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A THEORETICAL READING OF HOLOCAUST FICTION AND THE HOLOCAUST AS A DECONSTRUCTIVE EVENT

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THE COLDNESS OF HELL:
A THEORETICAL READING OF HOLOCAUST FICTION
AND THE HOLOCAUST AS A DECONSTRUCTIVE EVENT

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines several selected works of Holocaust fiction, Elie Wiesel's *Night*, Cynthia Ozick's *The Shawl*, Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, and Jonathan Safran Foer's *Everything is Illuminated*, integrating the literary theories of Deconstruction, Gender, and Trauma. In five chapters, this thesis gives a brief overview of deconstruction, applying it to works of Holocaust fiction to show how the Holocaust deconstructs our view of gender and body, trauma and memory, humanity, and even death.

Key Terms: Deconstruction, Gender Theory, Trauma Theory

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THE COLDNESS OF HELL: A THEORETICAL READING OF HOLOCAUST FICTION AND THE HOLOCAUST AS A DECONSTRUCTIVE EVENT

Introduction

Jacques Derrida once said, “the dead – a dead parent, for example – can be more alive for us, more powerful, more scary, than the living. It is the question of ghosts” (Derrida, as quoted in Stephens). Thinking on this quote, there is only one thing that comes to mind - the Holocaust. The ghosts of the Holocaust still haunt us today - from perpetrators to victims - and even though it ended over seventy years ago, the Holocaust is still fresh in the minds of today’s society.

The horrible reality of the Holocaust - genocide, destruction, war, and anti-Semitism - still affects our worldview and may even have deconstructed, or possibly is still deconstructing, our common perceptions of faith, gender, and even humanity. Deconstruction is a literary critical theory which states that metaphysical constructs, meaning, and binary oppositions are considered unstable because of their dependence upon signifiers that are ultimately superficial. The Holocaust deconstructs these perceptions because of trauma and memory. "Psychic trauma occurs when a sudden, unexpected, overwhelming intense emotional blow or a series of blows assaults the person from outside. Traumatic events are external, but they quickly become incorporated into the mind" (Terr, 1990). Trauma can shatter one's basic assumptions of the world - relationships, basic identity, sense of purpose, faith, and other parts of our

human identity. Of course, the Holocaust caused unspeakable trauma to those involved. However, the memory of these events was not confined to only Holocaust survivors; second generation survivors (the children and grandchildren of survivors) received the memory of this trauma from their ancestors. In learning about the Holocaust, students receive part of the memory and trauma of the events. Even visitors to museums and people who read about the Holocaust receive some measure of trauma and memory, even though they did not experience the Holocaust firsthand. In this way, the Holocaust deconstructs our ideas of memory and trauma, and shows that memory is not confined to the individual. It deconstructs our concept of trauma and shows how trauma can change a person – no survivors or perpetrators of the Holocaust were ever the same, and many of those who learn about it are changed in a significant way.

The Holocaust not only deconstructs our ideas of trauma and memory, but of gender and basic humanity as well. To quote Judith Butler, “When we say gender is performed, we usually mean that we've taken on a role or we're acting in some way and that our acting or our role playing is crucial to the gender that we are and the gender that we present to the world.” As members of a patriarchal society, we are all programmed with stereotypes about what it means to be a woman or a man, and we are raised to perform whatever gender is assigned to us. According to patriarchal tradition, men are large, strong, dominant, and are also leaders and providers. Women, on the other hand, are generally perceived as smaller and weaker than men, subservient,

emotional, and nurturing. These traditional gender roles also affect the body - men should be tall, muscular, active, and sexually dominant. Women are supposed to be lean, have large breasts, and bear children. Men and women who do not exhibit these traits are often seen and treated as lesser - for example, homosexual men are seen as feminine, and therefore not "real" men. Women who have small breasts or are unable to bear children are seen as less desirable and not as womanly as others. These perceptions of gender are often challenged and viewed as outdated or sexist, but what happens when an event is so large and traumatic that it deconstructs the ideas that form our worldview?

Methodology

As the years pass by, our connection to the Holocaust gradually gets smaller and smaller. Every year there are less survivors to tell their harrowing life stories, and less people interested in learning about the Holocaust. However, as we have learned several times over, those who do not know history are doomed to repeat it. Even though our firsthand connection to the Holocaust is gradually declining, it is vitally important to keep this tragic event fresh in our minds. And if there are no survivors left to speak and write about the Holocaust, we must take up their mantle and continue to keep their memory alive. Although it is not possible for younger generations to write firsthand accounts of the Holocaust and life in concentration camps, we must still write about these things so they do not fade from history and memory. In this study, I will examine several authors that are still writing about the Holocaust – authors Elie Wiesel (*Night*), Cynthia Ozick (*The Shawl*), and Jonathan Safran Foer (*Everything is Illuminated*).

In the Review of Literature, I will perform a review of literature relevant to the topic, and I will discuss the writings that influenced and informed my work. This literature includes studies on Gender Theory, Trauma and Memory, and Deconstruction. It also includes writings about the Holocaust, Holocaust literature and its relation to literary theory, women in the Holocaust (both as victims and perpetrators), humanity and the Holocaust, and reviews of existing Holocaust studies.

Chapter Four, "Theoretical Readings of Holocaust Fiction," will contain the majority of my work and research. In the chapter "Theoretical Readings of Holocaust fiction," I will be taking selected works of Holocaust fiction and applying various literary theories to them. I will mainly be examining these works through the lens of Deconstruction, showcasing the ways in which Holocaust fiction deconstructs our preconceived notions of gender, memory, faith, death, and humanity. The examples of Holocaust fiction I will include in the study are:

- *Night* by Elie Wiesel
- *The Shawl* by Cynthia Ozick
- *Everything is Illuminated* by Jonathan Safran Foer
- *Maus* by Art Spiegelman

As mentioned earlier, I will also bring up a few works of Holocaust literature that are not fictional, like *The Diary of Anne Frank* and *The Hiding Place*.

In Chapter Five, I will draw together and reflect on common patterns and themes. I will give a brief overview of my findings pertaining to Deconstruction and Holocaust fiction, along with the other theories I examine.

Review of Literature

Holocaust fiction, the literary home of many diverse authors and acclaimed works of fiction, is a genre that, while undoubtedly essential to learning about the Holocaust, is highly debated and can be controversial. Many believe that Holocaust fiction (and Holocaust literature at large) is becoming less accessible, and therefore less effective in modern times since many Holocaust survivors have passed away (Behlman). Others argue that, even if modern Holocaust fiction is sometimes watered-down or less effective, it can create an accessible avenue for anyone, children and adults alike, to learn about the Holocaust (Lassner and Cohen). However, whether or not one believes in its effectiveness, Holocaust fiction is an important part of understanding and relating to the Holocaust. This literature review will cover an overview of Holocaust fiction and its effectiveness, the issue of gender in Holocaust fiction, and the literature of second-generation Holocaust survivors.

