

Constructing the Imaginative Bridge: Third-Generation Holocaust Narratives

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Abstract

This research examines the ways in which third generation Holocaust writers, or the grandchildren of Holocaust survivors, approach the subject of their own traumatic history and the intergenerational transmission of trauma. Despite the generational divide that separates the third generation from the preceding two generations of Holocaust writers, the trans-generational transmission of trauma continues to preoccupy contemporary narratives. This research discusses the innovative ways that third-generation writers, such as Nicole Krauss, Margot Singer, and Jonathan Safran Foer, use imaginative leaps throughout their writing and how such narrative techniques distinguish them from survivor and second-generation Holocaust representation. The third generation's narratives of return and recovery stem from their desire to uncover the truth behind their traumatic familial history as well as their fragmented knowledge about this traumatic familial history. This paper refers to the grandchildren of Holocaust survivors' fragmented knowledge about the horrors of the Holocaust as "lost worlds," a motif that continues to arise in third-generation Holocaust narratives. Innovative imaginative leaps therefore serve as an attempt to bridge the gap between the third generation's personal history and their families' histories. Additionally, the unconventional use of such narrative patterns reflects the third generation's endeavors to articulate their complicated familial history, a history they themselves may not entirely understand.

Keywords: Holocaust Narratives, Third-Generation Holocaust Survivors, Intergenerational Transmission of Trauma

1. Introduction

Holocaust survivor and second-generation writers like Primo Levi, Elie Wiesel, and Art Spiegelman struggle with Holocaust trauma throughout their writing. Their writing includes certain distinctive characteristics like the hesitancy to speak at all, the "deep sense of moral urgency" to share the truth, and the utter sorrow of acknowledging Holocaust suffering (Teichman and Leder 4). While some survivors wrote to preserve the truth about the Shoah, others believe that the "most appropriate response...is silence" (Teichman and Leder 1). Words fall short, inadequately describe the horrors survivors faced, and seem to almost distort the truth about the Holocaust itself. Survivor silence then translates to their children. The second generation learned not to ask questions, to keep silent themselves, but they still experience a kind of reenacted past that is "not just remembered, it is re-lived" (Katz 240). Although, when faced with their parents' silence and their own reenacted memories the second generation often attempts to appropriate their parents' trauma, a characteristic that haunts their writing.

However, the urge to share one's experiences and to document the horrors of the Shoah pushed many survivors and members of the second generation to pursue written testimonies. In these written accounts from both survivors and the second-generation, fictional techniques, paradoxically, helped "make outrageous history more credible" (Teichman and Leder 3). The use of imaginative mechanisms brought readers into the experience itself and reflected

the absurdity of the Holocaust itself. For these two generations, life outside of the Holocaust almost ceases to exist. Creative and diverse forms often times eliminate “all references to past or future” to effectively “place the reader within the inferno” (Teichman and Leder 6). The survivor and second-generation writer struggle with problems of memory and how to articulate a past that feels beyond the scope of language. Their writing also represents the feeling of separateness. It depicts a “history [that] has permanently separated them from the human community” and a kind of arrested personal history (Teichman and Leder 14). Both survivors and their children remain firmly trapped in past trauma. Both generations often question what it means to live in a post-Holocaust world, especially when they cannot seem to shake past trauma. For many writers, the post-Holocaust world is one of an indifferent God and inescapable pain and loss.

The third-generation of Holocaust writers, or the grandchildren of Holocaust survivors, also demonstrates clear and persistent signs of the intergenerational transmission of trauma and memory throughout their writing. While the inheritance of trauma may have passed from the second to the third generation, the third generation distinguishes itself from its predecessors in four distinct ways. They display certain characteristics throughout their writing that include the desire to uncover the truth, various struggles with Jewish faith and identity, innovative uses of imaginative leaps, and the surprising presence of survival and hope. Despite the two generational gap in historical distance from the Shoah, Holocaust trauma still strongly affects these writers in terms of identity and the ways they approach their own traumatic familial histories in their writing.

2. The Desire to Uncover the Truth

The trans-generational transmission of trauma that continues to plague the third generation can be inherited in two main pathways: verbal and nonverbal. Verbal transmission, clearly the most direct channel from which to inherit trauma, includes storytelling and sharing memories. Some third-generation writers, like Julie Orringer, find themselves lucky enough to have grandparents that are not only alive, but also willing to share their experiences. In this manner, stories about the Shoah can be mediated and passed down through the generations verbally. Although not explicitly verbal, the third-generation also finds alternative means for learning about the Holocaust through museums or other cultural initiatives. In either directly verbal or still openly accessible pathways the third generation can encounter Shoah history fairly easily.

