travelling about during wartime" (36). Although this turnaround is entirely surprising for the reader, the *Mahmirim* have better luck, as "very little in the way of oddities could shock" (36) these circus performers. Having removed all signs of their Judaism, thin from malnutrition, and in matching long underwear, our fools are mistaken for acrobats. In a sense, our fools are moral and intellectual acrobats, having to employ various manoeuvres to navigate a world so different form their own.

"The Tumblers" evades the constraints placed upon "authors attempting to walk the high-wire" (37) of this field, a meta-comment on the theme and imagery of the circus in the story. Englander is at his best when he employs the very metaphors and imagery supposedly made inaccessible by his subject matter, exploiting the mismatch between the folk-humour of Chelm and the abuses of the Holocaust. "In the way in which only God can turn a selfish act into a miracle" (38), Mendel searches out the bar and finds himself across a table from a drunken French horn player. It is through her that he is first made aware of the assumption that the Chelmites are acrobats; then he soon learns of the fate he has temporarily escaped:

> "… unmatched feats of magic [are] performed with the trains. They go away full-packed so tightly that babies are stuffed in over heads … and come back empty, as if never before used."
> "And the Jews?" asked Mendel. "What trick is performed with the Jews?"
> "Sleight of hand … a classic illusion. First, they are here and then they are gone … those who witness it faint dead away, overcome by the grand scale of the illusion. For a moment the magician stands, a field of Jews at his feet, then nothing. … the train sits empty. The magician stands alone on the platform. Nothing remains but the traditional puff of smoke. This trick he performs, puff after puff, twenty-four hours a day." (40)

This description of the "magic trick" of Jewish extermination is dark, provocative, and biting (Lyons 65). It is a particularly striking example of Englander's "edginess", an unsettling angle from which to approach the gas chambers and the crematoria. Throughout "The Tumblers", the reader is presented with images that are staples of Holocaust fiction – ghettos, trains and smoke – only to have them inverted and transformed in ways which are innovative, and which probe the limits of the genre of Holocaust fiction. Englander "runs the risk of flouting the sensitive expectations of his readers" (Merle Williams 6). He is attempting an act of acrobatics himself; poised between a powerful metaphor and a sense of irreverence that verges on the offensive, he can articulate the unspeakable, a truth that so many refused to acknowledge, in a way that even the fools of Chelm can understand. By evoking a magic trick, he articulates that utter disbelief in the magnitude of the Shoah which was felt both upon the first revelation of its extent and by subsequent generations. This passage teeters on the edge of acceptable writing, testing the limits of what its reader can handle.

Mendel relates the horn player's information to his Rebbe. Since Mendel's companions are poised between life and death, there is no choice: they "must tumble!" (41). This is an apt description, not only regarding the routine they can cobble together in the few hours they have on the train, but as the choice of title for this story. There is no elegance or expertise in a tumble; it is defined as a "headlong fall" (Definition of 'tumble', Merriam-Webster), connoting all the clumsiness we have so far seen from our fools. Yet, the choice to tumble redefines this term, more closely associating it with the feats of acrobatics the *Mahmirim* are aiming to achieve. In *Facing the Extreme*, Tzvetan Todorov argues that the "preservation of dignity requires transforming a situation of constraint into one of freedom" (61), even when the extremity of the constraint means that the only choice left is doing what one is forced to do. Certainly, the declaration "we must tumble" (41) is among many examples of the characters' managing to find dignity, despite the degradations imposed on them, including when starvation leads to an attempt to take a banana from a monkey (52). However, absurd as their choice is, it is one rooted in the innocence of the fool, the necessity for survival and a heart-breaking understanding of their situation:

> … it is no more unbelievable than the reality they had just escaped, no more unfathomable than the magic of disappearing Jews. If the good people of Chelm could believe that water was sour cream, if the peasant who woke up that first morning in Mendel's bed and put on Mendel's slippers and padded over to the window could believe that the view he saw had always been his own, then why should they not pass as acrobats and tumble across the earth until they found a place where they were welcome? (42)

Here Englander deftly manoeuvres through the various types of "innocence" at play in the piece. The peasant in Mendel's slippers, claiming his home while the real owner is only a wall away, is practising a form of malicious self-deception, whereas the French horn player is drunk enough to speak a terrifying truth in disguised form. To comment explicitly on the deportations would have been extremely dangerous, especially to a stranger. Neither instance is comparable to the profound innocence which is inherent in our fools. Englander's treatment of these figure of Jewish folklore is at its most nuanced. By choosing characters famous for their absurdity, he can avoid implication in the sanctity reserved for victims or the reverence dedicated to survivors. He captures their innocence without sentimentalizing it.

The fools devise a routine, drawing on information that Mendel cobbles together from the other performers and his recollections of a circus which once came to Chelm. Here they are truly clownish, "scurry[ing] about on hands and feet mocking the movements of a crab" (41), jumping off luggage racks and learning cartwheels and handstands. The ridiculousness of the situation is not lost on them, and the refugees from Chelm take a moment to laugh "as the uncondemned might, as free people in free countries do" (42). In sharing their laughter, the characters become identifiable to the reader in the very way that Eaglestone is so wary of. In this way, against all reason, these characters make "space for themselves" (Belham 53) within this literary field, Englander gives agency to these victims. He has described himself as "in-between and unsettled`' (Lyons 65), yet by transplanting Jewish folklore into a post-Holocaust context with a purposeful transgression of the parameters of this genre, Englander is demarcating a space for himself amongst the boldest Jewish writers.

It is by re-embracing the transgressive and the folkloric that Englander gives weight to the final moments of the narrative. When the curtain opens, the fate of the *Mahmirim* is as surely sealed as that of the *Meykilim* who boarded the Nazi boxcars. While the latter are involved in a "magic trick", our fools are cast in a "Jewish ballet" (54). There is a bizarre staging in both of these situations, a theatricality which warps everyday life. In the midst of the enemy, their act is taken for a parody of the very foolish Jews that they are. The audience is bedecked with medals for "skill, efficiency and bravery" (53) in juxtaposition to the ragged tumblers and their desperate attempt at survival, which is taken as farce. Notably, not one Nazi is ever described in this story; they are shadows, snipers on buildings, men being pulled by dogs and an opaque audience. They become a single entity, a nondescript metonym for violence and domination.

Though the fools of Chelm lack the skill and efficiency of those who have degraded them for so long, their ability to be openly foolish, to act without constraint, even in the face of certain death, is the most rational course of action. They are bravely, if only temporarily, fighting against their extermination. The love and hope which permeate their actions stand in stark contrast to the efficiency and clinical brutality of the audience before them and express perhaps the truest meaning of what it is to be a "fool". Here Englander is at his finest. As the tumblers' audience laughs, unable to recognize what is in front of them, we, the readers, can quite clearly see the larger farce at work. The performance becomes an inevitably ludicrous response to the obsessive efficiency of the Nazi war machine.

Englander's representation of the fools of Chelm is an apt example of Eaglestone's claim that postmodern literary strategies may function as a response to the Holocaust. The recognizable characters of Jewish folklore are as altered by the events of the Shoah as are writing and reading in its wake. If, as Eaglestone claims, "it is not clear what the human is after the Holocaust" (109), then the creative pursuits and imaginings of human beings must also be re-examined and identified. The Chelmites do just this, renaming all of their sorrows in order to survive and comprehend their new reality. The reader too must acclimatize to the reimagined folkloric figures, as well as to a new type of Holocaust fiction and victim. When Mendel, breaking from the group, lifts his hands to the unseen audience, he is entirely alone.

> There were no snipers, as there are for the hands that reach out of the ghettos; no dogs, as for the hands that reach out from the cracks in boxcar floors; no angels waiting, as they always do, for the hands that reach out from chimneys into ash-clouded skies. (56)

The closing segment of Singer's *The Fools of Chelm* sees Gronom the Ox reflecting on the misadventures of the past fifty or so pages: "We do not wish to conquer the world, but our wisdom is spread throughout it just the same. The future is bright, the chances are good that someday the whole world will be one great Chelm" (56). Gronom anticipates the growing folly of the rest of the world, whereas in "The Tumblers", Englander juxtaposes the deadly rationality which has overtaken that world with the Chelmites' folly. Chelm is partitioned, ghettoized, and finally liquidated, while its residents are forced to "tumble across [an] earth" (42) the absurdities of which even the Wise Men of Chelm could not have imagined.

"The Tumblers" is a tragic-comic rendering of the stories of Sholem Aleichem and Singer, strengthened by Englander's remarkable wit. But the pathos of the narrative raises questions about how Jews may interact with the Eastern Europe of our past, and the Western culture that betrayed, ejected and destroyed so many. Indeed, as Chakravarti states, folly is complex (208). In resurrecting these characters, this town, Englander is defiantly keeping alive and giving new life to traditions which the Third Reich tried to obliterate.

Chapter Two: "What We Talk About When We Talk About Anne Frank"

In "What We Talk About When We Talk About Anne Frank", Englander links himself to prolific American short story writer Raymond Carver, this connection is clear from the deliberate allusion to his title "What We Talk About When We Talk About Love" to echoing the *mise-en-scène* of two couples seated around a kitchen table. In tracing the trajectory of Englander's Shoah narratives, the pivot he makes from the style adopted in "The Tumblers" towards the sparer aesthetic of Carver is noteworthy. He goes so far as to parallel the opening lines of Carver's piece, turning "My friend Mel McGinnis was talking. Mel McGinnis is a cardiologist, and sometimes that gives him the right" (1) into his own "Mark and Lauren live in Jerusalem, and people from there think it gives them the right" (3). While his elevated status as a medical specialist sometimes grants Mel McGinnis his right, Mark and Lauren's is less acceptable to their narrator. Though they believe that living in Israel permits them to lecture freely on the Occupation,[5] the resentment expressed by the narrator quells this line of reasoning. Mel, moreover, is identified as the narrator's friend, a position which makes the narrator more lenient towards his opinions, whereas a relationship exists only between Deb and Lauren in Englander's story, giving our narrator little inducement to be forgiving towards Mark.

The choice to pay homage to Carver is an interesting one for Englander. As an American short story writer, it makes sense that he would wish to align himself with someone who is credited with reviving the short story as a literary form (Gary Williams 23). Carver's fiction began to achieve prominence when Martha Foley included "Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?" in *The Best American Short Stories 1967*. From that point until his death in 1988, Carver became one of the most influential short story writers in North America, embracing a minimalist, realist aesthetic which focused on the quiet desperation of the "working poor among whom Carver grew up–and whose mode of perceiving he never fully left behind" (Gary Williams 25). Carver

[5] The term "Occupation" refers to Israeli military control of Palestinian territories -specifically The West Bank since June 1967. However, "Occupation" has become a catch-all expression for the constant tensions, as well as political, military and terror-related violence, between the State of Israel and the Palestinian people, who are located mainly in militarily occupied Gaza and the quasi-capital of Ramallah on the West Bank of the River Jordan. This is alternatively known as the "Israeli-Palestinian conflict".

was the son of a saw filer in a lumber mill in Clatskanie, Oregon. Married at eighteen, and a father of two by twenty, Carver worked at similar jobs to his characters in the “blue-collar stratum”; he was a janitor, delivery man, mill worker and eventually, as is sporadically seen in his work, a professor (Gary Williams 25-27).

Similarly, Englander’s stories are inextricably Jewish in their subject matter. Derived from his own background, since he grew up as an Orthodox Jew and later became completely secular, his characters expose all the absurdities, peculiarities and beauty of modern American Jewish life as Englander perceives it. Englander, like Carver, has had the experience of being immersed in a particular world and then breaking off from that world, thus being able to view it as an intimate outsider.

While Carver’s subject matter is the working poor, that lower stratum which Bakhtin identifies as embracing carnival as an escape from its oppressive existence, Carver’s pieces are utterly devoid of those forces. His characters are often confused, beaten down, and liminal. They are “men and women out of work, or between jobs, at loose ends, confused and often terrified … each bewildered by what has just happened and by what might happen next” (Wolff) Indeed, not only is the riotous joy of the Carnivalesque absent from Carver’s stories, but they are marked by the notion that “things will get worse hereafter” (Gary Williams 25). The direct connection to Carver does appear at odds with Englander’s style up to this point. As Michiko Kakutani points out in her *New York Times* review “Nude Rabbis and Tales of Revenge”, “whereas Carver’s slender stories are grounded in the banalities and oddities of ordinary life, Mr. Englander’s tales use allegory and folkloric techniques … to tackle the largest questions of morality and history” (Kakutani).

In considering “The Tumblers”, I have described Englander’s work as “edgy” in terms of Lyons’ definition, and as connected to Bakhtin’s notion of the Carnivalesque. In relation to Carver, however, Miriam Clark makes the opposing claim:

> Carver's stories are not, like the novelistic discourse M. M. Bakhtin describes, many-voiced or multi-languaged. Carver reduces polyphony, backgrounds the many voices and the carnival spirit, which are the essence of "modern literature" and novelistic discourse as Bakhtin understands them. He suppresses the folk energies that are the founding forces of heteroglossia and that rule in many contemporary writers (240).

Carver's success lies in the carefully considered economy of his stories. He does not often make use of parody, irony, or much of what Clark calls, playfulness (240). As Geoffrey Wolff comments in his review of Carver's *Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?*, these stories "have been carefully shaped, shorn of ornamentation and directed away from anything that might mislead. They are brief stories but by no means stark: they imply complexities of action and motive and they are especially artful in their suggestion of repressed violence" (Clark). Englander is playing with this sparseness of narrative, and while refracting Carver's subject matter through his Jewish lens, he evokes repressed violence through the model of Jewish oppression: the Holocaust. In adopting Carver's lens, Englander's interest in the Holocaust does not waver, but his means of depicting it is drastically altered.

In his 1981 story "Cathedral", another of Carver's nameless male narrators describes his interaction with Robert, a dear friend of his wife, who is staying the night. Robert is blind, and it is this blindness that is seemingly the source of the narrator's discomfort: "His being blind bothered me. My idea of blindness came from the movies. In the movies, the blind moved slowly and never laughed … A blind man in my house was not something I looked forward to" (1). The story follows an "intrusion plot", what Emily Hoffman, citing Girdler B. Fritch, describes as a stranger's entering a group in which "their presence is accepted by one or more persons and rejected by one or more, with resulting conflict, until someone's eyes are opened to the situation, to the danger, to a possible solution" (45). Certainly, Robert is disquieting through more than his sightlessness, owing also to the intimacy he shares with the narrator's wife; the two have been in communication for years, and she "[tells] him everything, or so it seem[s]" to her husband. Robert is other to the narrator both as a blind man and as a stranger, and yet intimately acquainted with the details of his married life, details whose extent the narrator does not know and which he has not voluntarily offered. The dynamics in his home are left in tumult, as he becomes powerless and vulnerable before this nearly omniscient blind man, who shares a closeness with his wife that he does not.

Hoffman argues that Englander borrows from this narrative, as well as "What We Talk About When We Talk About Love" (44). In this instance, Mark and Lauren, now going by the religious names Yerucham and Shoshana are perceived as the invaders, and Shoshana holds intimate knowledge of Deb from the years before the narrator knew her. Moreover, his dislike

of the couple, or at least of Yerucham, stems from what the narrator does not understand, his religiosity, his "Orthodox-Ultra" (5). Again, lines seem to echo between the two writers: "The blind man, feature this, he was wearing a full beard! A beard on a blind man! Too much, I say" (3), Carver's narrator exclaims. Englander's narrator continues: "Now, I know I mentioned the beard on Mark. … That thing grows right up to his eyeballs. It's like having eyebrows on top and bottom both" (14). While Robert's beard suggests a virility and a confident masculinity the narrator did not expect, Yerucham expresses physically the religious superiority he continually asserts. Both narrators feel threatened by the claims of the other men who have forced their way into their lives.

As Hoffman points out, in both narratives "the narrator's acceptance of his guests becomes total in a transcendent moment of marijuana-fuelled communion marked by the symbolic touching of hands" (46). At the climax of Carver's story, the narrator attempts to explain a cathedral to a blind man through a drawing, with Robert's hand on his own, as his hand "went all over the paper" (Carver 13). "It was like nothing else in my life up to now," Carver's narrator reflects. In Englander's piece, a similar joy awakens in the narrator, as he, Deb, Shoshana and Yerucham dance in a thunder storm, "It is the silliest and most glorious I can remember feeling in years" (26). Yet, while this moment of triumph concludes Carver's story, Englander returns to the edgy as his narrative develops. This enables him to pay homage to Carver whilst moving beyond his framework

The space Englander creates is an intimate one, an ordinary reunion of old friends which turns sinister and deeply disturbing. Yet, as the conversation becomes more invasive, the space itself contracts. The story begins in the large Florida home of Deb and her husband, who is our narrator. The various emotions attached to this reunion, excitement on the part of Deb, resentment on the part of her husband, play out in the bright kitchen, reaching out to the living room and dining room. Yerucham and Shoshana, living in a cramped Israeli apartment with ten daughters, are taken aback at "all this house" (4) which Deb and her husband have for just one son; yet at this moment it is necessary to contain the awkwardness and tension of the foursome. Though Shoshana and Deb were "glued at the hip growing up" (4), the intervening decades have created a stark contrast between them and their respective spouses. Our narrator and Deb are "secular" American Jews, whereas Shoshana and Yerucham, previously Lauren and Mark, have become embodiments of a different kind of Judaism. Along with their new "old world" names, they have adopted the garb of Eastern Europe: Yerucham in a black suit

with his “beard resting on his stomach” (5), and Shoshana in “a bad dress and a giant blonde Marilyn Monroe wig” (5), although the tradition of the wig stretches much further back than the star and cult figure of the 1950s, ironically evoking centuries of female modesty. Yerucham and Shoshana, once modern American Jews themselves, have chosen to return to an older set of Jewish norms and values, the very practices for which their families were persecuted in Europe. The tension in this reunion is more than simply that between four disparate personalities, rather it arises between two competing notions of Judaism which play out during the narrative.

While the women are “half celebrating, and half can’t handle how intense the whole thing is” (7), our narrator finds the presence of the visiting couple, the husband specifically, to be oppressive. Although he is “not one to get drunk on a Sunday afternoon … with a plan to spend the day with Mark, [he] jumps at the chance” (7). This is how this group comes to recreate Carver’s *mise-en-scène*, the four of them sitting “at the kitchen table with a bottle of vodka” (7) in front of them, though in Carver’s version they are drinking gin.

Yet Englander soon constricts the space. Just as the couples are beginning to relax, as our narrator is “starting to take a real shine to these two” (11) ultra-orthodox Jews, the tension flares again. Deb confesses to knowing that their son Trevor has been hiding pot; she in turn has been hiding the fact from her husband in the hope that Trevor may confide in her. While Deb “doesn’t seem troubled at all” (15), to her husband this incident feels “a lot like betrayal” (15) – and the strain is palpable. Trevor had hidden the pot in the laundry hamper: “leave it to a teenaged boy to think that’s the best place to hide something” (18). Just as Deb found the stash in a space her son believed to be private and secret, so too Englander exposes the proverbial dirty laundry of this couple. Here he successfully turns linguistic cliché into a concrete dramatic situation. Like a Carver story, every element has a purpose, with the literal and figurative closely linked. The resolution of this conflict is rapid and unsatisfactory; the two are high and exchange a simple “‘Are we good now?’ … ‘We’re good’” (18). Yet, the development of the narrative implies that their marriage is stable enough to sustain even conflict. Furthermore, this encounter lays the foundation for a larger debate, through which these marriages are pitted against each other in the claustrophobic kitchen pantry.

The foursome, while discussing their vastly different lives, challenge one another’s notions of what it means to be Jewish. Deb and Shoshana “went to school together their whole lives” (4),

best friends inculcated with the same values in the same Orthodox Jewish day school, complete with ankle-length denim skirts, Passover nut roll and "emergency preparedness methods" (15) for rolling joints. However, Deb married our narrator who "turned her secular" (4). Lauren met Mark and they "went from Orthodox to ultra-Orthodox" (4), sounding to the narrator's mind like a repackaged detergent. Deb, now secular, clings to an unhealthy obsession with the Holocaust to define her Jewish identity. The remembrance of and paranoid preparedness for oppression has replaced the modern Orthodox rituals she used to practice. Deb professes the importance of Jewish culture, whereas her connection to her people is actually defined by her status as a member of a minority group. Yerucham, Shoshana's religious husband and the son of a Holocaust survivor, insists that Jewish identity does, and must, have more "foundation than one terrible crime" (22).

Through this tension between Yerucham and Deb, Englander navigates the dynamics of differing approaches to Holocaust representation. These concerns are perhaps best illustrated through Yerucham's recounting of an interaction with his father and another survivor:

> "[S]o he's sitting in the locker room, trying to put a sock on, which is, at that age, basically the whole workout in itself. It's no quick business. And I see, while I'm waiting, and I can't believe it. I nearly pass out. The guy next to him, it's three before my father's number. You know, in sequence … I mean they're separated by two people. And I look at this guy. I've never seen him before in my life. So I say, 'Excuse me, sir' … and to my father I say, 'Do you know this gentleman? Have you two met? I'd really like to introduce you, if you haven't' … 'You're both survivors,' I tell them. 'Look, look,' I say … 'the numbers … they're the same.' And they both hold out their arms to look at the tiny ashen tattoos. I mean think about it … around the world surviving the un-survivable. These two old guys end up with enough money to retire to Carmel Lake and play golf every day. So I say to my dad 'Look he's right ahead of you' … and my father says 'all that means is, he cut ahead of me in line. There, same as here. This guy's a cutter. I just didn't want to say.' 'Blow it out your ear' the other guy says. And that's it. Then they go back to putting on socks'" (10-11).