Holocaust Fiction

Many works of Holocaust literature, for example, Elie Wiesel's *Night*, Cynthia Ozick's *The Shawl*, and Lois Lowry's *Number the Stars*, are recognized as fiction. These works are canonical; they are highly important texts that are commonly used to define their genre. These works of literature are widely read and studied, but their very nature of fictionality calls into question their reliability.

In *A Thousand Darknesses: Lies and Truth in Holocaust Fiction*, Ruth Franklin explores the genre of Holocaust fiction. The author studies in-depth several canonical pieces of Holocaust fiction, and asks, "What is the difference between writing a novel about the Holocaust and fabricating a memoir? Do narratives about the Holocaust have a special obligation to be 'truthful' -- that is, faithful to the facts of history? Or is it okay to lie in such works?" She answers these questions by examining texts of the genre and interpreting them. Franklin concludes that it is at best "ethically dubious" to use an atrocity such as the Holocaust as inspiration for any form of art, fictional literature included. However, the Holocaust demands to be remembered and therefore it is necessary to write about it, even if the work is fictional.

In their article, "Magical Transports and Transformations: The Lessons of Children's Holocaust Fiction," Lassner and Cohen explore Holocaust themes and stories in Children's literature. The authors claim that "such narrative conventions as fantasy and fairy tale elements offer accessibility for young audiences to learn about the brutal and incomprehensible extremes of the Holocaust. However, they may also undermine the catastrophe's grim historicity" (Lassner and Cohen). They discuss a few examples of Holocaust literature for children, including Jane Yolen's novel *Briar Rose*. The authors are effective in stating that, while Children's Holocaust literature creates an accessible avenue for children to learn about the Holocaust, it can also very much water down the content and may even undermine the truth of the Holocaust.

Dr. Alvin Rosenfeld's essay "The Americanization of the Holocaust" examines the meaning of the word Holocaust, and examines the efforts of the American people to broaden the concept and application of the Holocaust. The article cites examples of postmodern Holocaust literature. Rosenfeld also argues against Holocaust fiction with happy endings, saying that it is "almost a general requirement that audiences not be subjected to unrelenting pain." The author accomplished his objective, it does make the reader see "Americanization" of the Holocaust, either for the first time or in a different light. He shows how the Holocaust has been twisted to fit American political and social agendas, and how this affects people's perceptions of the Holocaust. He states that "the Holocaust is a unique event, [and] it carries universal implications" (Rosenfeld 35). But when historians, museum, or teachers appropriate the Holocaust in this way, it lessens the importance and the ramifications of the event.

Many, however, would argue that Holocaust fiction and Jewish-American literature are not watered-down or coming to an end. In S. Lilian Kremer's article "Post-alienation: Recent directions in Jewish-American Literature," Kremer argues against claims that Jewish-American literature is declining or coming to an end. She claims that, contrary to these claims of the ending of Jewish-American literature, pervasive treatment of Jewish subjects and values, reference to Judaic texts, and introduction of the *midrashic* narrative mode, in which a familiar story or theme is given a new reading, are simultaneously making a profound mark on American thought and literature and

heralding a Jewish-American literary renaissance. Kremer discusses contemporary Jewish-American writers, the influence of recent Jewish history, and intertextuality in Jewish-American literature. She uses these points to prove that Jewish-American literature and Holocaust fiction are not dying but thriving.

Even if Holocaust fiction is ethically dubious or waters down the effects of the Holocaust, the fact remains that the genre is thriving and is needed. Behlman claims that access to the Holocaust is declining due to the constantly dwindling number of Holocaust survivors, and many believe that Holocaust literature can no longer be effective once all survivors and participants are gone. However, if it is true that we will soon no longer have direct access to the Holocaust, then it is absolutely vital that authors continue to keep the subject alive through the writing of fiction. To let Holocaust fiction die would be to let the Holocaust die, and that must never happen.

Deconstruction of Gender

One important theme in Holocaust fiction is Gender and Body. The Holocaust is often seen as a deconstructive event, taking apart preconceived notions of gender, faith, history, ethnography, and other themes. Deconstruction of gender is especially troubling in Holocaust fiction, but gender and body theories are not very widely studied. A few scholars have done research in this area.

Glazer's essay "Orphans of Culture and History: Gender and Spirituality in Contemporary Jewish-American Women's Novels" explains the issue of "Otherization" of Jewish women. She argues that

Jewish women have been "Other" not only vis-a-vis androcentric gentile [sic] culture, but, excluded from male-centered religious life, they have also been the "Other of the Other" within traditional Judaism itself. Even that archetypal creature of the gentile literary imagination, the Wandering Jew, could have found community in any remote village minyan [Jewish prayer tradition in which 10 men gather in public worship], any prayer quorum from Yemen to the Ukraine; not so his mother, sister, daughter, or wife.

Glazer accomplishes her goal by examining several works of contemporary Jewish-American literature and assessing them. She concludes that women need a larger voice in the Jewish community and in Jewish genres of literature.

In her article "Recalling 'Home' from Beneath the Shadow of the Holocaust: American Jewish Women Writers of the New Wave," Burstein introduces Jewish American Literature and the "new wave" thereof. She focuses on how Jewish-American writers "moved with particular energy, innovatively, into the stream of Jewish writings about 'home'" (Burstein, 37). Burstein focuses in on female Jewish-American writers and their "home-as-shtetl" (Burstein, 52) mentality, especially post-Holocaust.

In her article, "Re-Imagining the Jew's Body: From Self-Loathing to Grepts," Most discusses the role of American Jews in contemporary popular culture, especially comic books and film, and the fact that many of the Jews that contribute to these things "kept their Jewishness quiet, often actively hiding it by changing their names" (Most, 17). Most explains how Jewish self-loathing appears as a common theme in the writing of Jewish-American writers and Holocaust survivors.

Gender and body are somewhat explored in Holocaust fiction, but there is a small gap in the literature here. Gender and body are a very important part of Holocaust fiction and should be explored more, especially if the Holocaust is seen as a deconstructive event which changed images of body and gender.

Second-Generation Holocaust Survivors

Second-generation Holocaust survivors as a group are vitally important to the body of work that make up Holocaust literature. These authors are people who were not part of the Holocaust, but their parents survived it. One thing that is commonly questioned about Holocaust fiction is whether trauma and memory were often transferred from survivor parent to second generation survivor children.