However, much of the third generation (as well as portions of the second generation) overwhelming encounters silence in place of open communication. While the second generation had access to their parents and experienced their silences, the third generation runs into the silences of not only their grandparents (which could be due to their reluctance to discuss the Holocaust as well as their death) but their own parents as well. Both generations, by “avoiding the trauma and by refraining from working through it, they paradoxically recreated” a similar trauma in the third generation (Talby-Abarbanel 230). The third generation, therefore, encounters an increased level of silence than the second generation due to the doubling of silence. While the second generation also experienced silences surrounding the traumatic events of the Holocaust, they also learned from their parents to keep aspects of Holocaust memory silent. Simply put, for many second-generation writers, they learned that some elements of the Shoah remain unspoken. The second generation then passed on the same kind of silence they experienced with their parents onto the third generation as well, which in turn created a Holocaust experience that “involved a lack of meaning, lack of words, feelings without content, horror without a story” (Talby-Abarbanel 228). However, the third generation must now overcome this doubling of silence due to not only their grandparents’ reluctance to discuss Holocaust horrors, but their own parents’ reticence, in order to tell their own story.

The majority of intergenerational trauma transference experienced by the third generation, therefore, falls under the non-verbal category. Marianne Hirsch created an integral theory connected to the inheritance of trauma that she refers to as postmemory. In suggesting that memory can occur after an event, even generations after, Hirsch argues that “experiences were transmitted to them [the children and grandchildren of survivors] so deeply and affectively as to seem to constitute memories in their own right” (Hirsch 5). Postmemory affects both the second and the third generations as they feel so personally and emotionally affected by an event they never actually experienced that survivors’ memories permeate their own memories. Even though, logically, the second and third generations acknowledge that these experiences are not their own, they cannot shake the feeling that they too share the same traumatic memories as their parents and grandparents. Margot Singer, a third-generation writer, accurately describes the complex phenomena of postmemory in her short story “Deir Yassin,” in which her character Avraham, a member of the second generation, “knows these images may not really be memories at all, but just sediment of stories he’s been told, or photographs he’s seen” (Singer 414). Avraham admits that his memories may not actually be *his*

memories at all, but that he still cannot shake the hold they have over him or the feeling that these recollections somehow belong to him.

The fact that these memories seem just as real and personal to the second and third generations indicates that the intergenerational transmission of trauma has indeed occurred. Avraham, like the generations before him, leaves only “a fistful of facts both random and worn that hardly add up to an entire man” for Susan to then fit together into a coherent narrative (Singer 427). Susan therefore collects trinkets of history from the older generations, items infused with other’s memories that somehow become her own. Yet this inheritance occurs without Avraham sharing one story. Julie Orringer’s novel *The Invisible Bridge* similarly demonstrates the non-verbal transmission of trauma affecting the third generation despite a two generational gap from the horrors of the Holocaust. The unnamed granddaughter of protagonist Andras Lévi acknowledges that “[t]here were strands of darker stories. She didn’t know how she’d heard them; she thought she must have absorbed them through her skin, like medicine or poison” (Orringer 596). Like many members of the third generation, Lévi’s granddaughter and Singer’s character Susan collect their family’s memories unconsciously, unaware that they are incorporating their grandparents’ memories into their own despite the silence surrounding the Shoah they encounter.

Some members of the third generation, however, consciously incorporate familial history into their own sense of personal history. Unlike Orringer’s anonymous granddaughter, Alma, one of the characters in Nicole Krauss’ *The History of Love*, as well as a member of the third generation, consciously documents specific memories she has inherited from her father and mother by making lists. Her list about memories she has inherited from her mother indicates that memories pass from a living person to another living person. Her father’s premature death, however, and the subsequent list that Alma creates to document her inherited memories demonstrate that memories can also pass from a deceased person to a living person. Although both these lists represent the intergenerational transmission of trauma from one generation to the subsequent generation, the fact that one parent is still living while another is not makes Alma’s trauma inheritance more representative of the third generation in general; she gathers memories from both the living and the dead just as many members of the third generation rely on information and memories passed on from both their own parents or the second generation and their grandparents, who may be deceased. Alma uses her living connection to her own past, her mother, to try and learn about her family’s history. By asking her mother questions about her father, Alma opens the verbal pathway to discussion and creates an avenue for storytelling. Storytelling, at least verbal storytelling, unfortunately remains firmly rooted in the living and cannot tell the whole history. For this reason, Alma turns to her deceased father and, just as a member of the third generation would try to uncover aspects of their past by examining their own deceased grandparents’ lives. Alma too attempts to understand her past through her deceased father. As the Holocaust survivors die, leaving an almost impenetrable silence, the third generation still finds ways to break through the quiet and connect to their familial past despite losing their direct link to Shoah trauma.