While the narrator, "loves that kind of story" (11), Deb is "crestfallen" (11), appalled by the lack of what Gillian Rose terms "Holocaust piety" or a redemptive tale grounded in an optimism which distances the audience from the disturbing actuality of the Holocaust (Boswell

1). Even though these two men have "survived the un-survivable" (11) and have "made enough money to retire to Carmel Lake and play golf everyday" (11), they neither wish to recall their shared past, nor do they overtly attribute any moral or religious significance to it. This impious interaction shocks and disappoints Deb. She, as her husband informs us, longs for what Langer calls the language of consolation, which would affirm her belief in the sacrosanctity of survivors and bolster her faith in the inherent goodness of humanity – or at least some specific human beings (Langer 66-70). Deb's husband offers a hyperbolic evaluation of exactly what it is that she wants: "one of those stories of a guy who spent three years hiding inside one of those cannons they use for the circus. And at the end of the war … he discovers his lost son breathing through a straw" (9) in a tub of water in that same circus. This farcical illustration exemplifies the narrator's contempt for, and rejection of, the ideological appropriation and moralizing representation of the historical misery of the Shoah. Indeed, the story debunks and ridicules such indulgent sentimentality, juxtaposing this absurd invention to the survivor's nonchalance and Yerucham's cool appraisal of his father.

Yet the narrator is not so much contemptuous of his wife as concerned about what he sees as an "unhealthy obsession" (8) with the Holocaust. Certainly, "she gives this subject a lot, *a lot,* of time" (8); this is a fixation, Shoshana informs both narrator and reader, that has existed since childhood. Though Deb's "grandparents were all born in the Bronx" (12), as her husband incredulously comments, "it's like she's a survivor's kid … it's like … really it's 1937 and [they] live on the edge of Berlin" (12).

Such characters are far from unusual in the literature associated with the Holocaust. In her debut novel, *When God Was a Rabbit* (2011), Sarah Winman imagines Herschel, a Jewish man who spent the Holocaust happily touring America as a violinist (30). Following the war and the disclosure of the atrocities that he had escaped, Herschel took to writing numbers on his arm in imitation of the infamous Auschwitz tattoo, the one Yerucham's father cannot remove, no matter how far distanced he is from the Holocaust itself (29). Herschel is a morally compromised character; degenerating mentally, he comes to believe that he experienced the Shoah, losing himself in the tragedy and self-pity of his imaginings (30).

It is not only in fiction that these imposter survivors exist. In 1995 Binjamin Wilkomirski, whose real name was Bruno Dössekker, published *Fragments: Memories of a Wartime Childhood*. Sold as a fictionalized memoir of Wilkomirski's own experience as a child survivor

of the Holocaust, the work was exposed as fraudulent by Daniel Ganzfried in August 1998. Given the title "The Wilkomirski Affair", the scandal was met with incredulous anger, both in the survivor community and the world at large (Maechler 302). As Robert Eaglestone describes it in *The Holocaust and the Postmodern*, Wilkomirski broke the "autobiographical pact", in which the reader identifies the author as witness (140). The affair has come to be viewed as more than a simple act of exploitation for the sake of profit and fame. Rather, as Stefan Maechler argues in *The Wilkomirski Affair: A Study in Biographical Truth,* Wilkomirski imposed the traumas of his own past onto the more accessible narrative of the Shoah and exploited that "collective ritual of remembering" (302). Isolated by his own fantasies of victimization, he came to identify with that meta-narrative of suffering which brought him into a community of survivors, thus treating him to worldwide sympathy and solidarity (Eaglestone 142). Robert Eaglestone insists that "identity without memory is empty, memory without identity is meaningless" (143), but what of false identification which creates or rather appropriates memory? Wilkomirski's vivid imaginings caused an outcry owing to the insistence that they were based upon a factual memory, a shared experience. As fiction, the work would probably have been received rather differently. However, in creating a false context for it, Wilkomirski made it nearly impossible for *Fragments* to be evaluated purely as fiction, divorced from the context of its scandal.

The character Deb, who is neurotically preoccupied with the idea of the death of potential victims, plotting her "hiding place" (28), is playing and replaying the "not-game" that gives this story its title. This game also encapsulates the consequences of that "crazy education" (12) which instils and perpetuates the trauma of the Holocaust as an indispensable part of Jewish identity. The result appears to be the compromising of both a healthy formation of identity and the meaning of the Shoah. Certainly, Deb is doomed in her disposition towards the subject, seemingly stunted in her ability to move beyond the sentiments which she first attached to the Holocaust, still "talk[ing] about" (29) what she talked about as a child. She thus transforms herself into an adult Anne Frank, with whose situation she is obsessed, pathologically preparing for an unlikely inevitability.

Anne Frank is one of the most widely discussed victims of the Holocaust. From 1942-1944, she and her family were hidden in an attic in Nazi-occupied Amsterdam. Twelve at the beginning of her concealment, Frank has gained fame from the posthumous discovery of her diary, which was kept while she was in hiding. The diary is both educational and inspirational,

known for such excerpts as *"*I keep my ideals, because in spite of everything I still believe that people are really good at heart" (244) and *"*Think of all the beauty still left around you and be happy" (157); it speaks to the ethos of Holocaust piety. Frank is seen largely as a representation of the one and a half million children killed in the Shoah. By clinging to this legacy, Deb has inculcated in herself a type of childish horror regarding the Holocaust, interpreting it from the perspective of a twelve-year-old and unable to comprehend the complexities that would come with maturity. Thus, she aligns herself with the reductionism of Holocaust piety. Englander's story offers a more mature understanding in the form of Yerucham's anecdote, although it is also wilfully cynical and dismissive, while the narrator's response urges readers to consider the nuances that Deb cannot see.

Deb seems to suffer from postmemory, as Marianne Hirsch describes it, or the transference of trauma from one generation to another who did not experience it (Hirsch 5). Hirsch limits this transference to the children of survivors, those who have grown up in the shadow of such horrors and have imbibed the intimate suffering of their parents, which then becomes an integral part of their own experience. As such, it is Yerucham who should be in Deb's position, yet he is able to say and understand what Deb cannot, that survivors are "like everyone else" (9). The "*kavod*" (10), the respect that Yerucham has for his father, is a mediated one, founded in a familial relationship and linked to the negotiation of inter-personal accommodations and differences.

Yerucham's attitude towards survivors' accounts, though often offhand and condescending, does align with Eaglestone's considered ethics of identification. Identification, Eaglestone notes, is "simply, the way in which the reader or audience 'identifies' herself or himself with the textually created characters in the narrative" (22). It is a process so integral to our experience of reading that it is often overlooked and not fully understood, yet is essentially about empathy. However, identification becomes problematized in relation to the Shoah, with certain well-known authors of Holocaust writing – including Elie Wiesel (Wiesel 7) and Primo Levi (Levi 129) – being adamant that their experiences cannot, and should not, be understood by others, at least not in terms of familiar experiential or explanatory frameworks (Eaglestone 22). One reason for such sentiments, which are not unique to the survivors of the Holocaust, is that this identification gives a false sense of comprehensibility to the incomprehensible and normalizes an atrocity that should never be thought of as normal. When expressed in an imaginative narrative form, these relations are inserted into a continuum of fiction, thus

compromising their violence, their particularity and the "unassimilability" of the trauma encountered (Eaglestone 27-29).

This sentiment is re-oriented by Dominick LaCapra, who argues against the conflation of absence and loss in trauma theory (702-717). This misconception LaCapra views as dangerous, as it promotes the "dubious idea that everyone (including perpetrators or collaborators) is a victim, that all history is trauma, or that we all share a pathological public sphere or a 'wound culture'" (712). LaCapra's insistence on the trans-historical nature of absence (as opposed to a historically located loss) is concerned with the appropriation of particular traumas by those who did not experience them. Rather, in *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (2002), LaCapra conceptualizes a way of understanding the past without appropriating it: empathic unsettlement. Empathic unsettlement means putting "oneself in the other's position while recognizing the difference of that position" (78). The listener, or reader, is an "attentive secondary witness" (78), who is able to empathise without identifying with the witness. The witness is involved in a type of "virtual experience" (78), which is distinctly separate from one's own. Stefan Maechler has argued that Binjamin Wilkomirski took "narcissistic possession" (309) of the Holocaust narrative, and like a "sleepwalker" stepped effortlessly into a trauma that was not his own. The lack of empathetic unsettlement in Wilkomirski fostered his great deception and seems key to Deb's disturbing obsession with the Shoah. Here, LaCapra takes pains to distance empathy from identification, to unsettle the actuality of the victim's narrative from the reader's response, hence reducing the blurring of such complicated boundaries.

Yet, of course, Deb is Jewish and has grown up in the shadow of the Shoah. It is part of what her husband calls "that crazy education" (80) she received in her Jewish day school. He does not go into detail about this education, but rather implies the depth of connection to the Holocaust injected into the American Jewish school system, which creates a strange variation on postmemory. Even Yerucham, who is offended by the idea of the "Holocaust as a necessary sign of identity" (22), is lured into playing an emotive game about the Holocaust, partly out of curiosity, partly at the insistence of his wife. This game is described by the characters alternatively as "the Righteous Gentile game" (29), "Who Will Hide Me" (29) or simply, as the story is titled: "What We Talk About When We Talk About Anne Frank" (29). As these formulations suggest, the game forces its players to adopt Deb's anxieties and to imagine a second Holocaust, right there in Florida, with Jews being rounded up. The players must then

identify “righteous gentiles” who will save their lives, and hide them–even at the risk of their own lives.

“I call it a game,” Englander says in a 2012 interview on NPR’s *Fresh Air*, “because it makes it easier to talk about as a game — but it's something we play with dead seriousness in my family — we would wonder who would hide us in the Holocaust” (NPR). In a family for whom non-Jews were all but invisible, this question would be a grave one indeed, confirming their bias against a world experienced or perceived as anti-Semitic and which has consequently fostered their insularity. Even within the story, this dark parlour game becomes even more invasive as the couples turn toward each other, exposing fault-lines in their relationships from which they will not recover. Englander balances the deeply personal dynamics of matrimony against the broader issues of transmitted trauma and the definition of identities.

Throughout the story, our narrator is uncomfortable within his own home, on edge owing to the incongruous figures standing in his living room. Yet, with the discovery of Deb’s teenage experiments with pot, as well as her deception about Trevor’s possession of the substance, he is shaken and uncertain of his place in these relationships. It is as though his wife’s “old secret and [his] son’s new secret are wound up together” and he therefore suspects betrayal. He insists that as the father, any secret shared between mother and son should be shared with him too; he should “always get to know–but pretend not to know–any secret” (17). His insecurities demand much of his wife, perhaps requiring unreasonably an intense intimacy which is his only identifier; after all, he is not named throughout the piece but exists as husband to Deb, father of Trevor, reluctant host to Yerucham and Shoshana. Whereas in Carver’s “Cathedral” the narrator’s sense of invasion is increased by his wife’s relationship with the blind man, the shared and understandable bond between himself and Deb should work to shield him from the foreignness of those guests who have entered and disrupted his life. He and Deb are completely secular and his only reference to Judaism comes from vague evocations of the Orthodox life his wife used to lead.

Deb does not seem to share the same insecurities about her marriage as her husband. She is more assured and in control in this relationship, putting a hand on her husband’s arm to guide him when he may be “taking a tone, or interrupting someone’s story, sharing something private, or making an inappropriate joke” (3). She is content in the marriage and the life that she has created, one which she sees as culturally Jewish and complete.

Yerucham, however, is adamant that "Judaism is a religion. And with religion comes ritual. Culture is nothing … and a weak way to bind generations" (22). Indeed, he goes so far as to insist that the religious way of being a Jew serves him in "all things" (23), relationships, parenting and marriage. When confronted by Deb's question as to whether he believes his marriage to be stronger than hers because of his religious laws, Yerucham answers: "I'm saying your husband would not have that long face, worried over if his wife is keeping secrets … because the relationships, they are defined. They are clear" (23). For Yerucham, it is the "present Holocaust" (24), not the past one, that matters – that is to say, intermarriage. He is concerned primarily with preserving the Jewish generations with that which binds, is welded and "not glued" (23). He asserts that he would not be himself if he were not Jewish; he assumes that Shoshana would not disagree.

However, Shoshanna, the "one Deb has the relationship with" (3), is busying herself with making "a little apple pipe" (23). She is uninterested in the debate taking place or with attempting to move the subject away from matters that would disrupt this "lovely reunion" (23). Used as a tool, alternately by Deb to reminisce about her past or by her husband in order to make a point about religious life and effectively overshadowed by him, Shoshana is the least developed of Englander's characters. Yet she becomes the epicentre of the story's climax. Certainly, the personal shortcomings of these four individuals become inextricably linked to their definitions of Judaism and memory, reaching a peak in which the most insidious make-believe traps them in a past that they cannot actually comprehend experientially.

Indeed, this parlour game extends beyond casual evaluations of the neighbours, or even the opportunity to appreciate the potentially generous people in their lives. As imagined participants in their thought experiment diminish, the group turn toward one another. The after-effects of the Holocaust, despite Yerucham's protestations, make their way into the respective marriages. Deb has transfigured a collective trauma into a personal one, forcing the same type of unhealthy identification onto the others as she herself cultivates. The trauma of the Shoah, and their respective reactions to it, cannot be ignored. As the narrator acknowledges, standing before his wife as if in "a line up" (31), whether he would hide his wife is not "a light question, a throwaway question" (31), but rather constitutes the very foundation of a shared life. Nonetheless, Deb and her husband emerge not only unscathed but renewed. The foundation of their marriage remains the same, a mutual trust reaffirmed by Deb's unwavering knowledge

that “of course” (31) her husband would risk everything for her, and that he in turn is essential to his wife and morally trustworthy in her eyes.

Englander’s conclusion to this narrative is an attempt to evoke the same intensity and pathos as Carver’s “What We Talk About When We Talk About Love”. He is able to recreate this sentiment, yet he is unable to do it with Carver’s minimalism. Carver’s two couples, Nick and Laura, Mel and Terri, sit at their table for the entire story, following a conversation that ebbs and flows as the gin goes down. Their subject is love, Mel’s favourite by Terri’s account (2). The cardiologist believes that his understanding of matters of the heart exceeds its physiology. Yet their dislocated thoughts evoke abuse, suicide, depression and ever-present alcoholism. The foursome find themselves trapped; every plan (whether to eat, to go out, or to make a phone call) fails, and they remain where they are, disempowered and unable to go on. Carver’s climax comes with Mel’s statement that the “gin’s gone” (11) and the narrator’s observation that “I could hear my heart beating. I could hear everyone's heart. I could hear the human noise we sat there making, not one of us moving, not even when the room went dark.” (11). The human heart bookends the narrative, its physical nature present here as its emotional counterpart – love – has been throughout. Ominously this last “human noise” is framed as dark and foreboding; Carver’s symbolism is obvious but well-chosen and resonant.

The drama and coherence of Englander’s story depends on the spectre of the Holocaust, the fear of a marriage’s ripping apart and the claustrophobia of the pantry: “We stand there playing our roles … we really all imagine it. I can see Deb seeing [Yerucham], and him seeing us, and Shoshana just staring and staring at her husband” (32). This moment of intense watchfulness encapsulates the dynamics which have been playing out all afternoon. Our narrator is concerned, as he has been throughout, with his wife, and she in turn is watchful of Yerucham, who holds a place both as the husband of an old friend and the couple’s mutual adversary of the past few hours. For Shoshana, the stakes are much higher; it is not just an appraisal of Yerucham, but introspection that engages her. She is examining a man, but also an entire marriage, a life and “you can tell Shoshana is thinking of her kids, though that is not part of the imagining” (32). The reader, it seems, together with the characters, is involved in this drawn-out moment of introspection, finally reaching the awful conclusion:

> She does not say it. And he does not say it. And from the four of us, no one will say what cannot be said – that this wife believes her husband will not hide her. What to do?

> What would come of it? And so we stand like that, the four of us trapped in that pantry. Afraid to open the door and let out what we've locked inside. (32)

The story hinges on this grim conviction. Yerucham's diatribe about what it is that "binds" collapses under Shoshana's unspoken certainty. He protests, playing the part of the non-Jew, arguing that if he were not Jewish, he would not be himself. It seems that in this instant Shoshana agrees that all that holds them together is their religious lifestyle, rather than an underlying devotion. Yerucham may be correct in assuming that there exists a religious Jewish bond, however he overestimates that bond's personal, ethical implications. He seems hollow and cowardly in the dim light of the pantry. This conclusion is not obvious, however. Though at times obnoxious, at least from the adversarial perspective of the narrator, he is not a villain, nor does his relationship with Shoshana appear unhappy. Nevertheless, it seems his convictions, which he had asserted as ironclad, are more glued than welded (27).

Englander is perhaps more obvious than Carver here, relying more heavily on direct statement. Nevertheless, the scene is affecting, haunting even, evoking the sentiments Wolff describes in his review of Carver's work: "No human blood is shed in any of these stories, yet almost all of them hold a promise of mayhem, of some final, awful breaking out from confines" (Wolff). Though there is no physical violence in Englander's story either, the conscious shedding of blood that was the Shoah is the subtext throughout, exacerbating the Carveresque mayhem that Englander unleashes. The reunion degenerates into a twisted psychological game, the consequences of which neither the characters nor Englander will "let out". The reader is left unsure of what will become of these four people; With the knowledge they hold among themselves, there is the possibility that this pantry door will, figuratively, not reopen, that our characters will waste away under the spectral recurrence of the Shoah. By adopting Carver's approach to suppressed violence, as well as his stylistic tendencies, Englander is both writing in homage to him and innovatively writing back to him.

Nathan Englander's "What We Talk About When We Talk About Anne Frank" gives its readers access to a topic which reverberates across contemporary Jewish life. His hyperbolic portrayal of the effect of the Holocaust on present-day relationships evokes the impact this trauma continues to have on Jewish identity and existence. In the spirit of Carver, this realist narrative is underscored by darkness, fear and uncertainty. While Yerucham dismisses the importance of the remembered genocide of the Shoah, it ultimately entraps him as much as his

diasporic counterparts. While his characters engage in a game of the darkest make-believe, Englander too is playing with this topic.

Chapter Three: "Camp Sundown" and "Free Fruit for Young Widows"

"Camp Sundown"

"Camp Sundown" continues Englander's transgressive reconsideration of the genre of Holocaust fiction. This narrative finds Holocaust survivors once again in a camp for Jews, surrounded by Polish workers. But here the location is the Berkshires in Massachusetts, and involvement is by choice. The camp, run by the ever-exhausted Josh, is a Jewish summer retreat for those "too young or too old to care for themselves" (144). By filling this camp with those demographic groups which would have been exterminated in the camps of Eastern Europe – those too weak to work – Englander marks this story from the outset as "edgy", with its focus on "borders, margins, and boundaries, lips or rims, or at a brink or on the verge" (Lyons 65). Lyons' insights into Englander's concerns and fictional technique are applicable to each of the short stories discussed in this dissertation, and so are consistently borne in mind. The physical boundaries of the camp struggle to contain the tensions at play between past and present, threatened insanity and memory, and morality and retributive justice. As in "What We Talk About When We Talk About Anne Frank", Englander constricts space and intensifies tensions in order to explore the impact of the Shoah on contemporary American life.

Josh explains to senior campers Arnie and Agnes that "the camp-like structure, for good or for bad…revives certain adolescent elements of human nature" (148). Indeed, Agnes's insistence that one of the new campers, Doley Falk, was a Nazi guard in a concentration camp, sees the seniors reverting to a gang mentality, to bullying paranoia and a much more dangerous form of psychological, as well as physical, violence. Camp life of any kind relies on a form of enclosure, or a disconnection from the outside world, in order to construct and maintain its authority and ideology. Englander's camp, more than "twelve miles of curvy road" (154) from the police station, is a world unto itself.

The stability of this camp depends on the control and compliance which Josh, the newly appointed director, is struggling to maintain and which Agnes's accusation further threatens. Josh's attempt to subdue the seniors begins with a reminder of their position:

> "You're too young to be the director", Arnie says…
> "And you, Arnie, are too old to be at camp."
> "It's Elderhostel." Agnes says.
> "Is there instructional swim?"
> "We can," Agnes says, "have a swim lesson in the lake."
> "Any place with instructional swim," Josh says, definitive, "is camp." (143)

Josh reinforces his point: "If it has visiting day, it's camp" (145). The repetition of this comedic exchange is Josh's attempt to contain Agnes and Arnie, to remind them of where they are and thus to reinforce the improbability of their claim that there is a Nazi among them. Paradoxically, the same conditions put in place to maintain safety and order can also facilitate the kind of abuse which led to the dismissal of the former director, Rabbi Himmelman, who was discovered to be a paedophile. Ironically *himmel* is Yiddish for "heaven" or "heavenly", making the accused rabbi a "heavenly man". The rigidity of camp structure has the potential for insidious control and abuses, whether in the camps of Eastern Europe or the summer camps of the Berkshires, even if one of them offers instructional swim.