In "The Literature of Second Generation Holocaust Survivors and the Formation of a Post-Holocaust Jewish Identity in America," Katherine Ann Wright discusses second-generation Holocaust survivors and the struggles they face. She writes, "The Holocaust shaped and molded the ways in which these children interacted with their

parents, with their peers, and ultimately shaped the way in which they saw and defined their own identity. They were not just children of survivors; they were survivors as well, even if this is only due to their relationship to their parents” (88). Wright also discusses Second Generation Holocaust literature and its part in forming contemporary Jewish and Jewish-American Identity.

In her article “Post-World-War-II American Jewry and the Confrontation with Catastrophe,” Diner discusses the importance of the Holocaust and its effects in modern times, and how it has shaped Jewish-American identity, politics, and culture. She achieves her objectives by explaining how Jewish identity has adapted to modern times in relation to the Holocaust, first adopting a policy of silence, then becoming more and more outspoken about the catastrophe.

Now that second-generation survivors (and even some third-generation survivors) are writing about the Holocaust, it is becoming more and more important to analyze Trauma and Memory in their writing.

Deconstruction

In this section, I will give an overview of Deconstruction and how it applies to Holocaust fiction. Deconstruction is a theory developed by Jacques Derrida. It explains language as a system of signs and words, and says that language only has meaning because of contrast between signs. Deconstruction creates a system of binaries by which a concept can be understood in context of its opposite. It pursues the meaning of

a text by exposing the contradictions and internal oppositions that show that the foundations of a text are complex or impossible. This opens the text to several interpretations and definitions of its meaning. I will use this theory to apply to several works of Holocaust fiction and explore the idea of authorial intent. I will use the theory of Deconstruction to answer questions such as:

- What is the purpose behind Jewish authors' writing of Holocaust fiction?
- What is the purpose behind non-Jewish authors' writing of Holocaust fiction?
- Is there a difference in authorial intent?

In this way, I will explain deconstruction through application to Holocaust fiction texts and explorations of authorial intent. It is important to understand why authors, both Jews and Gentiles, with and without relationship to the Holocaust, are continuing to write Holocaust fiction. At this point, I will also tie Deconstruction to previous chapters of the thesis through explanation and application of Theory. I will showcase the Holocaust as a deconstructive event. Earlier discussions of Gender/Body theory and Trauma and Memory will work into Deconstruction, showing how the Holocaust deconstructed (and may still be deconstructing) gender, trauma, and memory.

History and Morality of Holocaust Fiction

This section will introduce Holocaust literature and briefly examine its history. It will show how the Holocaust inspired literature, using the examples of Elie Wiesel's *Night*, Cynthia Ozick's *The Shawl*, Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, and Markus Zusak's *The*

Book Thief. These instances of Holocaust fiction are canonical works, and will be used to define the genre and, later in the thesis, to define and apply the theories of Gender, Trauma and Memory, and Deconstruction. I will use examples of Holocaust fiction to answer questions such as:

- What is the origin of Holocaust fiction?
- Who is writing Holocaust fiction and why?
- Is it moral to create literature/art from such a tragic and traumatic event as the Holocaust?
- How does the Holocaust deconstruct memory, and how do these changes affect survivors?

The section will open with a brief literature review of the history, historicity, authorship, and importance of Holocaust literature. However, the main purpose of the section will be to set up for the rest of my thesis. In this section, I will examine the history of Holocaust fiction to give background for the thesis. I will give an overview and brief examination of authors of Holocaust fiction, including gender, ethnicity, and relationship to the Holocaust. I will then explore the question “Is it moral to create literature/art from such a tragic and traumatic event as the Holocaust?” Writers like Elie Wiesel believe it is immoral to write fiction concerning such a horrendous time in history, but I will posit that as our access to the Holocaust declines, it is essential now more than ever to continue creating Holocaust literature and to continue teaching and

learning about the Holocaust. Therefore, Holocaust fiction is necessary if morally ambiguous.

Gender and Body Theory

This section will examine the theory of Gender in Holocaust fiction. Gender theory is a cognitive theory to explain how people understand and identify gender in society, and how sex-linked characteristics are maintained and transmitted to other members of a culture. It explains how people perform gender, or exhibit qualities and behaviors specific to their perceived gender roles, in society, and what factors influence this.

I will compare/contrast Holocaust fiction written by men and women to see how gender is perceived and how gender performativity changes throughout the text. I will use this analysis to answer specific research questions:

- How did the Holocaust affect gender?
- How did the Holocaust affect women's and men's perceptions of the self and gender performativity?

I will use these questions to draw conclusions about Holocaust fiction and its authors. I will use this to add to the discussion of the various kinds of people who write Holocaust fiction and their reasons for writing fiction about the Holocaust. Do these authors seek catharsis? Familial connection? What other motives could there be? I will give

examples from literature of ways that the Holocaust affected gender and body, and how it affected the way that both victims and perpetrators perceive and portray gender.

Trauma and Memory

Trauma is an unexpected event or series of events that is often sudden, intense, overwhelming, and emotional. Traumatic events happen outside the body, but usually are very quickly internalized and incorporated into the mind (Terr). Trauma Theory says that trauma can shatter one's basic assumptions of the world – including, but not limited to, basic identity, relationships, sense of purpose, faith. I will explore Trauma Theory as it relates to literature and to authors. In literature, I will explore events that caused trauma, such as the loss of a baby in Cynthia Ozick's *The Shawl*. In authors, I will explain the transfer of trauma from generation to generation. Of course, authors with firsthand experience of the Holocaust experienced many different traumatic events. However, many second-generation survivors (children of Holocaust survivors) are also writing about the trauma of the Holocaust. I will explore these relationships and how a second-generation survivor can experience trauma from the Holocaust. I will also delve into the topic of authors with no experience of the Holocaust. Authors like Markus Zusak are still writing Holocaust fiction even though they are not Jewish and have no connection to the Holocaust. Through this discussion I will bring up transmission of memory and again tie it back to the discussion of authors and authorial intent of Holocaust fiction. During the discussion, I will answer specific questions such as:

- How were authors that experienced the Holocaust firsthand affected?
- How were authors with secondhand experience of the Holocaust affected?
- How were authors with no experience of the Holocaust affected?

I will answer these questions by discussing transmission of trauma and memory, applying the Theory of Trauma and Memory to works of Holocaust fiction, and discussing Jewish and non-Jewish authors with experience, secondhand experience, or no experience of the Holocaust.