Singer, in “Deir Yassin” demonstrates how death can serve as a springboard for connection. With the death of her uncle Zalman, Susan reconnects with her still living uncle Avraham. Although they connect, they do not verbally share stories regarding their familial trauma. Yet her short story clearly indicates the continued intergenerational transmission of trauma throughout her narrative. At one point, a member of the second and a member of the third generation’s clocks freeze at exactly the same time signifying that the Holocaust trauma that troubled the second generation continues to plague the third generation. When Susan and Avraham’s clocks simultaneously stop, Singer indicates that they both feel drawn to and paradoxically trapped in the past. Singer poignantly describes the nature of indirectly experiencing trauma, as those that suffer from postmemory do due to their distance but strong emotional connection to the actual event, when she writes that “[e]ven those who escape dismemberment will suffer from an endless ringing in their ears” (Singer 430). As Singer suggests, Holocaust trauma continues to plague the third generation in a troubling way. According to David Bezmozgis, in his short story “Minyan,” this transference of trauma reflects a burden of inheritance. The “task of lifting the heavy scrolls” falls to the third generation regardless of whether or not they want it (Bezmozgis 460). Nobody proclaims this member of the third generation as the next scroll-bearer. Instead, the task simply finds its way to him. The burden shifts between a history and a legacy to embrace as well as a struggle with memory and how to articulate the past. Once again, however, the third generation has inherited this cumbersome and complicated burden, that encompasses both a legacy to embrace and carry forward but also a struggle with memory and how to articulate the past, nonverbally.

Since much of the transference of trauma occurs non-verbally, the third generation continually encounters silences or hushed conversations about their grandparents’ past which can actually “drive the child’s [the third generation] impulse to piece together” the truth about their own traumatic, familial past (Pisano 28). While some narratives reflect a strong desire to tell their grandparents’ stories in order to preserve their memories, more often than not the third generation desperately wants to fill the gaps in their own knowledge about their family and break the silence surrounding the Holocaust. Julie Orringer, an author inspired by her grandparents’ experience as Hungarian Jews

during the Holocaust, sits in a somewhat unique position in that, while she did begin writing to fill in holes in her history, she also had access to not only her grandfather and grandmother, but also her granduncle all of whom willingly helped her throughout the process of writing her novel, *The Invisible Bridge*.

Third-generation writers Daniel Mendelsohn and Jonathan Safran Foer, however, reflect a more common third generation experience in which their respective memoir and novel, *The Lost* and *Everything is Illuminated*, emerged from a deep-seated desire to uncover the truth behind their families' experiences. Both Mendelsohn's memoir and Foer's novel began as an investigation into their past, of which they had almost no knowledge. Foer states in an interview with Jane Zwart that "a lot of my writing has been born out of the inability to communicate things" and that "I encounter these holes in my life. The hole of my family's history in Eastern Europe. The hole of the silence about that history" (Zwart 1). Foer consequently reflects these holes and difficulty articulating the past in his novel not only in the fictional Jonathan's quest to find the woman who saved his grandfather during the Holocaust, but also in the uncertainty he includes in his history of his supposed family's shtetl of origin, Trachimbrod. A plaque in Trachimbrod "marks the spot (or a spot close to the spot) where the wagon of one Trachim B (we think) went in" (Foer 128). Similarly to the uncertainty Foer describes surrounding his protagonist's familial history, Singer's short story "Deir Yassin" also expresses a lack of knowledge about her own past because Susan, the member of the third generation, knows almost nothing about her uncle Zalman, whose ashes she carries with her to Israel, or her uncle Avraham. David, the protagonist of Erika Dreifus' short story "Mishpocha," conscious of the silence surrounding his familial history, repeatedly asks his parents questions about their past only to be brushed away by his mother's response of "David, please leave it all alone" (Dreifus 128). This wall of silence drives the third generation to try and uncover the truth. The last section of Julie Orringer's novel focuses on Andras' granddaughter and her desire to know her familial history. The anonymous granddaughter "want[s] to hear the whole story" but has only encountered hushed conversations or complete silence surrounding her family's past reflecting the fragmentation that the third generation encounters again and again (Orringer 597).

3. Struggles with Identity

The task of the third generation then becomes to piece together these fragments of history, to "reconstruct and reassemble fragmented lives" as well as create a cogent articulation of the past (Berger, "The Burden of Inheritance" 69). Reconstruction entails incorporating their knowledge of their families' past into their own sense of identity in order to construct a complete sense of self. However, the overwhelming silence that surrounds this past causes multiple and long lasting struggles with identity as the third generation attempts to connect to their Jewish heritage. The third generation, maturing through adolescence and into adulthood, "is now in the process of forming adult identities and world views. Part of such processes is the development of a consciousness of the past, present, and future" (Seeberg et al. 9). Forming an adult identity necessitates knowing about one's past, something many members of the third generation lack. Additionally, even if some members of the third generation actually know parts of their past, they need to assemble these pieces into a coherent personal history. The inability to do so leads to the fragmentation of one's own identity as well as detachment from the past. Considering Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory, in which subsequent generations experience survivors' memories as memories of their own, the third generation must again and again try to identify "how much of the past [they] can carry forward and how much [they] leave behind" (Freeman 7). Contemporary novelists, "preoccupied with the ways in which identity is affected by the ongoing presence of the past in the lives of those who did not experience but are nonetheless profoundly affected" by Holocaust trauma, must determine how to create their own lives and memories without losing themselves in past memories (Gąsiorek 887). Postmemory for the third generation means leaving even more of their grandparents' past behind since they now have to consolidate both survivors' and the second generation's memories as well as trying to create their own independent identity. Trying to create an adult identity from such fragmentary knowledge of one's familial history explains the drive towards uncovering the truth, but it also forces the third generation to address the place of the Holocaust in their lives.