Camps frequently implement the propensity for control in other institutions, such as prisons, with the camp then mimicking those structures. On the first page of his 1850 novel *The Scarlet Letter*, Nathaniel Hawthorne asserts that

> the founders of a new colony, whatever Utopia of human virtue and happiness they might originally project, have invariably recognised it among their earliest practical necessities to allot a portion of the virgin soil as a cemetery, and another portion as the site of a prison. (40)

He goes on to describe the prison as the "black flower of civilised people" (41). These civilised people were the Puritans of Massachusetts in the seventeenth century, a group of Protestants defined by their religious rigidity and restraint, who severely punished any action which they considered "sinful". In *Discipline and Punishment,* Michel Foucault tracks the development of this essential element, this black flower, from the plague-ridden town to the prison system and onwards to institutions and society at large (175-208). Foucault details the actions taken when the plague was known to have entered a town: the structures fell into place almost immediately; containment and surveillance were key – "inspection functions ceaselessly. The

gaze is alert everywhere" (195). From here he concludes that "if it is true that the leper gave rise to rituals of exclusion … then the plague gave rise to disciplinary projects" (197).

In examining such disciplinary projects, Foucault utilises Jeremy Bentham's panopticon as the symbol of the society of surveillance (Paternek 100). The structure Bentham proposed was an annular building; at the centre, a tower with an unobstructed view of the surrounding building, which is divided into cells. "All that is needed, then is to place a supervisor in a central tower and to shut up in each cell a madman, a patient, a condemned man…They are like so many cages, so many small theatres, in which each actor is alone, perfectly individualized and constantly visible. The panoptic mechanism arranges spatial units that make it possible to see constantly and to recognize immediately" (200).

This system centered upon the fear of constant observation without the direct knowledge of those observed. While whoever was inside the observatory had a clear visual perception of the entire structure, those below could not determine when someone was actually above them. The ideal model for this practice was the military camp:

> the short-lived, artificial city, built and reshaped almost at will; the seat of a power that must be all the stronger, but also all the more discreet, all the more effective and on the alert in that it is exercised over armed men. In the perfect camp, all power would be exercised solely through exact observation. Each gaze would form a part of the overall functioning of power. (172)

Yet, the perfect camp extended beyond military purposes. It was the concentration camp of Eastern Europe, where watch towers were placed around the perimeter (rather than at the centre) as a constant reminder to the prisoners that they were under Nazi control. This power, invested in surveillance, figures as the panopticon turned to Panopticism, which is "not possessed as a thing, or transferred as a property; it functions like a piece of machinery" (176), being the "apparatus as a whole that produces 'power'" (176). This constitutes disciplinary power, a system which is "both absolutely indiscreet, since it is everywhere and always alert, since by its very principle it leaves no zone of shade and constantly supervises the very individuals who are entrusted with the task of supervising and absolutely 'discreet', for it functions permanently and largely in silence" (176). It is thus able to exercise the maximum

control with the minimum amount of force. This method of minimum force was not, however, adopted in the camps of Eastern Europe, where violence was regularly used to instil fear and brutally evoke overt power.

Arnie, always at Agnes's side, has been educated in this Panopticism in a way Josh cannot fully understand: "'[Y]ou want camps? I know camps. I know from human nature and I have seen before'" (148), he says as a prelude to raising the sleeve on his right arm to reveal the ashen tattoo which signals his status as survivor. The residents of the Elderhostel are not only responding to their present condition but seem constantly to be reverting to the codes of the camps of their past. Having lived through the Shoah, the trauma to which they were exposed is, as Cathy Caruth explains, one which "imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor" (4). Agnes, Arnie and the other survivors who join their campaign certainly do know camps, and know that though the purpose may differ, the structure is the same. Thus, they are bound by their past and align themselves with the distorted values which that past, and this camp, reinforce.

The most innocuous example of their allegiance to the past is their speech patterns which irk Josh: "[W]hy do you talk like that: 'Always he takes care'. Like you haven't been in Livingston, New Jersey, for the last fifty years. Like it's not now 1999, the cusp of a new millennium. Honestly where does it come from?" (144). Five decades have not been long enough to alter the syntactic errors of Yiddish translated into English. Or rather, this mode of speech continues to connect them to a past which is at once horrific and precious owing to way in which it was destroyed. One of the evils of the Shoah was the attempted elimination of the Jewish lifestyle in Eastern Europe. Agnes and Arnie are not only survivors of the Holocaust but the last living links to the way of life that preceded it. All of this is at play within the Elderhostel. The camp evokes and unites some of the worst aspects of these senior citizens: the mentality which leads to greeting Doley Falk with the Nazi "*Heil*" as they walk past him, and quickly becomes much darker. The senior citizens take on a collectivised code of conduct, a state which facilitates morally dubious actions, as the individual is absorbed into the collective. This is a residual effect of their experience of panoptically enforced discipline.

Josh is unable to reason with Agnes, Arnie, and those who call themselves, the "Book Group 8" (because they have joined the camp's book club). "'How can we be mistaken' Arnie asks, 'if Agnes is not mistaken?'" (155). Arnie's perception of memory is juxtaposed to Josh's at

every turn. When Josh bemoans having had to move the camp turtles' habitat, because the seniors did not like them, Arnie responds "they will come back … like elephants – that's how turtles remember" (146). Josh does not even reply to this, giving it no credence. Similarly, he can neither reason away nor fully understand this implicit trust, the unequivocal support the survivors show for Agnes. Raul Hilberg writes that survivors are either "set apart or set themselves apart from anyone who did not share their fate" (187). There exists a gap between what is comprehensible to the survivor and what is comprehensible to everyone else. Hilberg continues that "the outsider can never cross this divide and can never grasp their experience" (187). Josh is an outsider who is neither able, nor has a real desire, to understand the mentality of his campers.

In *Admitting the Holocaust* (1996), Langer agrees that there is a "poverty of conventional vocabulary" (16) when it comes to the Holocaust, but ascribes a different reason for it. He argues that the environment created by the Nazis, a "universe of destruction", "undermined fundamental concepts that normally nurture human consciousness: tragedy, personal destiny, the discipline of private suffering" (17). The Third Reich aimed to obliterate not merely the Jewish people, but their peoplehood, reducing Jews to numbers. The object, and to some extent the outcome, of the Holocaust was the "murder of the word as well as the man and the woman" (Langer 16). Perhaps this account goes some way to explaining the attitude of the Book Group 8, and of those non-fictional survivors who endorse the idea of "Planet Auschwitz" (Eaglestone 18). The traumas endured were both personal and collective; the experience of those camps was crafted to dehumanise before destroying. Thus, trauma is shared, understood by survivors although it cannot be understood by outsiders. Whether this gap is truly a lexical one, a language which is ripped apart by experience, or one instated by the survivors, the effect is the same in this narrative, and Josh is unable to understand them.

In addition, Josh is constrained by the sacrosanctity of survivors. While he is arguing with Arnie and Agnes, Arnie reveals his tattoo and Josh relents: "[W]hat can I say to numbers?" (148). This happens throughout the story. The campers confound common sense, because their status as survivors defies it in the first place. Arnie knows from "human nature and [has] seen before" (148). Moreover, Arnie and Agnes challenge Josh's simplistic assertion of their senility, arguing that "'maybe sometimes my own grandchildren, I admit it – their names can't be found. But the faces from back then, from that place,' Arnie says. And Agnes, with vigor: 'these, we do not forget'" (149).

However, the survivors are also far more astute figures than Josh, who emerges as muddled and naïve. He has, as Arnie remarks, taken the job of the paedophile Rabbi Himmelman (143), yet lives in his shadow. Josh still feels the strain of living up to him, even as the camp authorities desire that Himmelman be forgotten. Indeed, the first line of this story, "I want I should talk to Rabbi Himmelman" (143) forces upon Josh the remembrance of his predecessor and the realization that he has still not replaced him in the minds of his campers. Notably, the elderly inhabitants of the camp still request Himmelman even after his criminality has been exposed. Himmelman's standing as a rabbi still holds a certain power and commands affection from these campers.

Socially too, Josh finds himself floundering, acknowledging that "the camp director's table in the dining hall is like the captain's table on a ship. It is a coveted place to be invited to eat, and Rabbi Himmelman had kept it full every meal … Josh favors his meals alone … and he knew, all summer long, that he was being judged for this lapse" (160). Josh's incompetence is made all the more pitiful when quite unkindly contextualised by Agnes: "at your point, a bald head … and this job – a sad job you'll admit. For us, a treat, but for you, well, this? Three months a year living in a pressboard house that smells like raccoons" (144-145). Josh is not capable of accepting Agnes's criticism, though he is happy to apply it to others. When Lou the sports coach comes to Josh with a complaint, Josh "can't help it. He hears Agnes talking inside his head. *A thirty-six-year-old man who unwinds tetherballs for a living–this is a life?* It fills Josh with pity" (150). The irony, while lost on Josh, is not wasted on the reader. Perhaps it is his lack of self-awareness, as well as a lack of insight and of empathy, that causes Josh to become unmoored. He is unable to retain control of the camp and himself: making scenes in the cafeteria, shouting at the seniors and finally engaging in an unhinged re-enactment of Kristallnacht.

Josh's insistence on the Book Group 8's senility allows them to thwart him again and again. Whereas he loses control, these seniors are calculating and effective. Ironically, though Josh possesses a Master's degree in Social Work, he is unable to turn theory into practise. Agnes's comment is, undoubtedly, a difficult one to accept, but Josh's refusal to accept it is complicated by his adoration of Falk, an infringement of the impartial surveillance that keeps a camp functioning. Englander pits Agnes's remembrance of Doley Falk against Josh's favouritism

toward him. He sees Falk as “beautiful” (149). He is one of “Josh’s specials, and he won’t have the man’s time here besmirched” (148), especially by the irksome Agnes and Arnie.

Nevertheless, Josh himself observes that “Doley Falk does not smile at children. He does not stare at the lake. He takes no joy in eating, and snaps his paper when the widows take the chair by his side” (148). His only joy comes from playing bridge, and Agnes’s insistence on Falk’s guilt calls his behaviour into question. The reader may indeed wonder whether his desire to be alone stems from a secret guilt, whether his love of bridge has brought him into the midst of those he persecuted so long ago. Englander cultivates ambiguity regarding a claim which at first seemed farcical.

Parallel evocations of the camp are a considered device throughout the narrative. Yama and David Blachor, terrified of fire, have “taken to wearing, each, around their necks, a smoke alarm on a lanyard woven specifically for this purpose in crafts” (151). This darkly humorous and absurd allusion to the crematoria perhaps has the strongest impact. Josh tells the Blachors that they cannot wear the smoke detectors, as they sow fear and threaten to make the other campers paranoid. Meanwhile, a less tangible and more insidious fear is boiling over, as the Book Group 8 begin exacting a “geriatric revenge” (158) on Doley Falk which bears similarities to Nazi reprisals.

In fact, it is the Blachors who alert Josh to a manifestation of this revenge. However, what they call a fire is actually “memorial candles in their jam jars lit and dropped into paper day trip lunch bags … the bags lined up, it seems, to form a giant Jewish star” (157). The campers accept the scene as a sanctioned night activity which, as Englander revels in the comically bizarre, grows into a bonfire and a sing-along. Josh and Doley Falk, however, understand it as a threat. This star is the Ku Klux Klan’s burning cross made Jewish. The burning cross is the symbol of the Klan, a representation of their hatred, racism, and violence, which was often left on the lawns of Black and Jewish houses to signal a threat to the occupants’ lives (ADL). The Holocaust survivors repurpose a sign of violent bigotry within what is meant to be a safe camp space, raising questions of the lines between oppressor and oppressed, and the ease with which such roles can change. Here, Englander is symbolically testing the limits of the absurd and the transgressive.

Feeling his authority slipping away, Josh begins his burning of the undesirable books and movies which, he says, are making the seniors paranoid. He is repeating the actions of the Nazis who notoriously burnt ideologically unacceptable material. Arnie retorts that "it is our heads that get into movies. It is precisely because of history that such horrible things get thought" (160). Through Arnie, Englander is echoing Langer's claim "that the Holocaust in fact resists displacement by the Holocaust in fiction" (63). Arnie's simple statement encapsulates the arguments of Langer and Eaglestone that the Shoah, as it was in reality, has reshaped critical and creative expression. Ironically, this point is being made by Englander's fictionalised survivors, within a narrative which by design rejects the constraints of Holocaust piety. On the meta-level of this work, Englander is grappling with how fiction may relate to fact.

Behind Josh follows a Polish worker who picks up materials that he has dropped in his haste; "now stern faced, a good helper, she tosses them into the flames" (160). Again, Englander is playing with the parallel camp device. The Polish worker participating here is the mirror-image of her World-War-Two predecessors, who aided and abetted the deranged work of the Third Reich. Englander portrays the Poles as unthinking enablers, eager to assist those in power regardless of the morality of their actions. Their presence seems to complete the transformation of this American summer camp into its counterpart during the Shoah. Yet, this staff member is benign, even pitied by Josh for her menial job, thus complicating a traditional narrative of condemnation and raising questions as to compliance and complicity. The line between the two has become uncertain. The act of burning Josh's fallen books to some extent makes the worker complicit and therefore culpable. Yet, the promptness of her action demonstrates an unquestioning compliance: but does a lack of thought, or choosing not to think or question, remove one from culpability?

Arnie insists that the sins of the past, no matter how distant, cannot be forgiven. This, he establishes from the start: "'Because you forget Himmelman … because some board decides to forget Himmelman, because it is better for the camp to forget, it does not mean justice wants to see Himmelman forgotten'" (156). Arnie criticises the selective memory in which the camp board engages, a manoeuvre similar to the forgetting of specific tragedies committed during the Shoah for expediency's sake. Ideological compromise is antithetical to the Book Group 8's mentality. However, their code of conduct is morally questionable. For Agnes, culpability for the injustices of the Holocaust is unending; the stains of guilt upon Doley Falk not only condemn him, but also make him a dangerous person, even as he approaches death. Arnie

simply states “to murder is to murder. To stand by a murder is to murder” (162), and Agnes reinforces “guilty is the watcher … guilty all” (162). Englander is grappling with the ethical implications of the bystander’s responsibility. Falk has supposedly been witness to, and an enabler of, violence and death; he is deemed to implicate the tolerant Josh with himself. Agnes accuses Falk of being a Nazi guard, one who looked down from the watchtower. Although she does not accuse him of specific acts of violence, his status as guard, is indictment enough, a crime of the Shoah. Josh’s position is less certain, another liminal position which adds to the ambiguity of the text. If Falk is guilty of crimes committed decades ago, crimes which time cannot expunge, then are the actions of the senior citizens justified, and in what position does this put Josh? Josh will shortly become a bystander to a murder in his own camp, or to the continued injustices of the Shoah, or indeed to both.

In the middle of the night, with Josh once again ironically unaware, Agnes and her companions enact a revenge which they construe as justice, a justice warped by the camp structure. Deciding that her memory is sufficient evidence, the Book Group 8 presumably force Doley Falk into the lake, where the turtles once lived, and drown him. In so doing, they exclude all forms of legality and empathy, connecting themselves to the conduct of the Third Reich. The impact of that system, to which these survivors were so brutally exposed, weaves its way throughout the narrative to the point at which they, decades later in a new camp, execute a fellow human being.

While Agnes and The Book Group 8 may be said to be enacting Nazi-style justice, they seem also paradoxically to be meting out a strange simulacrum of Jewish judgement. On *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement, the *Unetanneh Tokef* prayer is recited. The prayer hinges on the idea that on this day the future of each person will be decided on the basis of his or her moral actions, specifically “who will live and who will die”. (Koren 450). The prayer continues to enumerate the various ways in which individuals may meet their end, whether “in their time” or “not in their time” (that is, by completing or not completing their full lifespan). The question is asked: “who by fire and who by water?” (Koren 450). Yet, it is God, not human beings, who is meant to make these decisions. Englander’s Judaic echoes are willfully teasing and provocative. The 8 believe that they are enacting God’s prerogatives, yet they may merely be behaving like Nazis.

In “Camp Sundown” Englander provides some disturbing insights. The crematorium is never far from readers’ minds. The Blachors fear death by fire enough to wear fire detectors around

their necks. The Book Group 8 light *Yahrzheit* candles, the flames of which honour those who perished in the Shoah, whilst condemning Falk for his assumed complicity in their deaths. Doley Falk himself, who may have been responsible for the incineration of Jews, is sent to the bottom of the lake. Perhaps in choosing this vehicle for murder the survivors are distinguishing themselves from the Nazis, preferring water to fire. In *Unetanneh Tokef,* all of these deaths are theologically equal, but the medium of death is significant: "who by water and who by fire? who by sword and who by beast? who of hunger and who of thirst?" (*Koren* 568) According to this prayer, these outcomes are sealed on *Yom Kippur*, which implies that they have been considered by God; however, Judaism links the prospect of retribution to amelioration through *teshuvah* (poorly translated as "repentance"), prayer and charitable acts (Sacks xii). *Teshuvah* is a chosen return to ethical integrity. Englander uses allusion; the reader is repeatedly invited to see potential connections with the Holocaust and/or Jewish values and practices. His ironies are edgy and dangerous, and they unsettle moral assurance.

This death is personal, juxtaposed to the mechanized killings of the concentration camps. There Jews were stripped of their names, reduced to numbers, and their death was a matter of efficiency. Falk's murder, by contrast, is meted out by a group of senior citizens; while they are competent enough to outwit Josh, theirs is by no means a "master plan" or a "final solution". Falk is singled out, remembered through trauma and addressed by name. Significantly, he is deemed guilty because of his assumed actions, not by some accident of birth. Yet, Falk's crimes are never proven, for they are framed by memories that are decades old. The death sentence is disquieting.

At the same time, Falk also represents all those guards whom Agnes, Arnie and so many survivors did not see brought to justice. In *Facing the* Extreme, Tzvetan Todorov argues that while the concentration camps were "pure evil" (229), those working in the camps, could not be classified as such, he sees them as ordinary people (229). Todorov theorizes that under the appropriate circumstances, almost anyone can be made to act monstrously. If this is true, then Englander's survivors' committing murder in another camp situation is not necessarily surprising. Arnie again articulates Englander's point succinctly:

> This is what happens when you fence people in … this is always true, and never changes. A rule. A camp is a camp, Herr Direktor. Inside, different kinds of justice will form. (165)

The irony of addressing the muddled, inept Josh as a Nazi commandant is stronger here than the insult and insinuations that come with assuming an elderly Jewish man to be one of the perpetrators of the Shoah. In the same paragraph in which he that claims Nazi guards are ordinary people, Todorov asserts that "we must not abandon the principles of justice: the guilty must be judged, each according to his precise acts and responsibilities" (229). He adds, somewhat angrily, that in Germany the "passage of time has all but eclipsed this issue" (299). Are Agnes and her group's actions upholding the principles of justice, which would otherwise have been abandoned? Or do they demonstrate the mutation of human into monster which camp life, any camp life, can help to foster? Englander is yet again intentionally ambiguous. No one in this narrative is a hero, nor can anyone justly be called a villain; the inability to define these characters as such is central to "Camp Sundown".

The reader is confronted with concentration camp survivors who, having been contemptuously dismissed by the police they initially contacted, decide to deal out justice themselves. In effect, they have never escaped that original camp code which they believe Doley Falk helped to enforce. The group's exoneration, they believe, will come from the very accusations of a senility they have never displayed: "tell them what, about us, they already think. Tell them Alzheimer's, tell them mini-strokes, tell them brain plaque and sundowning" (166). Doley Falk's death, seen either as an accident or a murder, will ultimately be ascribed to dementia. Yet the choice is left to Josh. He can, as Arnie argues, take a second crime to bed with him, as he does the misdeeds of Rabbi Himmelman, or he can sacrifice "the good of this camp" by acknowledging that a crime was committed (166).

In "Camp Sundown" there is goodness at stake, the continued running of a camp which is beloved by many, if tainted by some, unlike the Nazi camps where there was nothing to sacrifice in exposing the atrocities. Josh is an innocent corrupted, and turned into a bystander, condemned by his own inadequacies. When he responds in dismay "What kind of a choice is that ... what have you done to this man?" (166), Agnes (the instigator of this adventure) answers "honestly confused" (166), "'to which man … to him?'", pointing into the lake, 'or to you?'" (166). Indeed, she has condemned them both, but perhaps not unjustly so. As the banished turtles, on cue, slowly and steadily emerge, returning to their old home to fulfil Arnie's prophecy – "like elephants … that's how they remember" (166) – the reader is again confronted with the uncertainty of the situation, while Josh's scepticism is dealt another blow. If Agnes's

claims are just, she has not only punished Doley Falk, but also Josh for his lack of empathy and attention. As she warned him at the beginning of this narrative, “if he’s guilty, then he’s your Nazi too” (159). Englander exposes the inevitability of moral entanglement in a world where circumstances are unclear and deceptive, while attempts at retrospective self-justification are often unconvincing.

“Camp Sundown” displays the range of Englander’s originality and irony. By delving into the psyche of survivors, he is also able to make a broader point about the next generations of Jews who have acquired a sense of injustice and a syndrome of victimhood. This is a claim he probes further in “Free Fruit for Young Widows”. He therefore challenges Langer’s constraints on fictional creativity, since their effect is to protect and perpetuate the intergenerational psychological effects of the Holocaust on Jewish life (7). Langer calls for a caution that Englander deliberately subverts.