Death

Death plays an incredibly significant and wide role in Holocaust fiction. In Markus Zusak's *The Book Thief*, Death is personified. He is the narrator of the story and even interacts with other characters. In Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, Death is personified as a cat. In Bernard Malamud's *The Magic Barrel*, Death is an ambiguous man/ghost. Death is often personified as a Nazi or as Hitler himself, and can also be part of the story in a more abstract or non-personified way. Whether or not Death is personified, it plays a vital role in Holocaust fiction. In this section, I will discuss this role and answer questions such as:

- Why is Death so often personified and characterized in Holocaust fiction?
- What is the role/significance of Death in Holocaust fiction?

I will use these questions to add to the theoretical discussion of deconstruction, because Holocaust fiction often deconstructs our concept of Death.

After this discussion, I end my thesis with an overview of my topic. Through studying Holocaust fiction and the theories of Gender and Body, Trauma and Memory, and Deconstruction, this paper showcases the Holocaust as a deconstructive event through Holocaust fiction. It will study these theories and their applications to Holocaust fiction in depth, and explore the authorship of the genre as well.

I will give an overview of other research that was excluded from my paper, including things like film as literature. Film is an aspect of Holocaust fiction that I chose to ignore for the purposes of this paper, but it is certainly a viable area of study and would add value to the category. I will also provide other areas for future study.

Theoretical Readings of Holocaust Fiction

The horrible reality of the Holocaust—genocide, destruction, war, and anti-Semitism—still affects our worldview and may even have deconstructed (or possibly is still deconstructing) our common perceptions of gender and humanity.

One of the most important things to note before examining theory and textual analysis is the importance of Holocaust fiction. As time passes, our first-hand connection to the Holocaust gradually decreases. The Holocaust ended in 1945, and every day there are fewer survivors to tell their stories. As this connection to the Holocaust is slowly severed, it is vitally important that the event remains fresh in the minds of today's society. Reading and writing Holocaust fiction (provided it is accurate and respectful) is one of the best ways to keep and remember the Holocaust without firsthand accounts.

In his article "Art and the Holocaust - Trivializing Memory," Elie Wiesel, the canonical and Nobel Peace Prize-winning author of *Night*, writes, "Auschwitz represents the negation and failure of human progress; it negates the human design and casts doubts on its validity. Then, it defeated culture; later, it defeated art, because just as no one could imagine Auschwitz before Auschwitz, no one can now retell Auschwitz after Auschwitz. The truth of Auschwitz remains hidden in its ashes" (1986). He goes on to write that we live in a time when the Holocaust is being de-sanctified and calls fictional accounts of the Holocaust and life in concentration camps "*Hilul hashem*" - blasphemy

or profanation, an act that strikes at all that is sacred.” Wiesel ends his article with a plea for readers to read the true accounts of the Holocaust, and a poignant statement: “And stop insulting the dead” (1986). Although some would argue against creating art or literature from the Holocaust (Elie Wiesel included), I would push back against these arguments. Admittedly, it is very difficult to argue against Elie Wiesel. However, not all Holocaust fiction trivializes the memory of the Holocaust and its victims. Indeed, Wiesel himself could be considered the premier writer of Holocaust fiction. Wiesel’s shattering account of his own experience in Auschwitz, *Night*, which has sold millions of copies and is read worldwide, was submitted for publication as a fictional novel and is still considered fiction today. While Wiesel certainly earned the right to write about Auschwitz and the Holocaust, I do not believe that all fictional accounts of the Holocaust are disrespectful to the dead. If Holocaust fiction was stopped (even ignoring fiction like *Night* written by survivors), we would lose important and impactful stories such as Cynthia Ozick’s *The Shawl*, Lois Lowry’s *Number the Stars*, and John Boyne’s *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*. So while I agree with Wiesel that it is difficult to write honest and respectful Holocaust fiction and that we should not read or write literature that reduces the impact or memory of the Holocaust, it is important that Holocaust literature, including fiction, must continue.

Two authors who certainly have worked to continue Holocaust literature are Elie Wiesel and Cynthia Ozick. Their seminal works—*Night* and *The Shawl* respectively—

are a great addition to the genre of Holocaust fiction. These two works also deal with more than just physical or psychological issues, both breaching the topics of gender and humanity. Wiesel and Ozick show how the Holocaust stripped these vitally important aspects of life from victims, dealing especially with issues of gender.

Judith Butler, renowned philosopher and gender theorist, argues that gender is simply a construction, an elaborate performance put on by people who wish to be perceived as strictly male or strictly female. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler writes,

Gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*. The effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self... gender norms are finally phantasmatic [sic], impossible to embody. (Butler, 179)

In this sense, gender does not exist; it is simply a social construct and an illusion, but it is an illusion that our society is heavily invested in. Men and women who do not perform their assigned gender roles are often ridiculed. Wiesel's *Night* and Ozick's *The Shawl*, however, exhibit a complete deconstruction of gender. These examples show how the Holocaust and its perpetrators - through brutal mistreatment, exploitation, starvation, and even torture - removed everything that its victims (and today's society) perceived as gendered qualities.

In concentration camps during the Holocaust, especially larger death camps like Auschwitz and Birkenau, women were specifically targeted as the procreators of the Jewish nation. Many women were taken and killed immediately upon entering the concentration camps. Those who were not killed were taken prisoner and neglected, starved, beaten, abused, and often sexually exploited. These terrible conditions affected the prisoners' psychological situation as well as their bodies; women and men were severely traumatized and stripped of the roles they were used to fulfilling. Men were no longer able to help, rescue, or provide for their families. Women were no longer able to care for their children, and the horrendous conditions often changed victims' bodies; after being starved and abused for long periods of time, women often stopped menstruating. They became extremely thin, and often their breasts shrunk. They were extremely malnourished, so those with babies were no longer able to nourish their young ones. So many of the things that traditionally define a woman were stripped away from these victims - sometimes causing them to question their womanhood and even their humanity, since they were not treated like humans. One source that exemplifies this sad reality is Cynthia Ozick's *The Shawl*.

The Shawl exemplifies part of the struggle that women victims of the Holocaust went through. This short story by Cynthia Ozick is about a woman, Rosa, and her daughters—14-year-old Stella and 15-month-old baby Magda, all of whom are imprisoned in a concentration camp. Ozick describes several ways that Rosa's and

Magda's bodies have been affected by life in the concentration camp. In this way, Ozick shows how the Holocaust deconstructed society's accepted ideals about the female body. Some of the only things that separate the female body from the male body—breasts and menstruation—are taken away from female victims. This blurs the line between male and female, and shows the ways that female victims were affected by this change.

Stella, a main character and the daughter of Rosa, exemplifies Ozick's deconstruction of gender and humanity. Stella's body is changed by the conditions of the concentration camp, removing the things that define her as female. In describing Stella, Ozick writes that Stella was "cold, cold, the coldness of hell... A thin girl of fourteen, too small, with thin breasts... Stella was ravenous. Her knees were tumors on sticks, her elbows chicken bones... Stella was ravenous, a growing child herself, but not growing much. Stella did not menstruate..." (Ozick). By forcing Stella's body to change in these ways, the Holocaust effectively removed her gender. However, it does not stop there. *The Shawl* also discusses changes in Stella that were not physical. Her environment and the conditions she was placed in also seem to take away Stella's very humanity; she begins to think about eating her baby sister, Magda, because she is so hungry. She no longer takes care of her baby sister like she should.

Stella gazed at Magda like a young cannibal. And the time that Stella said "Aryan," it sounded to Rosa as if Stella had really said "Let us devour her..."

Stella was waiting for Magda to die so she could put her teeth into the little thighs... Then Stella took the shawl away and made Magda die. Afterward Stella said: "I was cold." And afterward she was always cold, always. The cold went into her heart.

Stella's course of action in the story makes her almost as much of a perpetrator as the character who eventually kills Magda. Although she is not the one who actually ends Magda's life, she sets in motion (whether intentionally or not, there is no way to know) the chain of events that result in the death of her baby sister. After this event, Stella is cold forever, implying a passionless and emotionless life. After she goes through these changes, Stella is an almost inhuman character.

In a similar vein, Rosa goes through several changes throughout the story. Rosa is the mother of Stella and baby Magda, and on a basic level goes through the same changes as Stella did. Rosa is also very sickly and unable to menstruate. Her complexion is described as "dark like cholera" (Ozick) and she is unable to produce milk for her baby. The author begins deconstructing Rosa very early on when she writes that "Rosa did not feel hunger; she felt light, not like someone walking but like someone in a faint, in trance, arrested in a fit, someone who is already a floating angel, alert and seeing everything, but in the air, not there..." In only the second paragraph of *The Shawl*, Ozick portrays Rosa as something other than human; she is an angel, but she is arrested in a trance. She floats like a spirit who is already dead, and yet she is alive.

The most poignant part of Rosa that is deconstructed throughout the story is her motherhood—perhaps the most important part (at least to Rosa) of being a woman or a human. Rosa predicts her baby's death early on, and it is clear from the beginning that Magda will die. Ozick writes that "Rosa knew Magda was going to die very soon; she should have been dead already... When Magda began to walk Rosa knew that Magda was going to die very soon, something would happen.

Oddly enough, infant Magda is portrayed throughout *The Shawl* as a strong, content, and very protective character. Twice in the story, Ozick compares baby Magda to a tiger, saying "Magda was quiet, but her eyes were horribly alive, like blue tigers... She watched like a tiger." Magda has several character traits that seem uncommon, even strange, for both an infant and (at least in Jewish-American literature) as a female. Magda is the only character in *The Shawl* who is not starving, depressed, and depraved. In fact, she seems quite the opposite. Ozick writes that,

Magda did not die, she stayed alive, although very quiet... But Magda lived to walk. She lived that long, but she did not walk very well, partly because she was only fifteen months old, and partly because the spindles of her legs could not hold up her fat belly. It was fat with air, full and round... Magda was quiet, but her eyes were horribly alive, like blue tigers. She watched. Sometimes she laughed—it seemed a laugh, but how could it be? Magda had never seen anyone laugh...

Magda's health and apparent joviality seem a cruel irony to her mother and sister's starvation and pitilessness, "Rosa and Stella... slowly turning into air" (Ozick). However, despite her health and contentment, it is known early on in the story that Magda is going to die. It is foreshadowed several times when Ozick writes that "Rosa knew Magda was going to die very soon; she should have been dead already... Then Stella took the shawl away and made Magda die." Magda is the embodiment of hope for her family; and yet, they expect her death and are simply waiting for the baby to die. In a way, Magda is already dead in *The Shawl*, but she is "horribly alive" (Ozick). In this way, not only is Magda a deconstruction of the female gender, she is a deconstruction of humanity itself. She is neither alive nor dead, occupying the liminal space between the two extremes. She is an enigma, only 15 months old, not far from the beginning of life, and yet so near its end. When Magda dies, she becomes the standard of humanity that the other characters are measured against—indeed, upon witnessing the death of her baby, Rosa becomes only a "skeleton," suppressing a "wolf's screech" and ignoring all her instincts that tell her to run to her daughter. Magda, being her mother's last tie to humanity, causes Rosa to become an animal.

The opposite end of the humanity spectrum from Magda's "horribly alive" existence is the character who kills her. Surprisingly, Ozick does not describe this person in human terms at all; though Magda's killer is generally assumed to be a male Nazi officer, the only things that the reader learns about Magda's killer are that its

“shoulder... carried Magda... Above the shoulder a helmet glinted. The light tapped the helmet and sparkled it into a goblet. Below the helmet a black body like a domino and a pair of black boots hurled themselves in the direction of the electrified fence” (Ozick).

This character is given no human qualities, no gender, no personality, and only has one action in the storyline. To be certain, this act, the murder of an infant, is not human.

Magda’s killer represents the baby’s opposite—while Magda is the embodiment of hope for her mother, this supposed Nazi officer is the cold, emotionless, and inescapable figure who steals the last vestiges of hope and humanity from everyone around it...

Death. Again, Magda’s killer presents a deconstruction of humanity—it is given no discernible features, it is genderless, it has no personality, and it commits unspeakable acts against humanity. These qualities go against everything we use to define what humanity is, and yet it must be human. These two opposite characters, Magda and her killer, both exist in a liminal space. They are both alive and not, both human and not. They are the two ends of the spectrum by which humanity is defined in Ozick’s *The Shawl*.

Magda’s death poses another issue, not to the characters, but to the readers. Magda dies at the hands of a Nazi officer who throws her into an electrified fence after hearing her screams in the courtyard. Ozick’s description of the event (“Magda was swimming through the air. The whole of Magda travelled through loftiness. She looked like a butterfly touching a silver vine.”) could be seen as what David Brauner would call

“aestheticizing’ and ‘poeticizing’” Magda’s death. Brauner argues in “Breaking the Silences: Jewish-American Women Writing the Holocaust,” that “[B]ecause Ozick herself is aware of this tendency [to poeticize the Holocaust], her diction throughout manifests a tension between elaboration and reticence...” (Brauner). While there certainly is merit to Brauner’s statement, I would posit that Ozick does not indeed sanitize or “poeticize” her subject. Several times throughout *The Shawl*, Ozick describes, in no uncertain terms or flowery words, the Holocaust victims’ bodies and their functions. She writes about “Rosa’s complexion, dark like cholera.” She describes “Rosa’s teats... both were cracked, not a sniff of milk. The duct-crevice extinct, a dead volcano, blind eye, chill hole...” Ozick reveals that Rosa and Stella “did not menstruate,” and describes the “excrement, thick turd-braids, and the slow stinking maroon waterfalls” that the prisoners’ bodies produce. While it would have been possible for Ozick to use less descriptive language in describing these atrocities, I do not believe that her portrayal of Holocaust events is overly watered-down or aestheticized.