“Free Fruit For Young Widows”

“Free Fruit for Young Widows” closes Englander’s second collection of short stories and, like “Camp Sundown”, is an examination of and challenge to the sacrosanctity of survivors. Shimmy Gezer, a survivor who owns a fruit stand at the *Mahane Yehudah* Market in Jerusalem, tells the story to his 13-year-old son Etgar. The pair spend an afternoon discussing the life and actions of a fellow Holocaust survivor, Professor Tendler. The narrative begins in a style which has become familiar to readers of Englander’s work:

> When the Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser took control of the Suez Canal, threatening Western access to that vital route, an agitated France shifted allegiances, joining forces with Britain and Israel against Egypt. This is a fact neither here nor there, except that during the 1956 Sinai Campaign there were soldiers in the Israeli army and soldiers in the Egyptian army who ended up wearing identical French supplied uniforms into battle. (191).

This opening is rooted in the Carveresque realism that Englander has been navigating and reimagining throughout this volume. It emphasizes the absurdity of reality, of soldiers on opposing sides in a war whose fate is decided by the whims of distant international powers, intent on their own political advantage. What comes next is characteristic Englander, for the first paragraph is a set-up for a dark joke that one can anticipate: Private Shimmy Gezer, “formerly Shimon Bibberblat, of Warsaw, Poland” (191) sits down to eat at his Israeli camp and “four armed commandos [sit] down with him” (191). He grunts, they grunt; however unbeknown to Shimmy, “the enemy [had] joined [him] for lunch” (192). This beginning channels Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of laughter as a key form of truth which relates to the world from a specific point of view (66). Englander’s set-up allows him to criticise, if only in the opening passages, the fickleness of powerful nations, global alliances and the impact they have on the flesh and blood people whom they control.

Certainly, for these commandos, the consequences are dire. Professor Tendler, then a squad mate of Shimmy’s and “not yet even in possession of a high school degree” (191), joins the group. Realising what Shimmy had not, he “placed the tin cup he was carrying on the table, taking care not to spill his tea. Then he took up his gun and shot each of the commandos in the head” (191). The stark juxtaposition of Tendler’s carefulness with his tea and his unflinching,

unemotional killing, is the reader's first glimpse into the psyche of this survivor. The next comes immediately afterwards.

Tendler's action shocks both Shimmy and the reader; it opens up the first of numerous moral dilemmas in the story. Initially believing that Tendler has murdered four of his fellow soldiers, Shimmy "tackles his friend" (193). However, even after Tendler has explained the situation, Shimmy is fundamentally dissatisfied: "'You could have taken them prisoner', Shimmy yelled … "'you didn't have to shoot'" (192). Tendler's response is to beat his friend, "until his friend couldn't take anymore beating, and then he beat him some more" (192). "For those who had come running at the sound of gunfire and found five bodies in the sand, it was the consensus that a pummeled Shimmy Gezer looked to be in the worst condition of the bunch" (193). Tendler's use of violence is an expedient solution to the problems he encounters, whether as threats or as a way to end an argument he does not want to have.

The language shifts repeatedly throughout this encounter. In his explanation to Shimmy, Tendler screams "'Egyptians! Egyptians!' in Hebrew" (192); as Englander notes, "he was using the same word about the same people in the same desert that had been used thousands of years before" (192). With a sly irony typical of his unsettling humour, Englander sketches the destiny of the new Jewish state which in its first decade re-enacts a biblical battle, even if, in this one "God no longer raised his own hand in the fight" (192). There is a celebratory tone in the use of Hebrew, in the resurgence of this language as chosen for the new state. And yet, these characters use it hesitatingly, with Tendler "switching to Yiddish" (192) when Shimmy does not understand him. The return to Yiddish makes sense; twelve years of an official Jewish language cannot erase the words both Shimmy and Tendler had spoken all their lives, nor the centuries-long history of Yiddish as the cultural centre of Eastern European Jewish life. As Shimmy Gezer will later tell his son, this interaction of languages, the tension between old and new, is part of this nation of "unfinished borders and unwritten constitution … a gray space that was called real life" (194). And barely a line later, arguing against Tendler's choice to kill the men instead of taking them prisoner, Shimmy changes to another language: 'Halt!' He screamed in German. 'That's all – Halt'" (192). Here, before we are explicitly told, we are given a clear indication that Shimmy is a survivor of the Holocaust. Though he is serving in the Hebrew-speaking Israeli army, it is the German language that is, to him, synonymous with force. That single word speaks to Shimmy's own experience in the Shoah, which is barely touched upon in the rest of the story. While he will make the argument that it is Tendler who

was irrevocably injured by the Holocaust, its trauma reverberates in Shimmy too, if to a very different effect.

Anne Michaels' acclaimed first novel *Fugitive Pieces* begins dramatically with the seven-year-old Jakob Beer emerging from the mud of an archaeological site in Biskupin, Poland during the Second World War. Jakob, a Polish Jew, had hidden in a cupboard at his home while the Nazis gunned down his parents in a manner not dissimilar to Tendler's summarily shooting a family in his own European home. After fleeing and hiding in the forest, Jakob is discovered by the Greek archaeologist Athos Roussos in the "acid steeped ground" (5) of that drowned city. Emerging as a self-proclaimed "bog boy", a mask of mud "cracked with tears" (12), Jakob

> screamed into the silence the only phrase [he] knew in more than one language, [he] screamed it in Polish and German and Yiddish, thumping [his] fists on [his] own chest: dirty Jew, dirty Jew, dirty Jew. (12-13)

This elegantly imagined, yet horrific, moment emphasizes the insidiousness of the Third Reich. In this world of violently indoctrinated dehumanization, the plea of a child, orphaned, bereft, and starved, can only take the form of a self-negating slur. It is the extreme articulation of Shimmy Gezer's "Halt", of the remnants of a language which was distorted to destroy. Yet, Shimmy's 'Halt', expresses his desire to prevent violence, a rejection of brutality.

This interaction is an expression of what theorist Mikhail Bakhtin has termed the dialogic: in *Key Terms in Literary Theory* (2012), Mary Klages describes the dialogic as an interplay of voices, "truth negotiated and debated … instead of pronounced from on high" (23). Michael Holquist explains in his introduction to Bakhtin's *The Dialogic Imagination* that the ideal model for the dialogic is

> two actual people talking to each other in a specific dialogue at a specific time and place…each of the two persons would be a consciousness at a specific point in the history of defining itself through the choice it has made out of all the possible existing languages available to it at that moment…implicit in all this is the notion that all transcription systems … are inadequate to the multiplicity of the meanings they seek to convey. (12-13)

Bakhtin extrapolates this theory from his study of Dostoevsky and his polyphony of textual voices. In the interaction between Shimmy and Tendler, multi-voiced conversation is attempted but cross purposes frustrate understanding.

Notably, in the main body of the narrative which takes place an unspecified number of decades after this incident, Hebrew words feature in transliteration and without translation. The Hebrew terms *duchan, kach,* and *kodem kol* force the reader to rely only on context. This change suggests the solidification of a homogenous Jewish state, at least linguistically, as Hebrew became the national language even if it was imperfectly understood. Yet, there remains the tension of the story's being written in English and presumably spoken by the characters in Hebrew and Yiddish throughout. Englander makes use of the creative potential of the dialogical, across these multiple languages. He highlights the "contradiction ridden, tension filled unity of two embattled tendencies in the life of language" (Bakhtin 272).

Englander makes it clear that it is not possible to gain a perfect understanding of another person. Indeed, Tendler is given no first name, defined solely by his status as "professor". This intentional omission distances the reader further from the central figure of the story, drawing attention to his unknowability. Englander directs his readers away from definitive moral judgments of Tendler, whose life and internal logic they, as well as Shimmy and Etgar, can never fully grasp.

At the same moment as the interplay of languages displays the sophistication of Englander's thinking, there is a perceptible decline in the quality of his writing. From the moment the story shifts to a discussion between a now older Shimmy Gezer and his thirteen-year-old son Etgar, it takes on a quality which is didactic and unsatisfactorily simplistic. Arguably, this shift may reflect the unformed thoughts of a teenager trying to comprehend the "hazy morality of combat" (194). However, Englander creates little space for the reader. The questions the reader may wish to raise, and which in another Englander narrative would have been left unspoken, are asked by Etgar: "[T]his man had saved his father's life, but maybe he hadn't. He'd done what was necessary, but maybe he could have done it another way" (194-195). This study has explored the way in which Englander successfully cultivates ambiguity in "Camp Sundown"; although moral ambiguity is also the subject of this story, it is made explicit in a way that suggests a departure from Englander's characteristic approach.

In this narrative a tension arises between Bakhtin's notion of the dialogic, as outlined above, and his notion of the monologic. As the name implies, the monologic is set against the dialogic. It represents a single voice, a centralised authority:

> … with a monologic approach … another *person* remains wholly and merely an *object* of consciousness, and not another consciousness. No response is expected from it that could change everything in the world of my consciousness. Monologue is finalized and deaf to the other's response, does not expect it and does not acknowledge in it any *decisive* force. Monologue manages without the other, and therefore to some degree materializes all reality. Monologue pretends to be the *ultimate word.* It closes down the represented world and represented persons. (Bakhtin 292-293)

Shimmy tells his story to help Etgar understand Tendler's behaviour and values, when he feels that Etgar is old enough to engage with his narrative. Shimmy is trying to extend possible world-views and to direct Etgar away from the monologic, towards the dialogic. Yet Shimmy, as a character, can often feel didactic, telling the reader to embrace ambiguity. He explains to his son that "even absolutes could maintain more than one position, reflect more than one truth" (194), and he insists that "a similar life is not a same life" (196), that there is a difference that cannot be understood. It is as though Englander is attempting to determine in the discussion between Shimmy and Etgar what he seamlessly conveyed in the interplay between Shimmy and Tendler.

What prompts Etgar's interest in the Professor is the apparent contradiction in his relationship with Shimmy: "it was not his father's act of forgiveness, but his kindness that baffled Etgar" (195). Shimmy not only greets Tendler as a friend every Friday when he stops at his stand in the *Mahane Yehudah* market but does for Tendler what he does only for war widows - he gives Tendler his produce free (193). Indeed, Shimmy "always took care of the young widows. When they protested, he'd say, 'you sacrifice, I sacrifice. All in all, what's a bag of apples?'... it's all for one country'" (193), a remark which places Shimmy as the moral centre of this story but serves also to emphasize his deep sense of nationalism. We are informed that Shimmy had fought in all the "Jewish wars" (196), the wars engaged by the state of Israel in "'48 or '56, '67 or '73" (196). Even though Shimmy grapples with the "hazy morality of combat" (194), the "consequences of decisions, permanent, eternal, that will chase you in your head, turning form this side to that, tossing between right and wrong" (194), his loyalty to Israel, like his loyalty

to Tendler, never seems to waver. He is tolerant even in the face of imperfection. Again, Shimmy is portrayed as more than a mere storyteller; he is the compassionate survivor and veteran, whose own struggle with the violent means by which he has been obliged to protect his nation is implied throughout. The character of Shimmy represents a monologic authority, even as he presses the case for ambiguity.

After years of being questioned, Shimmy finally sits Etgar down and tells him why it is that Tendler evokes what Etgar calls his father's "Free-Fruit-for-Young-Widows eyes" (197).

> This is the story that Shimmy told Etgar when he felt that his boy was a man: The first thing Professor Tendler saw when his death camp was liberated were two big, tough American soldiers fainting dead away. The pair … stood before the immense, heretofore unimaginable brutality of modern extermination, frozen, slack-jawed before a mountain of putrid, naked corpses, a hill of men. (197-198)

Here Englander adopts a different narrative modality from his other stories, one which uses more conventional Holocaust discourse. His phrasing, "the immense heretofore unimaginable brutality of modern extermination", mirrors Langer's expression: "the most indigestible fact of the Holocaust is that during its reign death outwitted us on such a mass scale that 'being better off than before' ceased to be a viable option" (xx). This seems true of Tendler, who stared back "from this pile of broken bodies" (198) and emerged "rickety, skeletal" (198), but alive.

Englander continues with that dark humour which is more typical of his style: "when the corpse that was Professor Tendler from age thirteen – your [Etgar's] age – came crawling for that nightmare, he looked at the two Yankee soldiers, who looked at him and hit the ground with a thud. Professor Tendler had already seen so much in life that this was not worth even a pause, so he moved on" (198). This "thud" resonates back to the beginning of the story, to the Egyptian commandos who "fell facedown, the sound of their skulls hitting the table somehow more violent than the report of the gun" (192). Whereas the Egyptians' fall was the conscious work of an empowered Private Tendler, the American soldiers are rendered senseless by his victimhood.

Indeed, Tendler survived through the kindness of the Sonderkommando and others who took the bodies off to be burnt. In a testament to Jewish mercy as well as Jewish guilt, "they brought

him the crumbs of their crumbs to keep him going. And though it was certain death for these prisoners to protect him, it allowed them a sliver of humanity in their inhuman jobs" (198). Again, Englander is channeling Holocaust tropes, setting his audience up for an inevitable turn-around. In *Facing the Extreme* Todorov speaks of ordinary virtues which existed within this space, "the second ordinary virtue is … called caring. Here again, it is necessary to distinguish between two types of situations, between those that lie on this side of the ultimate threshold and those that lie beyond it … imminent death" (71). He theorizes that "on this side of the threshold" (72) (the one before imminent death) "there are numerous acts of caring, beginning with the simplest and, in the camps, perhaps most important: sharing of food" (72). Shimmy too, perhaps shaped by this camp mentality, responds to suffering by offering food, which is his stock in trade.

Liberated, in a physical sense, Tendler makes his way across borders to his old home. Having watched his own family die

> Tendler was expecting no surprises, no reunions … But home – that was the thing he held onto. Maybe his house was still there, and his bed. Maybe the cow was still giving milk, and the goats still chewing garbage, and the dog still barking at the chickens as before. And maybe his other family– the nurse at whose breast his body had become strong (before weakened), her husband, who had farmed his father's field, and their son (his age), and another (two years younger), boys with whom he had played like a brother – maybe this family was still there waiting. Waiting for him to come home. (199)

The image of home, cited in such detail, is heartbreaking, an evocation of sentiment not often found in Englander stories. This sense is heightened when the home is indeed found to exist; the peasant family – now living in his house – are still there, with the addition of a baby girl. Tendler, upon entering his old home as "master of the house" (200), decides he will remain to start his own family, naming every child after his dead loved ones, "free to be free, he would lock himself up again. But it would be his gate, his lock, his world" (200). Notably, at the same moment when Tendler returns to his former home in Europe, other survivors of the Holocaust were flocking to what would soon be declared the state of Israel. They too hoped that after nearly two thousand years of diasporic wandering, "if the old stories are to be believed" (192), they would be returning to a homeland, even as the other nations around them threatened its destruction.

As Etgar comments and as the reader is inclined to agree, “it is a nice story … sad but also happy. He makes it home to a home … surviving to start again” (201). And here, again, the similarities to those refugees who fled to Israel is striking. It is also implied that this is the story of Shimmy’s homecoming, as in the Shoah “no one in his family but Shimmy had survived, which was also the case for Etgar’s mother. This was why they had taken a new name … in the whole world the Gezers were three” (196).

However, the starting point of the story, the Sinai Campaign, already shows Tendler displaced from the home into which he wanted to lock himself forever. Indeed, the story does not end with this reunion. Relieving himself outside the kitchen window, Tendler overhears the family’s fears that he “will steal it all away … everything” (203). Ironically, these peasants have appropriated the possessions of the Jews for whom they had worked, having come to believe these gains theirs by right. While his nurse Fanushka argues that Tendler has “come for their lives” (203), their livelihood has actually been dependent on the efficiency of the Nazi killing machine. Now without the protection of the Third Reich, they plot to kill Tendler themselves, thus re-enacting another cliché of Holocaust narrative: the disloyal and scheming servants. It is at this point in the narrative that Englander subverts the conventions he has been cultivating, a deliberately debunking ploy which shifts his work from the piousness of traditional Holocaust fiction to a transgressive mode.

Tendler is faced with several options, as Etgar enumerates; “he could have escaped. He could have run for the gate when he overheard” (205). So too he might have killed “only the grown-ups (206) or “only those who would do harm” (206). Yet Tendler pursues none of these possibilities. He returns to the house, shares a meal with the nurse’s family, and waits. He waits until he is sure the family is asleep, and then:

> [He] took his pillow with one hand and, with the other quietly cocked his gun. Then with goose feathers flying, Tendler moved through the house. A bullet for each brother, one for the father and one for the mother. Tendler fired until he found himself in the warmth of the kitchen, one bullet left to protect himself … that last bullet Tendler left in the fat baby girl, because he did not know from mercy, and did not need to leave another of that family to grow to kill him at some future time (204-205).

Perhaps this is the unspoken reason behind Tendler's shooting of the Egyptians at the story's beginning. They, like the child, could not be spared in case they might go on to kill him or other Israelis "at some future time" (205). While Tendler had calmly joined his enemies for dinner a decade before, he would not allow Shimmy to be joined by his enemies for lunch (192).

In "Nude Rabbis and Tales of Revenge", Kakutani argues that at this point the narrative "tumble[s] into fairy tale artifice" (Kakutani). There is certainly a sense of gratuitousness which does not fit well with the account that Englander has created. However, to describe this as a tale of revenge, as Kakutani does, seems misleading. While Tendler had watched the destruction of everything he held dear, it was the image of his homecoming that had enabled him to survive the multiple inhumanities to which he was subjected; yet this final betrayal by his second family was too much to bear. Although ill treatment by enemies was survivable for Tendler, the deception and callousness of those he considered family was not. Tendler comes to cloak himself in distrust and violence, the only response left available to a man whose adolescence has been shaped by brutality. This illuminates the quickness of his response to the Egyptian soldiers who come to sit at the wrong lunch table. They too were enemies in the guise of friends, if unwittingly so. There is no gratification in the murder of these people. As with the killing of the baby, Tendler does not regard his actions as the meting out of justice, an argument which might be acceptable to some. He limits himself merely to self-defence, but, as with the Egyptians, it is distorted by trauma and suffering, indeed taken too far.

As Langer has argued, the Holocaust offers the "paradoxical possibility that survival may also be a lifelong sentence to the memory of loss" (7) and to distrust. Shimmy tells his son that Tendler did not survive Europe: "he made it through the camps. He walks, he breathes, and he was very close to making it out alive. But they killed him. After the war, we still lost people. They killed what was left of him in the end" (197). Here lies the heart of the story, the summation that elicits kindness from Shimmy and Etgar alike. Ironically, it is the goodness and forgiveness of these fellow-Jews that keeps Tendler nourished – at least through mangos and pineapples.

The question remains whether his past experience is sufficient justification for Tendler's actions: for the beating of his friend, for the killing of unarmed soldiers, for the murder of a baby. Englander, of course, offers no answers, except that "maybe the fault for those deaths

lies in a system designed for the killing of Tendlers that failed to do its job. An error, a slip that allowed a Tendler, no longer fit, back loose in the world" (205-206). Shimmy shifts the blame from Tendler to the Nazi regime, which warped Tendler's perceptions of violence and of survival, or at least he adds this point in order to amplify the ambiguity of the narrative.

Shimmy cultivates this ambiguity, arguing that "these are questions for the philosopher. These are theoretical instances turned into flesh and blood" (205). Shimmy approaches the enigma of Tendler similarly to his engagement with the "gray space" (194) of Israel, with a fierce loyalty, but an open mind and a practical understanding of the mismatch between ends and means. However, while Shimmy chooses to set aside the theoretical issues involved, Englander should not, and his choice not to offer a more nuanced perspective works to the detriment of the story. While Tendler is the Philosophy professor, and Etgar believes that on the day of hearing Tendler's biography he, ironically, "became a philosopher himself" (206), it is Shimmy who filters the narrative, both for Etgar and the reader. His final line to his son echoes like a warning: "'whoever are we, my son, to decide who should die?'" (206). It is an acknowledgement of the limiting conditions of philosophical argument, when practical circumstances force a different outcome.

This challenge follows Tendler and Shimmy's young son too, as he makes his way within the small world of the *Machane Yehudah* market. Yet, while Etgar deals with the singularity of Tendler, the reader is called to question the implications for the Israeli nation, over which hovers the spectre of the Shoah (194). Israel fought numerous wars in the first decades of its existence, and "unfinished' (194) as it might have been, its foundations were built on "the consequences of decisions, permanent, eternal" (194) which define the country today. Englander's narrative seems to question, very tentatively, whether the same trauma that has deadened Tendler's empathy is at work in the Jewish state, influencing the policies and military actions for which it is most criticized. By raising the issue of Jewish survival to the level of the state and national psyche, Englander extends the scope of the Holocaust from the personal to the political. Having implicitly made this point, though, Englander leaves it hovering over the story, without fuller examination.

"Free Fruit for Young Widows" argues for ambiguity. The reader is informed from the start that this story is about more than the "mallet coming down" (194). But it is exactly this assertion of the ambiguous which makes the narrative didactic. The questions Shimmy asks

are unnecessarily pointed, influencing the reader in a direction that Englander has not felt the need to do in his other pieces. However, through his set-up and take-down of generic conventions, he complicates the reading process, subverting even his own ambiguities. Englander outlines positions with the covert purpose of controverting them. Indeed, the monologic and the dialogic are at war in “Free Fruit for Young Widows”. Englander evades more searching questions by resorting to the “greyness” of ordinary life and the vulnerability of “flesh and blood” people. The only stable reference points he offers are the lasting effects of trauma and the importance of kindness, which passes from Shimmy to Etgar “even after his father had died” (207).