Just as the Holocaust changed and traumatized women, male victims were also extremely affected by the conditions of the concentration camps. One text that exemplifies this is Elie Wiesel’s *Night*. The text is primarily about a young Jewish man named Eliezer and his father Shlomo. The main character Eliezer exemplifies a few different types of deconstruction throughout the novel; Like Rosa and Stella, Eliezer’s

gender and humanity are deconstructed. However, Eliezer also exemplifies a deconstruction of faith in the novel that represents Wiesel's own experiences.

Very early on in *Night*, Wiesel begins deconstructing the gender of his characters. Even in Eliezer and Shlomo's first night in the concentration camp, they are almost immediately stripped of their gender roles. Upon first entering Auschwitz, a Nazi officer begins separating men from women, saying "Men to the left! Women to the right!" (Wiesel 29). Eliezer is separated from his mother and sister, but remains with his father Shlomo. Wiesel writes that "There was no time to think, and I already felt my father's hand press against mine: we were alone... I kept walking, my father holding my hand" (Wiesel 29). These sentences represent the first male gender role broken in *Night*—physical touch. Traditionally, men do not hold hands with each other, only with women or young children. It is not considered acceptable for men to show emotion to each other in this way, even sometimes for fathers and sons. However, for fear of losing each other, Eliezer and Shlomo break this stereotype. Later that same day, all the men were forced to strip naked and bathe in a barrel of disinfectant. They then ran through a shower and were given their prison uniforms. Wiesel writes, "In a few seconds, we had ceased to be men" (Wiesel 36).

Wiesel continues to deconstruct Eliezer's gender later on when Shlomo is first beaten by a guard. Shlomo stands and asks a Gypsy guard to show him to restroom.

The Gypsy stared at him for a long time, from head to toe. As if he wished to ascertain that the person addressing him was actually a creature of flesh and bone, a human being with a body and a belly. Then, as if waking from a deep sleep, he slapped my father with such force that he fell down and then crawled back to his place on all fours. I stood petrified. What had happened to me? My father had just been struck, in front of me, and I had not even blinked. I had watched and kept silent. Only yesterday, I would have dug my nails into this criminal's flesh. Had I changed that much? So fast? (Wiesel 39)

Eliezer, rather than fulfilling the gender role of protecting his loved ones, stands by and watches as his father is struck down. He recognizes his changed response and is concerned by it. Wiesel continues to deconstruct the genders of the prisoners as they are forced to work and often starved. The prisoners become mentally broken and are no longer mentally or physically strong and any power they once had is taken from them.

In his article "Regarding the Pain of Women: Questions of Gender and the Arts of Holocaust Memory," James Young puts forth the idea that all Holocaust victims are regarded as women, no matter their gender. He poses the question,

Is it possible that insofar as the prisoners are regarded as powerless, humiliated, and dehumanized, they are also on some level regarded emblematically as women? To the extent that Jews as victims are often represented universally in the figure of the woman or the child (I would argue that to a degree all

prepubescent boys are regarded as feminine, as more female than male, even the little boy in the Warsaw Ghetto with his arms upraised, in his kneesocks and short tunic), the victim is regarded as classically feminine. When this is so, however, little room is left in the story for women as women. (Young)

While there is some truth to Young's statement, I cannot agree with all of it. Characters in Elie Wiesel's *Night* should not be considered women only because they cannot be regarded as men—because their male qualities are taken away from them. Prisoners like Eliezer and Shlomo certainly are humiliated, dehumanized, and ultimately powerless. However, this does not make them “classically feminine.” By saying this, Young implies that qualities such as powerlessness, humiliation, and dehumanization are classically feminine qualities, and I would push back against this statement. While the male characters in *Night* are deprived of their male gender roles and characteristics, this does not make them women—it simply makes them un-gendered. While I do not agree with most of Young's statement, I do agree that there is not much room or consideration for women in Holocaust literature. In Elie Wiesel's *Night*, there are almost no female characters at all. Most of the women in the book are killed in the concentration camps upon arrival, and the very few female characters that appear after this culling do not perform feminine gender roles (or perhaps they do, in Young's classical sense).

Wiesel does not only deconstruct the gender of his characters in *Night*; like Ozick, Wiesel also deconstructs the humanity of Eliezer, Shlomo and many other male characters in the text. The first example of dehumanization in *Night* comes in the very first chapter, when Eliezer sees for the first time a procession of Jews being taken to concentration camps from the ghetto. "They passed me by, like beaten dogs, with never a glance in my direction. They must have envied me" (Wiesel 17). A bit later, when Eliezer and his family are being transported to Auschwitz in cattle cars, a Nazi officer threatens that they "will all be shot, like dogs" (Wiesel 24). In Auschwitz, an SS officer "looked at [the prisoners] as one would a pack of leprous dogs clinging to life" (Wiesel 38). "'Faster, you filthy dogs!' We were no longer marching, we were running. Like automatons" (Wiesel 85). Through these comparisons, Wiesel turns his characters into animals and automatons, unfeeling beasts with no sense of morals. The characters are constantly degraded and made to feel less than human. The most poignant instance of Eliezer and the other prisoners being dehumanized is when they receive tattoos at Auschwitz. Wiesel writes, "In the afternoon, they made us line up. Three prisoners brought a table and some medical instruments. We were told to roll up our left sleeves and file past the table. The three 'veteran' prisoners, needles in hand, tattooed numbers on our left arms. I became A-7713. From then on, I had no other name" (Wiesel 42). This is perhaps one of the most dehumanizing acts that Eliezer and Shlomo experience; one's name is synonymous with one's identity, and to have that identity taken away is

devastating. The prisoners in Wiesel's *Night* are always treated as subhuman, but especially after being tattooed and assigned a number, Nazi officers treat their prisoners as slaves, neglecting them and forcing them to work and complete unreasonable tasks.