Chapter 4: *Everything Is Illuminated*

Jonathan Safran Foer's *Everything Is Illuminated*, like Englander's "Holocaust stories", is deliberately and captivatingly transgressive. The novel traces a pilgrimage to find the woman who saved Jonathan's grandfather's life during World War Two, as well as reconstructing the history of his family which was lost in that war. This is a fictionalized version of a journey that Foer, as author, actually made to the Ukraine. The story unfolds across four alternating narrative modalities: the first-person perspective of Alexander Perchov (Jonathan's Ukrainian guide), his letters to Jonathan and the spectre of Jonathan's unpublished replies, as well as a *faux* historical account of Trachimbrod, which creates a fantastical history of Jonathan's ancestry. Alex and Jonathan are the authors of the two halves of the story, with Alex providing the humorous realist perspective of the 1998 journey and Jonathan inventing his account of the past from folklore and postmodern devices. The two narratives collide in 1942 when the fantastical Trachimbrod of Jonathan's imaginings is destroyed by the all too real force of Nazi Germany, in whose activities Alex's own family finds itself implicated.

A Beginning: Realism, Anti-Semitism and a Confrontation of Two Cultures

When the fictional Jonathan goes in search of Augustine, the last possibly surviving member of the family that saved his grandfather from the Nazis, he has only an old photograph in hand. He is aided by Alex, his Ukrainian translator whose English is comically fractured, Alex's grandfather, a partially blind widower/driver, and his farting "bitch", Sammy Davis Junior Junior. In "Illuminating the Ineffable", Elaine Safer argues that in *Everything is Illuminated* Foer is chasing his roots "back to a legendary past" (114). Safer aligns herself with Alex's assertion that Jonathan is the hero of this quest. However, he does not appear for the first thirty pages. The novel instead begins with an account of Alex's life in Odessa.

The first lines of the novel, "My legal name is Alexander Perchov. But all my friends dub me Alex, because that is a more flaccid-to-utter version of my legal name" (1), recall the beginning of Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations:* "My father's family name being Pirrip, and my Christian name Philip, my infant tongue could make of both names nothing longer or more explicit than Pip. So I called myself Pip, and came to be called Pip" (35). Both Pip and Alex are more "flaccid-to-utter" versions of their full names, but "Pip" is a determination made by

the protagonist. Alex finds other ways of defining his identity through naming, using the nicknames he claims women call him: “Baby, All-Night, Currency” (1). He hides behind such false assertions for the first part of the novel, until he discards this façade. *Great Expectations* is a famous *bildungsroman* of the Victorian period, chronicling its protagonist’s progress towards moral and emotional maturity by means of a fictional autobiography. Alex’s progress follows a similar trajectory; his chapters for Jonathan’s book, as well as his letters record a growing maturity and self-awareness. Oddly, Alex fits the criteria for the protagonist of a bildungsroman better than Jonathan, who is notionally the “hero” of this novel.

Alex’s first chapter is a contextualization of his life until his formative journey, the prelude, or as he calls it “the overture”, to his encounter with Jonathan. Alex connects himself with Jonathan – “as for me, I was sired in 1977, the same year as the hero of this story” (1) – before beginning in earnest to discuss his life and that of his family. He is “burdened to recite [his] good appearance” (3) and to acknowledge that he did “recklessly well in English” (2) (though the very construction of this sentence suggests otherwise). He also sets out to prove that he “disseminates very much currency at famous night clubs” (1) and that he is “carnal in many good arrangements, notwithstanding the Inebriated Kangaroo, the Gorky Tickle, and the Unyielding Zookeeper” (2). This quite clearly fabricated flaunting of his sexuality is mirrored later in Jonathan’s account of his grandfather’s numerous lovers, there “being some fifty-two virgins, to whom he made love in each of the positions that he had studied from a dirty deck of cards” (195).

This form of machismo is less problematic than those Alex offers in his “overture to a very rigid journey” (1). As if in passing, Alex notes that his grandfather, depressed since the death of his wife, shouts at him, “[D]o not be so lazy! Do not be so worthless! Do something! Do something worthy!” (5). Alex’s father is “a first-rate puncher” (6), who terrorizes Alex, his mother and his brother “little Igor”. It is this aggression that sends Alex and his grandfather to guide Jonathan, as they “[toil] for a travel agency, denominated Heritage Touring” (3). Though Heritage Touring is “for Jewish people, like the hero, who have cravings to leave that ennobled country America and visit humble towns in Poland and Ukraine” (3), it is Alex and his grandfather’s job to “unearth places where their families once existed” (3). These trips usually involve the first encounters between Jews and Ukrainians, as is the case for Jonathan and Alex – and the relationship is usually a financial one. The Ukrainians exploit the Jewish desire to understand their past; while being paid help for these Jews, they are never on equal footing

with them. These pilgrimages to places that “once existed” grounds them in the Shoah without needing explicitly to state it. The trips expose another tension between Ukrainians and Jews, because both parties understand (or will come to understand) the role of the Ukrainians in the destruction of Jewish families and their homes.

Both Alex’s father and his grandfather have worked for the company. When Alex expresses his distaste for continuing in this line, his father “removed three pieces of ice from the refrigerator, closed the refrigerator, and punched [Alex]” (29); then handing over the pieces of ice, he tells Alex to put them on his face, so he does not “look terrible and manufacture a disaster in Lutsk” (29). The violence and emotional force of this moment are underscored by Alex when he reflects on the conversation, believing that he should “have been smarter” (29). This form of toxic masculinity pervades Alex’s thinking at the beginning of the novel, hence women are objectified and reduced only to the lies that Alex tells about himself. Furthermore, Alex is brought “tremendous honour, on the scale of the sport of baseball, which was invented in the Ukraine” (5) by the fact that he, his father, and his grandfather are all first-born sons and all bear the name Alex. Though Alex spurns his familial line of work, he does plan to continue the family tradition of passing on his first name and “if [the reader] want[s] to know what will occur if [his] first child is a girl … he will not be a girl” (5). Alex’s mother is spoken of lovingly but sparingly, as a “humble, humble woman”.

This depiction of Alex’s home-life channels a specific depiction of aggressive Ukrainian gentiles. As Feuer summarises in his piece “Almost Friends”

> The history of the Ukraine includes many moments of antisemitism which are, in their details, quite horrific. The Jews of the Ukraine had a very difficult and antagonistic relationship with the Ukrainians. To begin with, the Jews experienced several pogroms in the late 19th century which took the lives of many innocent Jews. But the 20th century didn't fare any better: during and after civil war, which began in 1917 with the Russian revolution, 100,000 Jews were murdered. However, the worst was yet to come. After being invaded by the Nazis, Ukrainians were more than willing to give over their Jewish “neighbours.” In fact, one of the worst incidents was Babi Yar (named after a ravine in Kiev) in which the Ukrainians of Kiev worked with the Nazis in perhaps the most gruesome display of barbarity during the Holocaust wherein 100,000 Jews were brutally murdered in a ravine. (29)

Foer interweaves this aggression with the narrative, even before he begins to explore the relationship between these "neighbours." By comparing his pride at being a first-born son to the national pride in Ukraine's invention of baseball, Alex is linking two types of aggression which collide in his grandfather. Alex's assertion that Ukraine invented basketball is clearly false (it was created in the USA) and this problematizes his personal pride. If Alex's understanding of Ukrainian pride is misconceived, so too is his understanding of his own family. His account of himself is, in its turn, comical and disturbing in equal measure. His unidiomatic and semantically confused language combines with his obvious exaggeration to counterbalance, and mask, the abuse he will not – and cannot – acknowledge.

Alex, at least at the outset of the story, is not a trustworthy narrator. And yet he is given full control over the narrative, as well as the quest, since Jonathan has no choice but to rely on him to navigate the Ukraine. This is a privilege that Alex immediately abuses in his first, scathing, description of Jonathan:

> This is an American? I thought. And also, this is a Jew? He was severely short. He wore spectacles and had diminutive hairs which were not split anywhere but sat on his head like a Shapka…in truth he did not look like anything special at all. I was underwhelmed to the maximum. (31-32)

Though comically constructed, there is also an insidious side to Alex's comments. He admits that never having met a Jew before this journey, he believed that "Jewish people were having shit between their brains" (3). He goes on to explain this casual anti-Semitism: "this is because all I knew of Jewish people is that they paid father very much currency in order to make vacation *from* America *to* Ukraine" (3), a decision which seems absurd to a young man who fetishizes American culture and luxury, while hoping to move there. Alex's disappointment in Jonathan as an "American" leads to classifying him merely as "a Jew".

In "Organized Anti-Semitism in Contemporary Ukraine", Per Andes Rudling examines the disproportionately high levels of anti-Semitism in Ukraine in the early twenty-first century. According to the 2001 Ukrainian census, released just months before *Everything Is Illuminated* was published, there were only 103,000 Jews in Ukraine, forming 0.2% of the population. However, studies found that 35.9 percent of Ukrainian nationals held 'strong' anti-Semitic

sentiments. Rudling emphasizes the irony of this relationship, noting that "in fact anti-Semitism is printed in editions, considerably larger than the entire Jewish population of Ukraine" (83-84). Rudling distinguishes between "traditional" anti-Semitism, a religious bias which dates back centuries, and a "modern" secular racism (84). The two weave together to construct a narrative that "throughout the twentieth century, Ukrainians have been stabbed in the back repeatedly by Jews and/or Zionists. The conclusion from this is that there was - and is - no Ukrainian agency whatsoever" (83). This national narrative of absolution distances Ukrainians from continuing anti-Semitism, including the murder of a religious Jew on his own doorstep in 2005.[6]

Thus, it is not surprising that before meeting Jonathan, Alex had never seen a Jew. Alex is more curious than hostile towards Jonathan, yet he inserts moments of aggression into his record, roaring at him that he is to "FINISH THE COFFE UNTIL [Alex] CAN SEE HIS FACE IN THE BOTTOM" of the cup (107), a scene which he soon admits to having invented. The falsity of this episode is heightened by the fact that the cup is made of clay, and so cannot serve as a mirror. These actions are more aligned with how Alex believes men (as represented by his abusive father) should behave than a reflection of his personal inclinations. Though Alex's anti-Semitic tendencies may be passed over as naïveté, they are a recurrent feature of this journey. Alex's father calls Jonathan a "spoiled Jew" (6); his grandfather refers to Jonathan as "the Jew", refusing to believe that Sammy Davis Junior, after whom his dog is named, actually converted to Judaism (58); and even a waitress simply observes, "I've never seen a Jew before. Can I see his horns?" (107).[7]

Jonathan, for his part, is equally uneducated about the Ukraine. He expects a nation much more similar to his own, broadly sharing American social practices and values. On this basis, he asks for the air conditioner to be turned on in the car, making Alex "humiliated to the maximum"

[6] Notably, in April 2020, Volodymyr Zelensky won in a landslide to become Ukraine's first Jewish President. He joins Jewish Prime Minister Volodymyr Groysman, making Ukraine the first nation, apart from Israel, to have both a Jewish President and Prime Minster. These elections seem to indicate a change in attitude towards Jews in the Ukraine, unless burning political issues have overshadowed the concern with religion and ethnicity.

[7] Michelangelo's "Moses" (housed in the church of *San Pietro in Vincoli* in Rome) served to promote the image that Jews had horns, since two are sculpted onto the head of the biblical leader. While this idea is believed to have stemmed from a mistranslation of the description of Moses in Exodus 34:29 ("horns" instead of "rays of light"), it fed the anti-Semitic notion that Jews are not human but belong to the Devil.

(58). He brings cigarettes as “tips” for staff, thus confusing Alex, and he will not listen to Alex when he tells him to be quiet at the hotel, so that others will not hear his English and exploit him. He is also woefully underprepared for his quest, a fact Foer admits to having drawn directly from his real-life trip to Ukraine: “‘Of course I didn't find her [the woman who saved his grandfather]! ... I was so naïve – it’s like walking into New York City with a photograph and asking people if they recognise the person. It’s ridiculous. I did no research at all’” (Burkeman). Foer’s light-hearted dismissal of his failed quest seems disingenuous, an attempt to deflect attention from the embarrassment and mortification of his immature assumption that he would be able to unpack a complex traumatic history by relying on nothing more than an old photograph. By contrast, as Aron and Berger note, other third-generation writers approach such failure with sadness and anger (6-8). Andrea Simon acknowledges her attempts to locate the remnants of her grandmother’s family in Belarus: “I know that these facts are as elusive as the scattered ashes of my massacred relatives—ashes that lined village ditches, ashes that clung to crematoria walls, ashes that blanketed forest floors, ashes that have dissolved into nothingness” (xv). Moreover, in the short story “Deir Yassin” one of Margot Singer’s characters demands of another: “You think you can just go and dig up the truth like some potsherds or Roman coins?” (105). Foer, it seems, sublimates sadness and anger into a farcical or comic narrative which turns tragic and deeply disturbing.

Jonathan tells Alex that he wants to begin their search in Trachimbrod, the shtetl where his grandfather grew up and whose history he is trying to construct.

“Where I would be now if it weren’t for the war.”
“You would be Ukrainian.”
“That’s right.”
“Like me”
“I guess” (59).

Jonathan’s musing on what his life might have been, if not for the war, is the first indication of why he writes the fictional history of his family. Though he will only write his text upon his return to America, he is still able to recognize at the beginning of this quest that there are gaps which even finding Augustine will not be able to fill. This is why he starts almost two hundred years before the shtetl’s destruction.

This small exchange is also the first moment of bonding between the two young men, a hesitant recognition of each other as people, which Alex immediately disrupts: "only not like me because you would be a farmer in an unimpressive town, and I live in Odessa, which is very much like Miami" (59). Ironically, as the travellers will discover, he and Jonathan might in different circumstances have grown up as neighbours. Only paragraphs later, the two are again joined in the thought that Safran, Jonathan's grandfather (from whom he gets his second name), was in love with Augustine. "'Do you think that he loved her?' 'what?' "because he remarks only her.' So?' 'so perhaps he loved her.' 'it's funny that you should think that. You and I must think alike'" (60). To this a later Alex, one who has come to esteem and care for Jonathan, replies in parenthesis "thank you, Jonathan" (60). These conversations appear often in Alex's sections of *Everything Is Illuminated*. Such pieces are presented as unedited drafts of the part of the text that Alex is sending to a Jonathan he has come to trust and respect. Through Alex's letters to Jonathan, we are exposed to the process of due reflection, though Jonathan's replies are only ever inferred.

The relationship between Alex and Jonathan begins to intensify when the group goes to dinner. Once again, Jonathan's ignorance about the Ukraine shows itself when he explains that he is a vegetarian, which baffles Alex, his grandfather and their waitress:

"No meat"
"Pork?"
"No."
"meat?"
"No meat."
"steak?"
"Nope."
"Chicken?"
"No" (65).

The continuing confusion is at first amusing, playing out at the expense of the Ukrainians who cannot understand this Western dietary preference. Yet it also identifies Jonathan as a spoilt, privileged undergraduate from the US who adopts the latest politically correct attitudes. When Jonathan receives two potatoes with a side-serving of steak and asks Alex to remove the meat for him because "he'd rather not touch it" (66), his false sense of moral superiority over meat-

eaters is highlighted, since he ignores the socio-economic and cultural aspects of these choices. Alex here not only mocks Jonathan but is insulted by him, as he "perceived that the hero perceived he was too good for our food" (66).

The tension increases when one of Jonathan's two potatoes falls onto the floor with a "PLOMP. It rolled over, and then was inert" (66). Staring at the dirty floor, Jonathan finds himself unequal to picking it up. Even Alex's grandfather feels that "an awful thing has happened" (67), and when greeted by the sight of the potato on the floor, the waitress backs away. Finally, Alex's grandfather "inserted his fork into the potato, picked it up from the floor … [and] cut it into four pieces" (67), giving one each to himself, Alex, the hero, and Sammy Davis Junior Junior. What may be of little consequence in another situation is here an act of solidarity and compromise shared between the three men. Notably, it is Grandfather, who has been the most hostile towards Jonathan, who has the insight and compassion to find a solution that draws them into a group. Eating his own piece, and making Alex do the same, the grandfather remarks "welcome to the Ukraine" (67), which makes them all laugh hysterically, again reminding Jonathan of the difference between this country and his own. They "[laugh] with violence, and then more violence" (67), until they are crying; as Alex notes– with the insight that he is now beginning to reveal he possesses– "each of us was laughing for a different reason, for our own reason, and … not one of those reasons had a thing to do with the potato" (67). It seems Alex is laughing with relief that the tension has been dissipated and that he is not being deemed 'unworthy' by the hero, whilst Jonathan may be laughing at his own misunderstanding of the Ukraine, at his unrealistic expectations of the journey and the situation in which he has found himself. As for Grandfather, his reasons are perhaps more complicated: he has been on edge since entering Lutsk, and is openly hostile to "the Jew", as he calls Jonathan: there is a certain satisfaction in making this "spoiled Jew" eat the dirty piece of potato. Additionally, Grandfather is edging closer to a world he does not want to enter, and this moment of absurdity is a relief from the overarching tension.

Foer in this way reveals the purpose behind Alex's narrative style; it is used deliberately for the release of tension by an uncertain young adult, a son, a grandson and a tour guide. Indeed, he "makes funnies" throughout the journey, especially at moments when things are going severely wrong and he is ashamed or attempting to relieve Jonathan's tension. However, there is more to his humour than distraction and disguise. When his grandfather tells him that he does not have to "present not-truths" (227) to him, Alex reflects: "but I do. That is what you

always fail to understand. I present not-truths in order to protect you. That is also why I try so inflexibly to be a funny person. Everything is to protect you. I exist in case you need to be protected" (227). This "you", extends beyond his grandfather to his mother, and little Igor, and eventually Jonathan. Alex displays a desire to help those he loves and to shield them from the horrors–his father's abuse, uncomfortable truths, pain–which he has experienced. These moments of vulnerability expose a different side of Alex; as he is stripped of his Ukrainian machismo, he is able to reveal himself to his family, to Jonathan, and to the reader as a kind and tender young man, desperate for the love he has been denied by his father.

A Derridean Reading of Folklore and the Fantastical Creation of a Family Tree

In an early letter to Jonathan, Alex writes: "I know that you asked me not to alter the mistakes because they sound humorous, and humorous is the only truthful way to tell a sad story, I think I will alter them. Please do not hate me" (53). This is a lesson Jonathan learns only later: "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 a way of shrinking from that wonderful and terrible world" (158).

In "Illuminating the Ineffable", Elaine Safer observes that by engaging his characters in dialogue about the theory of the novel, Foer "brings the reader in as a third participant in the discourse. This method causes readers to get emotionally involved in the tension between the value of the comic and the tragic, as well as caught up in the tragicomic nature of the fiction itself" (Safer 124). Foer says as much in a 2002 interview:

> People say I'm writing a humorous novel about the Holocaust… In fact, there's nothing humorous about the Holocaust in my book - by the time it gets to that, there's no humour left. So, then the question is, well, do you think it's OK to use humour and tragedy within the covers of the same book? And the answer to that is obviously yes. (Burkeman)

The balance between humour and pain is central to the novel's transgressiveness. The text plays with the different ways in which trauma, absence, and loss can be represented, and challenges the notion that humour and fantasy have no place in this context. The novel emphasizes the necessity for combining pathos within fantasy. Fantasy does not nullify pain, or divert attention

from the Shoah, which is ever-present. Rather, fantasy is a way into the horrors of the Holocaust. In the fantastical story of Trachimbrod, it is the tension between laughter and the terrible that transgressively produces deeper understanding of a world filled with anguish and loss.

According to Jonathan's history or mythology, Trachimbrod is the village, or rather the shtetl, in which his paternal family lived from 18th March 1791 until 18th March 1942, exactly one hundred and fifty-one years. The origins of Jonathan's family and the destruction of the shtetl centre upon the River Brod. As the title of the first chapter suggests, this is the "beginning of the world", Jonathan's own Genesis, creating the concrete from chaos, although this universe never quite frees itself form the chaotic.

March 18th, 1791was the date on which "Trachim B's double axel wagon either did or did not pin him against the bottom of the Brod River" (8). This is, and is not, witnessed by the town's madman Sofiowka N, "whose name the shtetl would later take for maps and…census records" (9), as he rigged a lottery to make sure his was the only choice available. Sofiowka admits he saw something, after the Well-Regarded Rabbi's twins notice flotsam rising to the top of the river. This catches the attention of the disgraced usurer Yankel D, as well as the gefiltefishmonger Bitzl Bitzl R.

In this way, the reader is immersed in a culture of eccentricities, contradictions, and humour – one of Eastern European folklore. As discussed in the chapter on "The Tumblers" (21-32), Eastern European folklore is a narrative form with roots in the medieval period and the Renaissance, as well as the nineteenth century. Sholem Aleichem and Isaac Bashevis Singer are today the best-known writers in this Jewish literary tradition. Both these writers depict "holy fools", innocents whose real foolishness allows them to view the world clearly and to subvert it without malice (Chakravarti 209). In "The Escapist: Fantasy, Folklore, and the Pleasures of the Comic Book in Recent Jewish American Holocaust Fiction", Behlman argues that through the use of Ashkenazi Jewish folklore in particular, Foer and Englander create "fictions that announce their fictiveness, fictions that intimately surround historical experience but do not present that experience directly" (60). Rather, both writers contrast Jewish folkloric figures and the Jewish culture which generated them (60).

The similarities are clear between *Everything Is Illuminated* **(**published in 2002) and "The Tumblers", which appeared only four years earlier. Foer and Englander became colleagues and friends, notably working on 2012 *The New American Haggadah* as editor and translator respectively. In an interview for *The Guardian,* Foer says that he read Englander's first collection *For the Relief of Unbearable Urges* in 1999 (Brokes 2012). Thus, it is quite probable that Englander's re-imagination of the characters of Jewish folklore would have influenced Foer's practice.

Englander portrays two factions of Chassidim in Chelm: the strict *Mahmirim*, who wanted so intensely not to be associated with the lenient *Meykilim* that they moved away from the Nazi boxcars and accidentally entered a circus train. This idea reverberates in the two opposed congregations of Trachimbrod. The Slouchers and the Uprighters were divided one *Yom Kippur* service when they were all hanging from the roof of the synagogue, in order to be closer to God. As the Venerable Rabbi explained, screaming as all the congregants did to make themselves heard by God, "IF WE ASPIRE TO BE CLOSER TO GOD…SHOULD WE NOT ACT LIKE IT? AND SHOULD WE NOT MAKE OURSELVES CLOSER?" (17). A fly then came along, "tickling some of the most ticklish places" (17) and leaving the congregants either to drop their prayer books or to lose hold of the ropes keeping them attached to the roof. Those who dropped their books became the Slouchers, cast out of the synagogue and contentedly trading in their pulleys for cushions, "the Hebrew prayer book for a more understandable Yiddish one, and the Rabbi for a group led service…often interrupted, by food, drink, and gossip" (18). They left rigidity to the Uprighters, who "continued for two hundred years to walk with an affected limp to remind themselves – or, more importantly to remind others – of their response to The Test [of the fly]" (18). The Uprighters and Slouchers parody the current differences between the strictly Orthodox and less stringent forms of Judaism, rendering both ridiculous.

Chelm and Trachimbrod align again on the importance of physical space: when Chelm was founded, the Wise Men decreed that no one and nothing, not even an outside wind was allowed in Chelm (27). This decree was accorded the utmost importance, so that even a train track on the edge of town was unacceptable. Gronom the Ox woke the town at midnight and had all the men etch a longitudinal line down the middle of each and every brick, declaring that "the top half of every brick was to be considered theirs, and the bottom half, everything below the line, belonged to the railroad" (33). Thus, when the train passed through the tunnel, it would not

actually be within Chelm. This too enrichened the Chelmites "for they were now proud owners of so many top halves of bricks which they hadn't had before" (33).

Trachimbrod's stance on space is more flexible, quite literally so. The inhabitants divide the shtetl into two sections, the Jewish Quarter and the Human Three-Quarters.

> All so called sacred activities–religious studies, kosher butchering, bargaining, etc.– were contained within the Jewish Quarter. Those activities concerned with the humdrum or daily existence– secular studies, communal justice, buying and selling, etc.– took place in the Human Three-Quarters. (10)

Straddling this division is the Upright Synagogue (where the test of the fly had taken place), with the holy ark itself built along what the citizens called the "Jewish/human fault line"; "as the ratio of sacred to secular shift[s]" (10), so too do they redraw the fault line and move the synagogue. Here, Foer offers an insight into the duality of Jewish life, even within "Jewish" spaces. Though Trachimbrod is far away from bustling cities, and is dominated by Jews, there is a continual negotiation between worldly and religious affairs. Foer's fault-line emphasizes how precarious this balance may become. Unlike Chelm, there is no decree forbidding the wind to enter Trachimbrod; the shtetl is located within the Ukraine, not far from Lutsk. "Gypsies" travel past it, the citizens speak of other shtetls and cities, visitors arrive – and, as Yankel D did, they leave. Yet this division between the Jewish and secular world persists through most of the novel, and is mirrored in its structure which divides Jonathan's Trachimbrod from Alex's quest narrative, as well as his letters to Jonathan. As with the Jewish/human fault-line, these elements seem to co-exist in constant tension, until they will converge in 1942.

The lines between the sacred and secular are threatened by more than just philosophical questions. Outside forces of anti-Semitism assert themselves at intervals, notably "that exceptional hour in 1764, immediately following the Pogrom of Beaten Chests when the shtetl was completely secular" (10). Although this pogrom was "not the worst, and there still are, no doubt, worse to come" (206), it heralded the only time when Trachimbrod was located within "the Human Whole". This balance between human and Jewish lasted from 1764 until 1942 when the shtetl was destroyed, leaving nothing sacred or secular behind.

In Foer's novel, magical realism, fantasy and myth mix with, and alter, the familiar characters of folklore in a deliberately constructed space of literary antecedents while still rendering Trachimbrod complex and three-dimensional. The incident of the wagon is transformed from the comic to the legendary. As soon as the twins discover the debris of the overturned wagon, the entire village gather together, "curiosity being the only thing the citizens shared" (10), in an attempt to understand what had taken place that morning. While the Well-Regarded Rabbi, the man of law Isaac M, and Menasha the physician are arguing over the shtetl's proclamation, Jonathan's great-great-great-great-great-grandmother rises out of the water, "still mucus glazed, still pink as the inside of a plum" (13).

The baby born seemingly from the river itself is at once obscene and mythical, causing the drowned horse at the bottom of the river to close its "heavy eyes" (13) and the twins to hide behind their father, while even "the prehistoric ant in Yankel's ring, which had lain motionless in its honey colored amber since long before Noah had hammered the first plank, hid its head between its many legs, in shame" (13). In "Illuminating the Ineffable", Safer notes that Foer uses and subverts devices from classical epics such as *The Odyssey, The Iliad,* and *Paradise Lost*; his description of his ancestor's birth parodies the epic proportion of Greek myth concerning the birth of gods (17). By treating his great-great-great-great-great-grandmother's birth with the reverence tradition accords to characters in ancient texts, and elevating his own family to the divine dynasties which characters in these works found, Foer is drawing upon, and parodying, Holocaust piety. Both Rose (1996) and Boswell (2012) reject the sanctimonious narratives that have dominated Holocaust fiction, yet Foer deliberately uses the associated devices, driving them to their most absurd conclusion. Englander too plays with this approach in all of his short stories, most notably "The Tumblers" and "What We Talk About When We Talk About Anne Frank". However, Foer goes still further, mythologizing not only the survivors themselves but an entire family line and all the inhabitants of the town of Trachimbrod. An entire culture is thus memorialized without sentimentalizing it. In the novel, Jonathan's grandfather Safran observes that "the origin of a story is always an absence" (203), so the mythic fantasy becomes an effort to fill the absences left in the wake of the Shoah in order "to live among presences" (203).

Foer's endeavour to engage with the erosion of presence echoes Jacques Derrida's notion of "the trace". This notion describes the absences always present in language: every word holds within it all those words that are unspoken but which it connotes, but also, at its centre, the

origin of language itself–"the fire that is still burning at the origin of language" (Lukacher 1). In keeping with this idea of "burning", cinders became Derrida's metaphor for the trace. Cinders are both presence and absence, they are what remains after a fire, but are more solid than ash (Derrida 37). As such, cinders are liminal, they are a holding place between the past and the future, a space into which "the truth, or its impossibility, might come, a space, as Derrida calls it, for the invention, the *in-venire*, the incoming of the other"(Lukacher1). This is precisely Foer's project, producing an inventive space in which trauma and memory can be explored

Derrida's cinder is inextricably linked to mourning, which is a subtext throughout *Everything Is Illuminated*, or rather what happens beyond mourning, when mourning burns itself out. Mourning and melancholia intertwine and extend indefinitely, looking to what "persists within the 'enigma' of mourning, of what still 'clings', what still continues to burn and cannot be consumed" (Lukacher 12). This is the transition from "high mourning", to "partial mourning" which Derrida believes is the indestructible cinder. In this sense the cinder is a monument in and of itself, much like Trachimbrod will become.

Derrida's examination of mourning leads him to the Holocaust which he argues is the modern incarnation of cinders, of "the all-burning… in German in all the Jewish languages of the world" (57). In this shared language humans all become Jews, and thus Jews human too, so that Derrida finds a focused perspective on Foer's Jewish/Human fault-line. The Holocaust is at once cinder and ash, the term Derrida originally preferred; this ash is both literal and figurative, evoking the crematoria which turned physical bodies into frail fragments which would be blown away and scattered as the residue of their extermination. Ash, Lukacher writes, is the result of the

> cathartic motivation of the Nazi Extermination, the most monstrous gift of appropriation, which sought to purge Europe of its unaesthetic inhabitants, Jews above all, but also dissidents and eccentrics of all sorts - political, sexual, or cultural; "of the other", writes Derrida, "cinder there is". (12)

Yet, this goal was not achieved: what remained after the Holocaust was more than mere ash; it was the "effects of the fire even if the fire itself remains inaccessible, outside cognition though not without leaving a trace" (Lukacher 2). The cinder retains the incineration of victims,

displaying it and commemorating it. As Derrida writes in *Shibboleth* "there is certainly today a date for this holocaust that we know, the hell of our memory" (77). He argues that all languages are Jewish, consumed and burnt from the inside by the cinder "by the all-burning oven named in the Greek holokaustos" (14).

Foer's task entails uncovering the cinder when he has been presented with ash. His challenge, both literary and literal, is to reignite the fire buried within the cinder. Early in Jonathan's section, an unnamed citizen of Trachimbrod writes down his recurrent dream:

> I walked to the Brod, without knowing why, and looked into my reflection in the water. I couldn't look away. What was the image that pulled me in after it? What was it that I loved? And then I recognised it. So simple. In the water I saw my father's face, and that face saw the face of its father, and so on and so on, reflecting backwards to the beginning of time, to the face of God in whose image we are all created. We burned with love for ourselves, all of us starters of the fire we suffered. Our love was the affliction for which only our love was the cure. (40-41)

This is the trace seen in reverse, as Jonathan contemplates his antecedents in the absence of any solid family evidence after the Holocaust. Here, the burning bush is evoked(40), the moment when God first spoke to Moses and commanded him to free the Hebrews from Egypt, a marked beginning for the Jewish people. However, this burning is also tied up with the crematoria of the Holocaust, a definitive end to many lineages. For Jonathan, unrequited love for his past will always be closer to the crematoria than to the burning bush.

Jonathan expresses the longing that comes from a lack of knowledge. His grandfather died a few weeks after his mother was born. His grandmother "held onto the photograph" (60) of Augustine for fifty years and even after giving it to his mother, said nothing about it. Jonathan's grandmother is reminiscent of the one in Thane Rosenbaum's novel *The Stranger within Sarah Stein* whom her granddaughter describes as being "smart about secrets . . . secrets of her own, and secret hiding places . . . It was like she disappeared" (38). In Jonathan's family, his grandmother makes his grandfather vanish rather than herself. Jonathan refuses to speculate aloud about his grandmother's knowledge concerning his grandfather's relationship with Augustine. Her silence is another absence demanding to be filled, creating further questions

for Jonathan and Alex: if his grandfather was indeed in love with Augustine, was this knowledge passed on to his grandmother (60)?

Jonathan, like Ben, the child of Holocaust survivors in Anne Michaels' *Fugitive Pieces*, has been born into a vacuum left by history, "already fetid with undergrowth, worms chewing soil abandoned by roots" (233). In this ground he attempts to plant a magical realist family tree. In *Third-generation Holocaust Representation: Trauma, History, and Memory* Aarons and Berger note that "the more temporally distanced from the events of the Holocaust, the more tenuous the stories become—stories of stories told, second- and third-hand versions of names, places, and the unfolding of events. In such instances, as the late psychologist Dan Bar-On suggests, there are, to be sure, 'historical' truths that describe 'what happened'—but there are also 'narrative truths'–'how someone tells what happened'" (8) This telling is as, if not more, important, than the historical truths. It is a response to trauma, absence, and loss; a way of navigating through them. Foer "tells what happened" across four narrative modalities, which disrupt and supplement one another–before they ultimately converge–displaying the fragmented nature of this narrative truth. It is defined by what is not there. It is an attempt to conjure a presence.

Aarons and Berger argue that the third generation of Holocaust writers have grown up not in the wake of the Holocaust, but on its margins (4). The Holocaust constantly casts "remote shadows" (4) across their lives

> It is this periphery upon which the third generation trespasses in an attempt to capture memory and fill the ever-widening gap between those who directly suffered the events of the Holocaust and lived to recount their experiences and those for whom that particular history can only be imaginatively reconstructed from an approximation of that time and place, events excavated from the "shards" of memories, as one of novelist Ehud Havazelet's characters reveals, "refracting no more than their miserable incompleteness." (4)

French writer Henry Raczymow notes that third generational stories often bear "no resemblance [to the known world] as if they'd come from another world" (102). Certainly, this describes Trachimbrod, an amalgamation of Sholem Aleichem and Singer, of epics and the Bible, of magical realism and folklore, together with borrowings from Englander, all pieced

together to create a fractured middle spanning the lacuna between before and after. Foer's "before" addresses the question that Aaron and Berger ask: "[W]here does memory end and fantasy begin?" (8). Lukacher writes that Derrida's cinders "name another relation, not to the truth as such, but to its possibility" (1). Jonathan has nearly nothing in the way of truths. Thus, fantasy becomes the substitute for memory, not a literal "but [a] more than figurative fire that can be felt in the cinders…" (Lukacher 2). Jonathan's magical realist Trachimbrod is powered by this not-quite fire, by the ever elusive possibility of memory and truth.

The baby's arising from the river, seemingly from nowhere since no other bodies are ever found, is the first fantastical attempt to fill absences in the family history. Yet this absence is also an immediate concern for citizens of the shtetl, who are trying to understand exactly how this mysterious event could have happened. They fill the gap with their own mythology, and accept Sofiowka's story that it was Trachim B's double-axle wagon which feel into the river; without any bodies for evidence, they settle on only the wagon itself. The Well-Regarded Rabbi directs them out of this uncertainty, arguing that there is no need to fill out a death certificate and to bury what is not there, which allows them to make progress (13). However, far from moving them forward, this legend becomes integral to the shtetl. Plays are produced retelling it; every year on its anniversary, the people celebrate Trachim Day, when young men from all the surrounding shtetls dive for a sack of gold representing Trachim's body, while the town adopts its informal name from Trachim and the River Brod into which he supposedly disappeared.

Another absence which demands to be filled is that of a home for the baby. Again the Well-Regarded Rabbi steps in, announcing that there will be a lottery to decide who will become her family. Only the men apply, because the baby is kept in the Upright Synagogue which only they can enter to see and hold the new-born. The women are not permitted inside, as the Venerable Rabbi had explained: "HOW CAN WE BE EXPECTED TO KEEP OUR MIND AND HEARTS WITH GOD WHEN THAT OTHER PART IS POINTING US TOWARDS IMPURE THOUGHTS OF YOU KNOW WHAT?" (19). The women are confined to the basement of the synagogue and given only a tiny hole through which to see and hear the service. This is Foer's wry commentary on the gender discrimination prevalent in patriarchal Judaism, which chooses to relegate women to separate galleries, to hide them behind partitions known as *mechitzot*, and indeed in some cases to bury them in basements, all to ensure that men's eyes do not wander. Thus, the women of the shtetl have to take turns at seeing the baby through this

hole, and "from such a distance…they couldn't satisfy any of their mothering instincts. The hole wasn't even large enough to show all of the baby at once, and they had to piece together mental collages of her from each of the fragmented views" (20). The baby becomes an absence for these women, an other which is not given space, which is not welcomed (37). The women of Trachimbrod must, like Jonathan, create her from scraps, and they grow to hate her, "to hate her unknowability, her untouchability, the collage of her" (20). While Foer aligns the baby with Greek heroes, demi-gods and Moses, these women cast her as a "sign from the devil herself" (20). Both these myths will follow her as she grows.

As a result, the Rabbi must choose between fifty-two men who are all decent, if a little below average. He decides to let the baby herself choose, putting all the letters from the men who applied into her crib and giving her to the person who had written the first note she grabbed. Parodying both the epic and the aspiration to piety, Foer prepares for the future of this family in an "inhuman and inexcusable stink" (22) emanating from the baby and out of which her father is chosen–the disgraced Usurer Yankel D. The birth of Jonathan's great-great-great-great-great-grandmother and her acquisition of a father are treated by Foer with a similar level of satirical grandiosity. The stench, and its cause, "flooded from the ark, swept through the synagogue, streamed down every street, every alleyway of the shtetl, flowed under every pillow in every bedroom – entering the nostrils of the sleeping for long enough to misdirect their dreams before exiting with the next snore – and drained, finally, into the Brod" (22). Here Foer uses the grotesque, applying the same "material bodily" (Bakhtin 75) degradation to the biblical and the epic as is utilised in the "feast of fools" to undercut sacred church rituals (75). The invented origin of Foer's family is sacrilegious and wickedly comedic.

In the first chapter entitled "Falling in Love" (one of four occasions when this title is used), Yankel creates his own world for the baby, making her "a bed of crumpled newspapers in a deep baking pan … her body was tattooed with the newsprint" (43). Sometimes he rocks her to sleep in his arms and reads her … knowing everything he needs to know about the world. If it wasn't written on her, it wasn't important to him" (44). This cocoon of a world he builds for himself and the child is a smaller scale version of the world Foer creates for Jonathan and for his readers, one where they are at home, are given, as Yankel gives the baby, "an abacus bead of [our] own, so [we] never feel out of place" (48). As for the child herself, Yankel names her Brod "after the river of her strange birth" (47). Again, Foer parodies traditional biblical stories, with Brod's birth bearing similarities to that of Moses (*Mosheh*) who was brought to Pharaoh's

daughter by a river and was named after her "reaching" for him in the water; the Hebrew is *meshitihu* (Exodus 2:10-11). Moses is taken in by royalty in stark contrast to Brod whose father is defined by an unexplained disgrace.

Everything Is Illuminated is full of Jewish "in-jokes", like these biblical and historical references that speak particularly to Jewish readers. By playing with the tropes of Yiddish folk stories, Foer is already immersing readers of all backgrounds in a Jewish space. This space creates a moment of comfort in a narrative which is purposefully disruptive and tense. Indeed, even the reprieve of an "in-joke" serves further to disorient the reader when the story returns to the uncertain and tragic.

Discovery and Loss

The Jewish/Human fault-line at work within the story is also a feature of the narrative design of the novel, as the story switches between the fantastical, Jewish world of Trachimbrod and the 1998 quest in Ukraine involving both a Jew and gentiles. At the same time, the fault-line in Alex's section blurs as Alex and his grandfather start to see Jonathan as human and even a friend. The reader returns to the group who have just finished their dinner and are beginning to break through the distance and cultural confusion that they initially felt towards one another. Alex's interest in and affection for Jonathan have been re-established, now with a deeper basis than merely his being an American. After the sharing of the potato at dinner Alex observes that he and Jonathan "were like friends. For the first time that I could remember, I felt entirely good" (72). His grandfather describes Jonathan as a good boy and believes that they "should try very inflexibly to help him" (73). Alex agrees, so grandfather and grandson draw closer together as well, united in their suddenly investment in Jonathan's search: "'I should like very much to find Augustine he [grandfather] said. 'So would I'" (73).

However, the journey to find Trachimbrod is "very rigid" (105). It quickly becomes clear that the shtetl is more difficult to locate than they had expected, owing to their outdated and incomplete maps and the hostility of the people they try to ask for help. Repeatedly, they are told to go away, or are greeted with silence. At one point a woman asks ominously "why now?" (114), while a man warns them "you should stop searching now. I promise you that you will find nothing" (114) – which proves to be almost true. Alex, again taking on the role of protector, does not tell Jonathan anything, wondering whether "this is because I am a good

person. Perhaps it is because I am a bad one" (114). His decision may spare him for the moment, but he is unsure whether he should prepare Jonathan for ultimate disappointment. Alex bases his dubious decision on the mantra his father uses when punching him: "'it does not hurt, it does not hurt. And the more he would utter it, the more it was faithful" (115). Alex's refrain is: "we will find her. We will find her" (115). But, like the physical and emotional pain inflicted by his abusive father, the anxiety and sadness which come with the seemingly fruitless search cannot be permanently erased.

Despite this, Alex succumbs, albeit briefly, to a despair of his own, observing that "it was seeming as if we were in the wrong country, or the wrong century, or as if Trachimbrod had disappeared, and so had the memory of it" (115). Alex is faced with the third generation problem of how "to locate people and places that are no longer there" (Aarons and Berger 9). He feels the anxiety of the end of memory, of the disappearance by physical destruction and silence of what had just become important to him. As Aarons and Berger describe it, he seems to be falling into the depths of the hole of the Holocaust in a "painstakingly unswerving descent" (4). Nevertheless, he is determined, for himself, for his grandfather, and for Jonathan: "we would drive until we found Trachimbrod, and drive until we found Augustine" (115). He, like Jonathan, has taken on Derrida's "impossible mission" (35), attempting to uncover cinders amongst the dispersed ash of the past.

Jonathan's anxiety manifests itself in his compulsive literary recreation of his family. Alex observe that the "less we saw, the more he wrote" (115). Jonathan is determined to fill as many absences as possible; if he cannot find physical evidence, he will create it. Here, Foer again exposes the function of the novel, whilst implicitly acknowledging its desperate – and often bizarre – self-creation out of nothingness. At this point, he moves his story forward in time to the fictional Jonathan's grandfather. From Brod, the Trachimbrod narrative leaps over two centuries, and the reader finally meets Safran, whose absence has been central to this story. It is 1941 and Safran's wedding day (119).