This constant dehumanization that Wiesel writes about continues through the end of the novel. *Night* ends at Eliezer's liberation from the concentration camp. His father, unfortunately, does not make it to liberation. On the last page of Elie Wiesel's *Night*, he writes,

Our first act as free men was to throw ourselves onto the provisions. That's all we thought about. No thought of revenge, or of parents. Only of bread. And even when we were no longer hungry, not one of us thought of revenge. The next day, a few of the young men ran into Weimar to bring back some potatoes and clothes—and to sleep with girls. But still no trace of revenge. (Wiesel 115)

These last paragraphs show the extent of Wiesel's deconstruction of humanity in *Night*. Earlier in the text, Wiesel compares his characters to dogs several times. In this last comparison, he shows that the men lived up to this name; when set free, Eliezer and the other prisoners seek only to fulfill their bodily appetites for food and sex, and none of them consider the emotional and historical weight of the events they have just been through. They do not look for their friends and family. They do not turn towards home, and they do not think of anything but their own desires. This certainly shows a deconstruction of humanity by exposing the actions of newly liberated prisoners.

However, Wiesel's most moving example of deconstruction comes at the very end of his book. Eliezer, the character who most closely relates to the author himself, says,

Three days after the liberation of Buchenwald, I became very ill: some form of poisoning. I was transferred to a hospital and spent two weeks between life and death. One day when I was able to get up, I decided to look at myself in the mirror on the opposite wall. I had not seen myself since the ghetto. From the depths of the mirror, a corpse was contemplating me. The look in his eyes as he gazed at me has never left me. (Wiesel 115)

In this passage Eliezer becomes another liminal character, much like Magda and her Killer in *The Shawl*. Eliezer spends two weeks "between life and death," and is really neither alive nor dead. Then when he wakes up, Eliezer looks at himself in the mirror and sees only a corpse. After experiencing everything he went through in the Holocaust, Eliezer no longer considers himself either a man or a human. He is simply a walking corpse, nothing more.

Holocaust literature is arguably one of the emotionally taxing genres to read. The horrendous truths that works of Holocaust literature relate are heart-breaking, soul-rending, and oftentimes tragically beautiful. Holocaust fiction is particularly important because it keeps readers connected to the Holocaust—as time goes on and our firsthand connection through survivors continues to dwindle, Holocaust fiction becomes even more vital. Elie Wiesel wrote that "the cry unuttered is the loudest. If this is true of

language as a means of communication in general, it is even truer of literature and art that try to describe, without ever succeeding, the final reality of the human condition during the Holocaust” (1986). While I do agree that it is difficult—not impossible, as Wiesel might say—to describe the reality of the Holocaust, I believe that Elie Wiesel and Cynthia Ozick have poignantly and accurately captured what life in concentration camps was like. As some of the formative examples of Holocaust fiction, Cynthia Ozick’s *The Shawl* and Elie Wiesel’s *Night* display perfectly the deconstructive nature of the Holocaust and Holocaust fiction.

Trauma and Memory

The events of the Holocaust were so traumatic to everyone involved that this trauma is often passed down through the generations. In her 2008 article, “Trends in Literary Trauma Theory,” Balaev puts it like this: “A central claim of contemporary literary trauma theory asserts that trauma creates a speechless fright that divides or destroys identity. This serves as the basis for a larger argument that suggests identity is formed by the intergenerational transmission of trauma” (Balaev). The children and, now grandchildren, of Holocaust victims are receiving the trauma of the Holocaust from their predecessors. Perhaps this is one reason that second- and third-generation survivors are writing so much about the Holocaust; they write as a means of catharsis, to trap their trauma on paper. Wiseman, et al. posit in their paper, “Anger, Guilt, and Intergenerational Communication of Trauma in the Interpersonal Narratives of Second

Generation Holocaust Survivors,” that these survivors could also be responding from a place of anger or guilt. Wiseman writes of the relational narratives between Holocaust survivors and their children,

Studying the narratives qualitatively showed that the association found between feelings of guilt... and parents’ vulnerability... usually appeared to involve a dynamic in which the sons or daughters felt that they caused the parents undue worry and pain. This was because of their not thinking enough about the possible impact of pursuing their own wishes on their vulnerable parents. (Wiseman et al)

Art Spiegelman’s groundbreaking graphic novel *Maus* holds a perfect example of guilt in the writing of a second-generation Holocaust survivor. *Maus* is a fictionalized autobiographical graphic novel, written and illustrated by Art Spiegelman. The book follows the story of Spiegelman interviewing his father, Vladek, about his experience as a Jew in the Holocaust. At one point in the novel, Spiegelman experiences heavy guilt after his father finds out the comic he wrote about his mother, Anja’s, suicide. He hides the comic from his father because he feels, as Wiseman says, that if Vladek finds out about it then he will feel undue worry and pain. As it is portrayed in the book, Spiegelman writes about a conversation with his stepmother wherein he finds out that Vladek read the comic about his Anja’s suicide.



(Spiegelman, 99)

Here Spiegelman is already experiencing guilt because his stepmother implies that his work is the main reason for Vladek's depression. "Prisoner on the Hell Planet" is a rather intense and graphic depiction of Anja's suicide and how it affected her family.

This situation causes such a reaction from Spiegelman because he was “not thinking enough about the possible impact of pursuing [his] own wishes on [his] vulnerable parents” (Wiseman et al). The comic does have a strong emotional impact on Vladek, portrayed in detail after “Prisoner on Hell Planet.”



(Spiegelman, 104)

Vladek affirms Spiegelman of his sadness, which validates Spiegelman’s feelings of guilt.

Not only does Spiegelman experience guilt aspects of being raised by Holocaust survivors, he also receives significant trauma from his parents. Spiegelman writes that he did not have a particularly close relationship with his father (Spiegelman, 11), but Vladek is still willing to share his story, albeit a bit reluctantly. Spiegelman’s mother Anja, however, was always desperate, almost compulsive, about telling her story. This knowledge is a lot for a young person to handle, but this trauma became much more real for Spiegelman when his mother committed suicide. In his article “Holocaust

Trauma Reconstructed,” Harold Blum says that this kind of trauma, trauma within a family, can be worse than external shocks of trauma.

[I]nterfamilial trauma may be more damaging than [sic] psychic trauma associated with accident, physical injury, or illness. Psychic trauma during childhood has developmental consequences related to the immaturity of the personality and the developmental phases or phases in which the trauma occurred. (Blum)

As Spiegelman mentions in *Maus*, he spent some time in a state mental hospital in his late teens and early twenties. It is highly likely that trauma received from his parents during childhood played a heavy factor in Spiegelman’s mental state and need to be institutionalized.