Safran is on his way to participate in a ceremony that every soon-to-be-husband in the town of Trachimbrod has observed; he is headed to the Dial. The Dial, the reader learns, is a statue in the centre of the town square of Safran's great-great-great-grandfather, the Kolker, Brod's husband (121). After only a few paragraphs about the 1940s, Foer again brings the narrative back to the seventeenth century, to Brod's married life, as her great-great-great-grandson

prepares to begin his own. Jonathan links his family in a "uniform chain" (140), which is bizarre, tinged by the fantastical, and steeped in ceremony, tradition and most importantly knowledge. Safran kneels before the Dial and understands how he had arrived there; he, in stark contrast to Jonathan, is confident in his history.

The Kolker had arrived in Brod's life on Trachimday, 1804, when she discovered her father dead on the floor. Foer ties his family to this date, producing a cyclical narrative of life and death. As Brod looked at the Kolker, she lit up so brightly that years later on 16th July 1969, with Jonathan's mother and grandmother watching the first astronaut to walk on the moon, he whispered "*I see something*, while gazing over the lunar horizon at the tiny village of Trachimbrod, *there's definitely something out there*" (99). In Foer's version the astronaut is seeing, as Lukacher says of the cinder, "the effects of the fire even if the fire itself remains inaccessible, outside cognition though not without leaving a trace" (2). This moment is a mixture of absurdity and pathos. The idea that Trachimbrod could capture the attention of an astronaut during such an historic moment is reminiscent of Singer's opening paragraph of *The Fools of Chelm and their History*: "And God said, 'let there be Chelm.' And there was Chelm" (3). This moment exposes Jonathan's deep desire for his family to have left an imprint on the world, a cinder.

Yet, even one-and-a-half centuries earlier, Brod and the Kolker live within an absence. At the flour mill where the Kolker works, he has a gruesome accident and a saw lodges in his head (126). The Kolker lives but is changed; whereas he had previously been kind, he becomes aggressive. Despite his turning his anger, both verbal and physical, toward Brod, she refuses to be separated from him. Eventually they are forced to exile the Kolker to another room, cutting a hole in the wall: the "absence that defined [the hole] became a presence that defined them. Life was a small negative space cut out of the eternal solidity" (135). Brod and the Kolker are forced to piece together once familiar bodies. However, unlike the women of Trachimbrod, who grew to hate Brod's "unknowability" (20) when obliged to view her through such a hole, the Kolker and his wife create a life from that negative space and "for the first time, it felt precious" (135).

Foer qualifies the argument about filling absences that he has been building throughout the narrative. The pain of having only incomplete images of what should be known is counterbalanced by an appreciation of what can be reached and known, however

problematically. Brod articulates this: "*this is love,* she thought*, isn't it? When you notice someone's absence and hate that absence more than anything? More, even, than you love his presence?*" (121). Here absence frames and gives meaning to presence in an inversion of love. The reconstruction Jonathan is engaged in is an act of love intent of filling absences; it is a longing for presences that the Shoah has taken from him, making absence the more precious. Brod's love is tinged by hatred, but there is little indication of hate in Jonathan's imaginings.

In another cyclical moment, the Kolker dies at the same moment that his son is born and "the house was so consumed with new life, that no one noticed new death" (139). This cyclicity is imbedded in the Trachimbrod narrative from Brod's birth to the Kolker's meeting Brod on the day when Yankel dies – and now there is a new child in the family line. It will reach its tragic conclusion on the same day on which the narrative began–Trachimday, March 18th – but no new life will immediately replace those lost. Even the descendants of the survivors are far removed from Trachimbrod and its history.

After the Kolker's death, the men at the flour mill bronze the body and erect the statue in the town square; the saw lodged in its head could be used "to tell more or less accurate time by the sun". He becomes a "symbol of luck's power" (139) and people come from the surrounding area to visit and pray at his feet. The Kolker is an ever-changing god; his body is rubbed and kissed, and worn away by his believers, "destroyed and recreated by their belief" (140). He is re-bronzed once a month. In an act of "reverse heredity" (140) the craftsmen begin to model his face after his male descendants; when Safran, decades later, kneels before the Dial, and is struck by his resemblance to his great-great-great-great-grandfather, "what he really saw was that his great-great-great-great-grandfather was growing to look like him. His revelation was just how much he was growing to look like himself" (140).

This is a self-reflexive moment in the novel, when Foer calculatedly refocuses his readers' attention on the constructedness of the narrative, which has its own craftsmen, both the fictional Jonathan and the author Foer. Foer subverts the successful immersion of his reader in the world of Trachimbrod, emphasizing the fantastical elements which have become almost commonplace, exposing them as the reverse engineering of a past which never was, an absence masquerading as presence (Merle Williams 308-310). Safran kneels before the Dial "as every man about to be married had for generations" (140). His secure sense of family, of history and of tradition has been stripped away from Jonathan by the Holocaust and the subsequent

displacement of the family to the United States. Jonathan does not know – and perhaps cannot know – whether he is "growing into his place in the family" (121).

If Jonathan resembles his grandfather, he does not comment upon it. He studies his grandfather's image in the few photos he has of him with intensity, noticing that it "would be possible to look through all the photographs and still miss what's so unusual" (166). In every photo his grandfather's right arm holds nothing; it is held awkwardly and hidden away. Jonathan gives his grandfather a dead arm, and from this detail he creates another fantastical story of origin. His grandfather was born with a full set of teeth, "the first thing [Jonathan] notices in his baby portrait" (166). This remarkable physical feature is the reason he was "pulled prematurely from his mother's well" (166) and why his mother stopped breast-feeding him. Here Jonathan imagines a series of events being set in motion that will ultimately save his grandfather's life:

> 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 exempt 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 stopped him from swimming back to Trachimbrod to save his only true love… 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 on orders of U.S immigration officials, and whose passengers would all eventually perish in the Treblinka death camp. (166)

Jonathan's fantasy here borders on nonsense, emphasizing his immaturity and a certain lack of seriousness in his search for his family history. Like Deb, in Englander's "What We Talk About When We Talk About Anne Frank", there is an element of parody in how Foer depicts Jonathan's desperation for stories of miracles of the type where people survive in impossible, ridiculous circumstances, like Englander's man hiding inside a circus cannon throughout the war (9).This type of story in turn evoke Gillian Rose's critique of Holocaust piety, of the equally absurd moment in Spielberg's *Schindler's List*, where instead of Zyklon B pouring through the shower heads in the gas chambers, water cascades down (8). As Alex notes, the

less they see, the more Jonathan writes; his imagination is running out of control as the fear of a lack of knowledge makes him desperate.

It is not only Jonathan whose anxiety has increased; Grandfather too becomes tenser the closer they get to Trachimbrod, yet his stress is different from Alex's and Jonathan's. He hints at his familiarity with this area early in the journey when he asks Alex to tell Jonathan that "much of this land was destroyed when the Nazis came, but before it was yet more beautiful … they made it all again. Before it was different" (111). Alex is surprised, asking "you were here before the war?" (111), to which he receives no answer. As the trio inches closer to Jonathan's past, they are also going to unearth Grandfather's past, one which Alex has no idea exists.

Despite his grandfather's silence, Alex wonders about his family's involvement in World War Two. Believing that his grandfather grew up in Odessa, his attention turns to his great-grandparents: "What did they do during the war? Who did they save?" (111). He is convinced – despite the anti-Semitism his grandfather, father and he himself have displayed – that his family were heroes in the war, or at least neutral. Alex has now grown close to Jonathan by assisting him, and perhaps he wants to know that his family had helped Jonathan's (or at least other Jews) during the war.

After hours of travelling, of going round in circles, the group comes across a woman on the porch of a "diminutive house" (116). Alex notes that while all the people in these small villages were poor, "she was more poor" (116), surrounded by clothing and objects that were in tatters, and very old – "she was very fragile, and appeared as if she could be obliterated with just one finger" (116). She is the first friendly person Alex has encountered, though at first she says she cannot help him, that she does not know anything about Trachimbrod. Alex cannot bear to return to the car having failed again, acknowledging that there "are only so many times that you can utter 'it does not hurt' before it begins to hurt even more than the hurt" (117). This is the first time Alex admits to the psychological pain his father's abuse has caused; he has "become enlightened of the feeling of feeling hurt, which is worse, [he is] certain, than the existent hurt" (117). He is beginning to face his own truths, as well as his own trauma, and no longer wishes to lie to his grandfather and Jonathan.

He returns to the woman with the picture of Augustine and asks whether she has "ever witnessed anyone in this photograph" (117). She replies that she has not, but Alex asks again,

and again– ten times–until finally she answers, “I have been waiting for you for so long” (118). When he tells her that he is looking for Trachimbrod, she replies in a statement which is both a relief and a tragedy– “you are here. I am it” (118).

Alex chooses for the moment to ignore the tragedy of an entire shtetl’s being contained in a single woman, and rushes to the car, declaring that he has found Augustine. Her home is filled with photographs, boxes with strange proto-biblical labels – darkness, death of the first born, dust – and with piles of clothing and shoes. The shoes specifically are an image inextricably linked to the Nazi death camps as an “impurified” object which connotes destruction (Langer 65). Again Foer is playing with different Holocaust tropes, evoking the camps in his telling of the Ukrainian Shoah.

Yet the three men ignore these signifiers, filled with joy at having found the woman whom they believe to be Augustine. The sense of rightness is increased when the woman tells them she is too poor to buy meat and has only cabbage and potatoes to offer them; here privilege and poverty meet, as ironically this is the first time since the start of the journey that Jonathan’s vegetarianism has not been a problem. Grandfather cannot stop smiling, and Alex notes that he had “not seen him smile so much since Grandmother was alive” (148). Jonathan’s excitement is uncontainable, as he begs Alex to ask her question after question, to tell him everything in his desperation to fill the chasm of his past (Aarons and Berger 4). It is Alex, who has quickly grown empathetic and mature, and who cautions him to “slowness” (148); he does not want to frighten the frail Augustine, or as he puts it, he does not want her to “shit a brick” (148). Alex takes the expression Jonathan had taught him at the beginning of the novel and misapplies it, imbuing it with compassion rather than undergraduate facetiousness. Foer cleverly overlaps the adolescent past of Alex and Jonathan with their present, pointing to the complex layering of change and growth.

The joy and relief the trio find in this moment are almost immediately undercut when the women informs them that she is not Augustine. Grandfather refuses to believe her; putting his finger on the image of Safran, he tells her “you know this man” (151). She replies that she does, but she is not the woman in the photo. Alex accepts this declaration, “secur[ing] in [his] heart what grandfather would not allow in” (151). He does not spare Jonathan this truth either, declaring that Grandfather “is not being reasonable” (151). Within hours Alex moves from

presenting "not-truths" to Jonathan to unwavering honesty. He no longer wishes to hide the truth from those around him, especially concerning their quest, even if it will hurt them.

This newfound honesty in Alex's sections has long been apparent in his letters to Jonathan. The letters increasingly contradict his assertions in the quest narrative, until the two begin to converge, as the Alex on the journey grows to resemble the one writing about it. He is no longer "nomadic with the truth" (179), as Jonathan continues to be. He admits that he does not go to the "famous nightclubs" (1) described in the early pages of the novel, preferring to "roost on the beach" (53). He exposes more of his father's abusive behaviour, and acknowledges just how damaging it has been to him, how he would "remove him from [his] life, if [he] were not such a coward" (178). He divests himself of the last of his machismo, admitting that he has "never been carnal with a woman" (144). This is another truth which seems obvious, even though Alex is sure Jonathan, even now, "cannot believe it" (144). This confession is more complicated than a mere admission of virginity. Alex seems to be hinting at his sexuality here– he remarks that while he and his father laugh together about women, his father does not know what he is really like (144). This point is emphasized when he tries to explain to Jonathan that "I am the Gypsy girl and you are Safran, and … I am Kolker and you are Brod…do you not comprehend that we can bring each other safety and peace? When we were under the stars in Trachimbrod, did you not feel it then?" (214). This intimation that Alex may belong to the LGBTQIA+ community further entangles him in the Holocaust narrative, as members of this community were labelled "deviant" and suffered a similar fate to the Jews. Finally, he admits that he "will never see America" (241). Alex's dreams have been stripped away and he has been made realistic through suffering.

Three accounts of 18th March 1942

Alex asks the woman: "what do you signify?" (153). She has already answered him pages before, describing herself as Trachimbrod –"I am it" (118); however, it soon becomes clear that she does not signify what remains, but rather what was lost. She becomes "not-Augustine", her very name marking an absence, the physical representation of the destruction of Trachimbrod with its last objects stored in her diminutive house and its last memories stored within herself. Not-Augustine stands for the lost possibilities of the 1,204 lives that were taken on 18th March 1942. She seems to say, "*Il y a la cendre* – cinder, there is".

Literally too, not-Augustine leads the travellers to Trachimbrod, announcing their arrival with a simple "we are here" (184). Yet, what "here" means is not self-evident, as Alex explains:

> There was nothing. When I utter "nothing" I do not mean there was nothing except for two houses, and some wood on the ground, and pieces of glass, and children's toys, and photographs. When I utter there was nothing, what I intend is that there was not any of these things, or any other things. "How?" the hero asked. "How?" I asked Augustine. 'How could anything have ever existed here?' (184)

This nothingness is incomprehensible to the trio. It is the realization of the Nazi project, the utter meticulousness of eradication. As Englander writes in "The Tumblers", it is the fulfilment of a dogma that insists even on the extermination of a "dot-on-the-map hamlet" (51).

In the middle of the not-town, stands a monument: "it was a piece of stone, approximately the size of the hero" (189); small, yet life-sized, it commemorates the destruction of the citizens of Trachimbrod. It is the only physical imprint that Jonathan's family had ever lived there and it serves as the basis for the Dial; if Jonathan stares long enough, he can engage in generating his "reverse heredity…destroyed and recreated by [his] belief" (140). All that remains here is what Jonathan can and will imagine upon his return to the United States.

Standing in this place, Grandfather insists that the woman tell them what happened here: not-Augustine's story is one of three which close the novel, each depicting different versions of the destruction of Trachimbrod and its neighbouring shtetls. These accounts have been looming since the start of the novel, the origin of the absence that necessitated it.

Not-Augustine explains in a story aligned with Holocaust testimonies that "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" (184). This thinking echoes that of Englander's Chelmites, who even after the murder of a young girl would not look back "lest they be turned to salt, for they had learnt the lessons of Sodom" ("The Tumblers" 33). In Chapter 19 of Genesis, God destroys the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, deeming them wholly wicked. He saves only Abraham's nephew Lot and his family, who are told: "look not behind thee…lest thou be consumed" (19:17). However, when Lot's wife does turn back, she becomes a pillar of salt (19:26). For the citizens of Chelm and Trachimbrod, the lessons of Sodom are simple: they cannot save those behind

them, for to stop and look back would lead to their own deaths. Sodom and Gomorrah were obliterated by "brimstone and fire" (19:24) rained down from heaven, a description which is echoed in the second account of the destruction of Trachimbrod, where "bombs poured down from the sky exploding across Trachimbrod in bursts of light and heat" (272). Yet in this destruction the values are reversed; the shtetl is not wholly wicked, and its end is caused, not by a divine act but by the agency of humans whose sins "are very grievous" (18:20).

The Nazis lined up the men, with their families near them, and unrolled a Torah scroll; the general told each man to spit on the Torah or he would kill his family. In a paper delivered at a conference entitled "The Holocaust in Ukraine: New Sources and Perspectives", Father Patrick Desbois presented evidence that

> [b]etween 1941 and 1944, more than 1.5 million Jews were murdered in Ukraine during the invasion of the Soviet Union by Nazi Germany. Almost everywhere, Hitler's squads surrounded cities and towns and rounded up Jewish men, women, and children. They were first forced to undress and then slaughtered before being buried in mass graves. (94)

These shooting were public events, and the mass graves were often on the edges of towns, in plain view of the Ukrainians from whom Desbois collected his testimony. He does note that our knowledge of the subject is relatively incomplete, so much so that "in certain places—and it doesn't take long to realize this on the ground— the facts themselves remain undiscovered" (91). It is therefore possible that the events Foer describes could have taken place in the Ukraine, although this is not the traditional narrative.

Alex feels the pain doubled as he translates for Jonathan: "You cannot know how it felt to hear these things and then repeat them, because when I repeated them, I felt like I was making them new again" (185). Alex is no longer a witness to the testimony but is made part of it, implicated in what Caruth calls the voice which cries out "paradoxically from the wound" (2). Here, Caruth's "cry of the wound" vocalizes the ongoing trauma of the Shoah, which echoes across the generations, an unresolved pain that demands attention. This cry, as Derrida declares, is "in German in all the Jewish languages of the world" (77). Foer subverts the notion that this anguish can be expressed only by a Jew. It is Alex, the gentile Ukrainian, speaking in his idiosyncratic English, who tells Jonathan the story.

The story intensifies as the general approaches not-Augustine's father, as she recounts: the general told her father to spit "'did he?' 'No,' She said, and she said no as if it were any other word from any other story, not having the weight it had in this one" (186). This "no" reads as another word "impurified" by the Holocaust, carrying with it the weight of impending horror (Langer 66). Foer's account turns briefly to the conventional, even the "pious". Yet, he moves back to the transgressive with the father's unforeseen and seemingly perverse – yet courageous – behaviour.

When the father's refuses, the general kills not-Augustine's mother and again orders him to spit. At this point, Alex comments that he "felt that it could not be stopped" (186); he is faced with the inevitability of these events. The general shoots not-Augustine's four year old sister, and then turns to the next victim whom she describes as her pregnant sister. It is at this point that Jonathan reaches his threshold, protesting that he does not want to hear anymore. His decision directly contradicts Alex's belief, expressed only sentences before, that the story cannot be stopped. This is certainly the case for those characters in the historical narrative who have no choice but to go on. A different kind of privilege emerges here, one extended not only to Jonathan but to the reader: a choice of whether or not to continue. On the precipice of an awful story, Alex gives a parenthetical warning to Jonathan, one which applies to the reader too: "if you do persevere, do not do so for curiosity, this is not a good enough reason" (186). The question of what a good enough reason is lies at the centre of this novel. Foer's work, while stylistically exuberant, is by no means sensationalist. It does not wish to sanctify the dead, nor to use the horrors of the Shoah to make a moral statement. Rather, Foer seems to be trying to subvert these tropes, to break through barriers which limit the way in which Holocaust fiction can be written. This is not only an experiment with various narrative techniques, but an exploration of the ways in which trauma, absence and loss can be represented. Foer is seeking to construct different paths of access both to the Shoah and to his journey toward understanding it as a member of the third generation.

Certainly, the story which follows is deadly serious, as the woman speaks of her "sister":

> 'They tore the dress of my older sister. …she was very cold, I remember, even though it was the summer. They pulled down her panties, and one of the men put the end of the gun in her place, and the others laughed so hard, I remember the laughing always.

> Spit, the general said to my father, spit or no more baby.' 'Did he?' Grandfather asked. 'No,' she said. 'He turned his head, and they shot my sister in her place … But my sister did not die. So they held the gun in her mouth while she was on the ground crying and screaming, and with her hands on her place, which was making so much blood. Spit, the general said, or we will not shoot her. Please, my father said, not like this. Spit, he said, or we will not let her die here in this pain and die across time.' 'Did he?' 'No. he did not spit. 'And?' 'And they did not shoot her.' (186-187)

This sequence of events explores the violence and dehumanization which accompanied the meticulousness of the Third Reich. The laughter, which not-Augustine can still hear, is a testimony to the inveterate callousness of these perpetrators. This laughter echoes the laughter in "The Tumblers", when the Nazis watch the Chelmites enacting what they call "a Jewish ballet" (54). Fascist responses of this kind seek total control and domination of anyone who is different or resistant, thus reducing permissible experience to their own parameters.

In "Toward a Dialectic of Totality and Infinity: Reflections on Emmanuel Levinas", Anselm Kyongsuk Min argues that "[n]o one in recent years has done more than Emmanuel Levinas to carry on a sustained, rigorous critique of the notion of totality and the logo-centrism it implies" (571). Indeed, in *Totality and Infinity* (1961) Levinas presents what he believes to be the most effective form of opposition to the conjunction of egolatry (a belief that one's ego is god), totality, and history – the ethical encounter with the "other" (Min 572). The attempt to "appropriate the other and reduce him to the 'self-same'" (Robbins 137) is at the centre of totalitarianism. Whenever, Min explains,

> egolatrous reason approaches persons and things, it inevitably reduces them to a moment of the ego and the same, of totality and history, and the result is not only intellectual reduction of reality to components of totalizing ontology but also political reduction of persons to moments of omnivorous totalitarianism. (572)

When one's impulses are one's god, the other's alterity cannot be borne and thus must be contained, replaced or destroyed. Murder, Levinas argues, is the complete negation of the other, a removal of them from one's personal world (Burggraeve 38). The meticulousness of the Third Reich represents the ideological limit of this obliteration of the other. While the Nazis in Trachimbrod have this aim in mind, they are also enacting their ideological hatred of the Jews.