Maus is also rather deconstructive in its own right. The graphic novel’s portrayal of characters as animals has been controversial and debated for some time. In *Maus*, Jews are drawn as mice, Poles as pigs, Americans as dogs, and Nazis as cats (Spiegelman).



(Spiegelman, 1972)

According to Vaul-Grimwood's book *Holocaust literature of the Second Generation*, Spiegelman's portrayal of Jews as mice was particularly controversial. Of course, this choice makes sense in relation to the Nazi cats; however, it could be a distasteful connection to the Nazi idea of Jews as vermin. Spiegelman's artistic choice to portray Jews as mice, though controversial, is certainly effective. It almost flips the idea of viewing Jews as vermin on its head because the mice are so anthropomorphized. They walk and talk like people, and interact with animals in their world the way we would in our world. Vaul-Grimwood writes, "The appropriation of the Nazi concept of Jews as vermin subverts anti-Semitic caricature by individualizing the mice, emphasizing the ambiguity of 'Jewish' characteristics and questioning a simplistic understanding of 'racial' origin" (Vaul-Grimwood).

In this way, *Maus* is both a deconstruction of humanity, anti-Semitism, and racial stereotypes, as well as a prime example of transmission of trauma and cultural memory in second-generation Holocaust survivors. However, transmission of trauma and memory did not stop with the second generation. There is a wave now of third-generation survivors who are writing about the Holocaust, their heritage, and relating to the past through their ancestors. Perhaps the most prominent example of the literature of third-generation survivors is Jonathan Safran Foer's *Everything is Illuminated*.

Third-generation Holocaust writers are different from their predecessors. Direct survivors, those who experienced the Holocaust firsthand, tend to relate their experience in a rather straightforward manner. They are more private, telling the stories of what happened to them in the Holocaust rather than the emotions and trauma aspect of the experience. Second-generation survivors, on the other hand, did not have the direct experience of being part of the Holocaust and therefore could not rely on the more distant, factual parts of the stories. Instead, they wrote about trauma, loss, and atrocity in the Holocaust – they inherited the emotions their parents did not speak of, and this became their platform for writing. Oftentimes it seems like an act of catharsis. Third-generation survivors, like Foer, have a completely different angle than their predecessors. According to Berger, third-generation writers are “Seeking to transform trauma into history, [they] simultaneously mourn their loss and work through their legacy in a process which helps them clarify their Jewish identity in the hovering shadows of

the *Shoah*" (Berger). Third generation survivors writing about the Holocaust are seeking a way to reconnect with their history, and to more firmly establish their Jewish identity.

Foer certainly searches for identity in *Everything is Illuminated*. The book is about a Jewish character, also named Jonathan Safran Foer, taking a trip to the Ukraine to try and find the woman who saved his grandfather's life during the Holocaust. He is trying to connect with his grandfather and his traumatic past, while experiencing something inherently Jewish – the unique encounter of visiting a concentration camp to gain a sense of the cultural trauma that happened there and to reconnect with long-dead ancestors. However, Foer does not completely focus on the Jewish experience; he takes a step beyond his own heritage and takes on the task of recognizing those who are "other" to him. One of the main characters of the story, Alex, is not Jewish, yet he is also a third-generation Holocaust survivor. Alex has inherited some trauma from his grandfather, who is harboring the emotional devastation of having caused the death of his best friend. Alex's grandfather, a Ukrainian non-Jew, told the Nazis that his best friend was Jewish, causing him to be taken away. Through this story, Foer tackles in a much more universal sense the intergenerational transmission of trauma. He does this by taking on the mantle of not only the victims of the Holocaust, but also the perpetrators. Through this process, Foer is able to reconnect not only with his Jewish ancestors, but with the perpetrators who were at least partially responsible for the Holocaust.

At the beginning of the book, Foer writes characters who have an ironically anti-Semitic worldview. Even though they run a travel business specifically for Jews who wish to visit their ancestors' homes, main character Alex originally states, "I had the opinion that Jewish people were having shit between their brains" (Foer, 3). Alex's grandfather is even more cynical and anti-Semitic, saying things like "I hate Lvov. I hate Lutsk. I hate the Jew in the back seat of this car that I hate" (Foer, 57). However, as the story goes on, the characters grow closer and forget their biases, with Alex's grandfather even saying that Jonathan is "a good boy... He seems good" (Foer, 73). Eventually it comes to light that, although Alex's grandfather and all his descendants are born of Holocaust Perpetrators, their heritage is actually Jewish. Feuer poses some interesting questions about this in his article "Almost Friends: Post-Holocaust Comedy, Tragedy and Friendship in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Everything is Illuminated*." Feuer writes,

If we cannot look at the Holocaust in a comic way, but can only look at it in a tragic manner, as most of this novel suggests, does this imply that it is impossible to forgive the other because of his or her "heritage?" Is Jonathan wrong in associating Alex with his grandfather, or did Alex do this from the beginning of his novel? And should we associate the third generation with the original perpetrators? Is this their "heritage?" (Feuer)

Foer crosses boundaries with his comedic portrayal of a Holocaust story. Traditionally it would be seen as immoral or inconsiderate to create any sort of art or entertainment from the Holocaust, but perhaps *this* is the legacy of the third-generation survivors:

Reconciliation. In this story, Jews and perpetrators become friends, they each find their own sort of fulfillment, and break down the barriers between Jew and Gentile, between self and other. This is also a very deconstructive idea – by the end of the story, Foer has completely eliminated the difference between self and other, nullifying the binary opposition of Holocaust victim versus Holocaust perpetrator.

Conclusion

Through analysis, comparison and contrast, and theoretical application, I have shown the Holocaust as a deconstructive event through the lens of Holocaust fiction. The Holocaust as we know it deconstructs gender, faith, humanity, life, death, even the self. Holocaust fiction shows that all these things can be deconstructed, and that victims often occupy a liminal space between life and death. Holocaust fiction also shows how trauma and memory are transmitted and affected.

Some weaknesses of the study include a very limited range of texts. I chose only four examples of Holocaust fiction, but there are many more. I could have chosen also to analyze Lois Lowry's *Number the Stars*, *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* by John Boyne, Jane Yolen's *The Devil's Arithmetic* or *Briar Rose*, or any of many other prime examples of Holocaust fiction. I also did not consider other means of fiction besides written prose. I could have considered film, such as *Schindler's List*, *The Pianist*, or *Life is Beautiful*.

For future study, I would suggest expanding the base of literature studied. While the four texts used in this study are well-established, well-known, and critically acclaimed, it would greatly benefit the study to have a more widely established basis. One could also write about more than three literary theories, or focus specifically on one, thereby delving deeper than before into one particular aspect of the study.

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