Hatred for Levinas is, “an extremely paradoxical manner of denying the other, for one wants at the same time both to radically negate the other and also not to do so entirely. From its offensive height, hate wishes to humiliate and crush the other, but without destroying him completely” (Burggraeve 39). Hatred of the other demands that the Nazis inflict suffering upon the sister, refusing to kill her so that she “remain at [her] most active, so that [she] could bear witness to this hate” (38), while murder compels them to move forward, to put the Jews in lines and burn them in the synagogue (Williams).

According to Levinas, it is the acknowledgement of the infinity of the other which confirms the other’s irreducibility to totalitarian impulses. Only through face to face interaction, through discourse, can the other be ethically actualized (Robbins 137). Not-Augustine’s father’s refusal to comply with Nazi orders, even as his family is killed, is his assertion of selfhood in the face of destruction. The father forces upon them an encounter with the other. Paradoxically, by his inflexible refusal of the general’s commands, he too is forced into a kind of totalitarianism. When the general turns the gun upon the woman’s father and tells him to spit, he does (187). He defies a familiar fascist technique of control which manipulates people by threatening their families; he refuses to give the general the satisfaction which might have come from shooting him. The ethics of the father’s actions are complicated; he may save his family from being burnt alive in the synagogue, but he has still condemned them to death through his own choices.

The father’s transgressiveness is a facet of what Foer is doing throughout the novel; he resists offering expected tropes of Holocaust fiction, which leave the reader either enraged at the evil of the Nazis or comforted by the sacrosanctity of victims and survivors. Foer implies the ethical Levinasian alternative, just as Jonathan’s letters to Alex are implied but never made part of the overt text. He weaves together a complex narrative, which moves between styles, linguistic registers and timelines, resisting resolutions. In his non-fiction book *Eating Animals*, Foer relates the story of his grandmother, who spent the Second World War “barefoot, scavenging other people’s inedibles” (2) in order to survive. Yet, when a Russian farmer offered her a piece of meat, she refused. She explains to her incredulous grandson that “it was pork. I wouldn’t eat pork” (16), because it was not kosher. When he asks, “but not even to save your life?” (16), she answers: “if nothing matters, there’s nothing to save” (16). Foer’s grandmother seems to suggest that meaningful survival should be predicated on certain values; if those values are sacrificed, survival itself has no significance. There is a disturbing congruence with the problematic choices of not-Augustine’s father.

In a twisted miracle, "[t]he baby accepted the bullet and saved its mother" (188). The sister survives, crawling into the forest, after begging for help and being greeted with silence by people she cannot forgive (187). This sister, it is strongly implied, is the woman herself. When Grandfather asks how she was spared, she replies "I told you, my sister survived" (187). In order to tell this story, she must distance herself from it; she must disassociate. Behlman argues that Foer uses self-conscious narrative devices in the Holocaust narrative, announcing the "gap between [the novel] and the past *as it was experienced*" (60). Not-Augustine tells the trio that they "cannot imagine what it is like… it is not a thing that you can imagine. It only is. After that there can be no imagining" (188). Yet, Foer has imagined the unimaginable, doing so three times.

Not-Augustine explains that she followed the "line of her blood" (188) both her figurative Jewish line and the literal line, back to Trachimbrod and collected everything that remained from the Jewish houses: the valuables, the books, the hair, the gold fillings from teeth, the clothing, the shoes. Again, Foer is combining different Holocaust narratives, as these objects evoke the concentration camps, rather than the attacks in Ukraine. Not-Augustine then hid this material in the forest and came back after the war, found a home near the shtetl and "promised herself to live there until she died" (189), not only as a living memorial but as a living absence; alone in what was once a thriving world of its own, she entombs herself in the remnants of Trachimbrod, its last witness as well as its last victim.

Jonathan's version of the destruction of Trachimbrod diverges from, though ultimately returns to, that of not-Augustine. The shtetl comes to an end on the same day as it began, 18th March 1942, and in the same place, the River Brod. It is again Trachimday, and Safran and his "very pregnant wife" (267) are watching the Trachimday parade from a picnic blanket. Having finally arrived at the destruction of the shtetl Jonathan notes how hard it is becoming not to scream "GO AWAY! RUN WHILE YOU CAN, FOOLS! RUN FOR YOUR LIVES" (269). Indeed, this is not only the end of Trachimbrod, but of his magical realist creation, a work which has been lovingly pieced together only, and inevitably, to be destroyed. The Nazi war machine is about to turn upon Trachimbrod and again "the prehistoric ant…which had laid motionless in the honey colored stone since Brod's curious birth, turned away from the sky and hid its head in its many legs, in shame" (270). The Dial, now part of the narrative, hides himself too and Jonathan pauses, covering the better part of two pages in ellipses, interrupted only with the

words “there is still time” (270). Foer, Jonathan, and the reader all know that this is not true, that there was time, or may have been time, but historically the opportunity was lost.

Foer has said, as noted on page 79, that by the time the novel reaches the Holocaust there is no humour left. Certainly, the three accounts of 18th March 1942 are by no means humorous, but this does not mean that the novel hides in shame: Jonathan’s account of the invasion of Trachimbrod includes a page from the nine volumes of *The Book of Recurrent Dreams* (272). On this page is dream number *9:613,* the number 613 being the number of commandments in the Torah. This is another Jewish “in-joke” which is probably inaccessible to non-Jewish readers. It is not obvious what the purpose of this device is, whether it is a hidden code, added merely to be noticed, or a signal to Jewish readers to remind them that this is a strikingly Jewish tragedy. It is possible that the number is a reference to the absence of salvation in the Holocaust; as with the Pogrom of Beaten Chests, this event is completely secular. God is conspicuously absent from the Shoah, as even the most pious of Jews, keeping his commandments, are not spared. This is reinforced when those Jews who did not drown are sent into the synagogue– an apparent refuge– and set alight, destroying the human /Jewish fault line.

It is the magical realist device of this dream of “the end of the world” (272) that tells the story of the destruction of Trachimbrod: “bombs poured down from the sky exploding in bursts of light and heat” (272). In panic the citizens jump into the “bubbling splashing frantically dynamic water” (272) of the Brod in an attempt to protect themselves. Here the Brod is anthropomorphised, becoming Jonathan’s great-great-great-great-great-grandmother, who “embraced them with open arms” (272), wishing to save them all. Safran and his wife Zosha jump in too, judging it the safest place to be amid the shrapnel and falling buildings. Ironically, it is the river itself which kills them, with “all of the bodies flailing and grabbing hold of one and other” (272). By seeking salvation in water, which should be the source of life, they promote their own demise.

Safran escapes the mass of struggling limbs, but his wife is dragged down into the depth of the river, and the baby inside her, much like her great-great-great-great-great grandmother, “refuses to die like this” (273) and leaves the womb. However, not as lucky as Brod, this baby is attached to her mother by the umbilical cord. In the last moments of her life, Zosha attempts to break it, but “she died with her perfectly healthy baby cradled in her arms” (273). Jonathan pursues cyclicity, choosing not to abandon the magical realist roots of his work, but to invert

them. The Holocaust is not a realist force which shatters the fantastical, but becomes an aspect of it.

Safran is pulled downstream, his dead arm preventing him from swimming back for his wife and child; he will eventually be rescued by Augustine and her family. Here, Foer offers narrative closure for his folkloric creations. The first and last chapter on Trachimbrod share the same name – "The Beginning of the World Often Comes" – alluding to the two beginnings of his family, "where [Jonathan] would be now if it weren't for the war" (59), and where he has ended up, retuning to this place which is nothing more than darkness, a memorial stone and an old woman.

When not-Augustine is taken back to her home, she gives Jonathan a box marked "in case". She explains that for decades she had been wondering "in case of what?" (192). When Jonathan offers "Evidence. Documentation. Testimony" (192), she dismisses his suggestions. She tells him that one does not need the physical to remember; people can remember without it, and "when those people forget, or die, then no one will know" (192). This view seems to rebuff the evidence Jonathan has been searching for, as well as the quest of the third generation, who insist on excavating the past, finding fragments that, according to not-Augustine, cannot help in keeping the past alive (Aarons and Berger 6-8). So the novel returns to the theme of "what is a good enough reason" (186) to write fictionally about the Holocaust? Foer's fiction is entirely remembrance without evidence, which through its transgressiveness does not keep the past alive, but focuses upon ways of representing and connecting with what has been destroyed. Not-Augustine believes that she has been keeping these objects "in case someone should come searching one day" (192).

After the trio return to their hotel, they decide to open the box "in case". Alex and Jonathan are hesitant, asking repeatedly "'is this a bad idea?'... 'is this a good idea?' 'I am not certain?'" (221). The two twenty-year-olds, much like the couples in Englander's "What We Talk About When We Talk About Anne Frank", are unsure whether they should open this box "and let out what we've locked inside" (32). It is Grandfather who again re-orients them, stopping them from becoming lost in their own fear. "Open the fucking box" (221), he demands, and they do.

They make a game of drawing out the items, each turning his head away and picking up something from inside; they "were similar to three children" (224). This echoes the game played in "What We Talk About When We Talk About Anne Frank", which turns deadly serious, as this game will too. They pass the box between them; although Alex is concerned that he and Grandfather do not have the right to look, Jonathan's easy acceptance acknowledges that they have "the same privilege as he did to investigate the box" (222). They retrieve a necklace, a map, a book from Trachimbrod. When Grandfather does not know what to choose, Jonathan says there will be "time for all of them" (224), and Alex reflects on the foolishness of this belief that "thought [they] still possessed time" (224). They too have become entangled in history, so there is no longer any choice about following the course of events. Indeed, like Jonathan's filling more than a page with ellipses, Alex is aware of how close they are to another discovery, another Holocaust narrative and another secret that is almost too painful to be revealed. He begs for time. Alex entreats Jonathan, "you could alter it Jonathan. For him, not for me … It is possible" (145), and in greater desperation: "we are merely two paragraphs away. Please, try to find some other option" (224). Yet, as Alex felt when hearing about to the destruction of Trachimbrod, this story "could not be stopped" (186).

Grandfather picks out a photograph, an unremarkable item, that neither he nor Alex pays attention to. Yet Jonathan does, and holding the photo up to Alex's face, exclaims "it's you!" (225). Of the four people in the image–two men, a woman, and a baby– Alex looks uncannily like the man on the left. In examining the man's features, Alex concludes that "his hairs, lips, arms, legs, they all appeared like mine. Not even like mine. They *were* mine" (225-226). Through this observation, Alex is preparing himself to claim the new family history he is about to hear. Foer is playing with the absences and presences of different family histories. While Jonathan has been imaginatively creating a narrative about what has been destroyed, Alex's version of the past is about to be broken down and replaced with one he must learn to accept. In order to do so though, he, like not-Augustine and like Jonathan writing the destruction of Trachimbrod in *The Book of Recurrent Dreams*, must distance himself:

> here it is almost too forbidding to continue. I have written to this point many times, and corrected the parts you would have me correct, and made more funnies, and more inventions, and written as if I were you writing this, but every time I try to persevere, my hand shakes so that I can no longer hold my pen. Do it for me. Please. It is yours now. (226)

Thus, the narrative mechanisms are again exposed as the story continues being written in Alex's voice, even as the reader is aware that it has been given over to Jonathan. The continuity in style reminds the reader of the constructedness of the novel, of the singular author behind the four narrative modalities which intersect at this moment.

Grandfather admits that he is this man and that this photo was taken in Kolki, where he was "before the war" (227), a phrase often used to encompasses all that was destroyed in five years, or as it is for both the Foer and Perchov families, in one night. The novel finally reaches the "illumination" promised in its title, when Grandfather informs Jonathan and Alex that the other people in the photo are Alex's grandmother, who is holding Alex's father, and Herschel. Herschel, Grandfather tells them, frankly, was a Jew, his best friend – and, shockingly, he "murdered him" (228).

Grandfather explains that "I murdered Herschel. Or what I did was as good as murdering him … Herschel would have been murdered with or without me, but it is still as if I murdered him" (247). The Nazis came "in the most darkest time of the night. They had just come from another town and would go to another after. They knew what they were doing, they were so logical" (247). It is now that the narratives, which have seemed temporally and experientially separate, converge. As not-Augustine has explained, once the Nazis had destroyed Trachimbrod, they moved on to Kolki, where they would find Grandfather's family. Kolki is also the home of Brod's husband and thus emerges as another aspect of Jonathan's family history which is becoming enmeshed in Alex's. Alex's earlier musings that Jonathan and he might have been neighbours, if things had been different, ring truer than he could ever have expected.

Alex is faced with the destruction of his own family history as suddenly as the destruction of either of these towns. He finds that not only does his family not come from Odessa, but that the name, Alex, which he had so proudly stated had been passed form first-born to first-born (1), is invented as well. His grandfather was Eli. Eli is typically, though not always, a Jewish name; though Grandfather denies it many times throughout his story, ambiguity as to his being a Jew remains and adds to the moral quandary regarding his past.

The general, probably the same general who told the Jews of Trachimbrod to spit on the Torah, orders that all the citizens must "come to the synagogue everyone with no omissions" (248).

Grandfather stands in line, with Herschel on one side of him, and his wife and baby on the other. The general orders that all the Jews move forward, and when none of them do, he commands that "you will point out a Jew or you will be considered a Jew" (248). This sees friends and family members outing one another, as one by one Jews are shoved into the synagogue; "one Jew pointed at his cousin and one pointed at himself because he would not point at another" (249). This sadistic act has neighbour turn against neighbour, family turn against family, as every person attempts to save his own life. The process continues until the only Jew left is Herschel. Grandfather explains that no one, except himself and his wife, knew Herschel, or knew that he was a Jew. This seems inconsistent with Eli's earlier statement that with or without his intervention, Herschel would have been murdered. However, Eli believes that no Jew could have escaped the insidious logic of the Third Reich. This seems to hold true, as when one man tells the general there are no Jews left, the general "shotthismaninthehead" (250). The running together of this sentence is the start of a shift in the language. Foer alters, and at points abandons, many conventional grammatical and linguistic structures, allowing Eli's story to come out as a panicked stream of consciousness, as though it is too horrific to be constrained or even expressed. It is the collapse of discourse under the pressure of totalitarianism.

After this man has been murdered, the general approaches Eli and asks, "who is a Jew?" (250), and he tells Alex that he

> felt Herschel's hand again and I know that his hand was saying pleaseplease Eli please I do not want to die please do not point at me … 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. (250)

Eli acknowledges that Herschel was his best friend; he would have done almost anything for him, except sacrifice his own family and its future. Grandfather points at Herschel to save his family. Herschel is sent into the synagogue and it is set alight. Grandfather acts in exactly the way that is expected of him, by contrast with the transgressiveness of not-Augustine's father. Both of them destroy people they love. Eli emerges with a family intact, though as he tells Alex, his love turned his father into the abusive man he now is "because a father is always responsible for his son…because I loved him so much that I madeloveimpossible" (251).

Alex's father is affected by a trauma he has no knowledge of, and Alex, his mother and his brother also become its victims.

Examining the Complexities of Survival and Guilt

Alex, Jonathan and the reader are left with "the truth of someone who is not only a survivor, but also an alleged collaborator with the Nazis" (Francisco Collado-Rodriguez 62-63). Eli is clear that he "as good as" (249) murdered Herschel, but also that the events of that night happened to Herschel and to him, that they "happened to everybody, do not make any mistakes. Just because I was not a Jew, does not mean it did not happen to me'" (245-246). Eli's secret is situated between eager Ukrainian collaborators' and tortured survivors' choices, in a "grey zone, where neither history nor moral judgements are simple" (Eaglestone 156). When not-Augustine told them about her father's refusal to spit, Grandfather called him "a fool" (186), but the woman insisted that he was wrong, that he could not imagine the circumstances. The question, though, is whether Eli is closer to the father, whose actions not-Augustine could forgive, or the gentiles who did not open their doors for her, and whom she could not forgive. Foer seems to be asking whether the distinction is related only to saving Jews, and if so, the uncertainty behind Eli's own religious affiliation serves further to complicate the issue. Jonathan does not have an answer when Alex asks, agonised "so what is it he should have done hewouldhavebeenafooltodoanythingelse but it is forgivable what he did canheeverbeforgiven for his finger … he is stillguilty I am I am Iam IamI?" (252).

The dynamics shift between Alex and Jonathan. Alex is no longer a witness but implicated within this story. He questions both his guilt and his identity, the merging words asking "IamI?" (252). On the way to Trachimbrod, Alex had wondered whom his family had saved; the answer, it seems, is themselves. He tells Jonathan the truth is that he "also pointedatHerschel" (252), and that so did Jonathan, and little Igor and Jonathan's grandmother, they all "pointedateachother" (252). According to Alex, no one is exempt, no one can know how they would have acted in that situation. Todorov argues that in the wake of the Shoah, it is important to grapple with the humanity of the Nazis and their collaborators, "and [to] be prepared to say, 'they are human beings like us'" (135). Here Alex is frantically asserting this point, drawing them all together. Yet, Todorov also insists that every person is responsible for his actions and must be punished for them. Grandfather had prefaced his story by saying "I am not a bad person

… I am a good person who has lived in a bad time" (227), but the question remains whether this absolves him of the action itself.

On the next day, the members of the group separate and Jonathan returns to the United States to start the novel he and Alex will write together. Alex returns home and eventually gathers the courage he believes he had lacked before: he tells his father to leave, and that he will take care of his mother and Igor (274). We learn this from Grandfather, in a letter that ends the book. Alex has translated it and sent it to Jonathan. He tells Jonathan that he "would give everything for them to live without violence" (275). He believes it is "still possible" (275), but first they must "cut" all of the ties to the past. Grandfather says that, since Alex has started cutting away the past, he "must finish it" (275) – he slits his wrists. Perhaps this is the long delayed "justice" for his finger, or perhaps he has killed himself because he is unable to continue once his secrets have been exposed and relived. Grandfather too becomes a victim of the Holocaust.

The novel's title is wilfully ironic, underscoring the impossibility of "illumination." The alternating literary modalities and perspectives used in *Everything Is Illuminated* weave together to form a singular narrative of absence, loss and discovery. Foer's humour, imagination and experimentation challenge and transgress familiar versions of the genre of Holocaust fiction, moving away from certitude and into a complex moral grey zone. Certainly, redefining the limits of this genre seems to be a "good enough reason to write fictionally about the Holocaust".

Conclusion

This dissertation argues that Englander's "Holocaust stories" and Foer's *Everything Is Illuminated* mark a transgressive tipping point in Holocaust fiction. These five narratives confront the traditional constraints of this genre, whilst purposefully and skillfully subverting them, creating new entry points into the Shoah. In "The Tumblers" and *Everything Is Illuminated*, familiar figures of Jewish folklore are reimagined in the wake of the Shoah, emphasizing its inescapabilty for the generations who have be born in its shadow and its impact on modern Jewish life. The realist sections of Foer's novel, as well as "Camp Sundown" and "Free Fruit for Young Widows", problematize the saint-martyr or monster-beast dichotomy which governs such works as *Schindler's List* and *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*.

The Derridean cinder is at the centre of *Everything Is Illuminated*, but also makes itself felt in "What We Talk About When We Talk About Anne Frank". The origin of these stories is "always an absence" (Foer 203); for Jonathan, it is the destruction of his family in the Holocaust, and for Englander's two couples, it is the attempt to define their Jewish identity in a post-Holocaust world, a need "to live among presences" (203). Certainly, "What We Talk About When We Talk About Anne Frank" explores the contemporary Jewish psyche, juxtaposing cultural or secular and religious Judaism, and exposing how both fail when confronted with the Holocaust.

Both together and separately, Englander and Foer manoeuvre between Langer's rigid language of consolation, Eaglestone's concern with identification, Boswell's abrasive methods of impiety, and questions of morality which are explored but left ambiguous. Instrumental to Englander and Foer's transgressiveness is the use of Bakhtinian laughter. For Bakhtin, laughter enables a release of conventional restraints and the possibility for a life-enhancing inversion of social structures. In these narratives, laughter clearly breaks tension, overturns expected conclusions, and satirizes the sentimental or conventional.

Although Bakhtin's conception of the Carnivalesque is applied, it is Lyons' definition of "edginess" which is the most apt descriptor of Englander and Foer's writing. Indeed, their transgressive approaches are exciting, provocative, dark and disquieting, as they push the boundaries of the genre of Holocaust fiction. These works are appropriately disruptive and

unexpected. Just as readers have been made secure, believing as Etgar does in "Free Fruit for Young Widows" that they are reading "a nice story" (201), they are made to move "swiftly … to the tragic and back again, [experiencing] the postmodern effect of black humour which disorientates [them]" (Safer 117). Englander and Foer repeatedly surprise their readers, unfolding fictional situations that resist stock responses. The narratives in this dissertation are neither comforting nor easy, yet they do not rely on gratuitous violence to cause outrage and indignation.

At the beginning of this dissertation, I shared my own experiences of Holocaust education and Holocaust fiction, as well as my belief that the chosen approaches work to re-traumatize and to emphasize a notion of victimization of the Jewish people, a postmemory that goes further than Marianne Hirsch's definition to encompass multiple generations and an entire people. I shared my fear of these representations of the Shoah. I did this both to set a context for my interest in this topic, and to juxtapose those types of fiction to Englander's and Foer's. In the themes, style and content of their texts, Englander and Foer adopt a mode of transgressiveness that allows at least me to re-engage with the Holocaust. In *Admitting the Holocaust* Lawrence Langer expresses the view that time alone can release the constraints of Holocaust fiction (66), and certainly the time for transgressiveness has come.

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