The Shoah occupies two positions in the younger generations' lives and writing. The first of which is a compulsive interest in it. Nathan Englander's short story "What We Talk About When We Talk About Anne Frank" portrays a woman, Deb, still completely haunted by the horrific events of the Holocaust. Deb's husband describes her as intrigued by her friend Mark's parents:

They're Holocaust survivors. And Deb has what can only be called an unhealthy obsession with the idea of that generation being gone. Don't get me wrong. It's important to me, too. I care, too. All I'm saying is, there's healthy and unhealthy, and my wife, she gives this subject a lot, a lot, of time." (Englander 8)

Deb clearly cannot move beyond her interest in the Shoah despite the fact that her own parents are not survivors. Englander's writing also reflects what Monica Osborne calls "impatience to appropriate the mantle of Holocaust victimhood" (Osborne 149). This impatience, however, is characteristic of the second generation, but not the third. Deb in Englander's story represents the second generation's attempts to experience the concentration camps, most significantly in her twisted game her family and friends call the "Anne Frank game." Deb's game tries to determine which of her friends would hide her in the event of a second Holocaust. Without direct ties to a survivor family though, her remove from the trauma reflects the third generation's distance; they too feel intrigued by survivors' histories and wish to know more but lack direct contact. The third generation, a generation less strictly defined by Holocaust lineage than the second generation, does not try to appropriate survivors' memories but, once again, to uncover the truth. The truth in this case resembles more than merely the facts about the Shoah in that it also reflects a kind of empathetic understanding, something the third generation must struggle to uncover as well. Third generation writers, therefore, include subtle hints that conjure specific Holocaust memories in reader's minds without attempting to biographically enter the camps themselves (with the exception of Mendelsohn). Deb's game, therefore, represents a creative and distanced attempt to experience Holocaust trauma as well as a feeling of inadequacy when doing so. The "Anne Frank game" signifies a simultaneous closeness and distance to the Shoah, the profound emotional connection the third generation experiences, but also the lack of direct memory about the event itself. Englander consequently creates a situation in which the third generation tries to recreate the Holocaust but can only do so through imagination.

This is not to say that the third generation feels less affected by the Holocaust, but rather, they simply approach the subject more cautiously because of their increased historical distance and their fundamental lack of knowledge of both their familial histories (that is their personal histories) as well as their empathetic connection to the Shoah. Unlike the second generation, they rarely try to autobiographically go where their grandparents went while in the concentration camps; third generation writers (with the exception of Mendelsohn's memoir) usually do not enter the camps biographically but instead describe the horrific experiences through their fictional characters. Most third generation writers do not create stories that begin and end with the Holocaust. Multiple authors, like Daniel Mendelsohn and Nicole Krauss, do not even qualify their writing as Holocaust writing. Instead, Mendelsohn "never conceived of [his memoir] as a book about the Holocaust, and [he doesn't] think of it as being about the Holocaust" (Kalman Naves 62). As paradoxical as it sounds coming from an author whose whole book was not only inspired by his family's traumatic Holocaust history, but that also chronicles his search for his lost relatives, Mendelsohn's memoir is not actually entirely concerned with the Holocaust itself. Instead, it is primarily a search for family that begins with the family "lost" during the Shoah. This family, however, also includes still living relatives that Mendelsohn has lost touch with. Nicole Krauss' novel, *The History of Love*, also represents more of a search for identity than a meditation on the Holocaust. One of the protagonists, Alma, hunts down the truth behind her namesake, a character in a book within the novel also called "The History of Love," hoping that it will help her discover her own sense of identity as well. By uncovering the truth behind her namesake, Alma believes that a more complete sense of self will emerge as well. Both Mendelsohn and Krauss reflect the third generation's desire to uncover the truth and the hesitancy with which they identify as Holocaust writers.

Additionally, the subtly with which third generation writers acknowledge the Holocaust in their characters' lives creates stories that rely on family relationships and everyday occurrences instead of Holocaust horrors. While direct references to Holocaust trauma convey a sense "a sense of immediacy and impact" for the first and second generations, "the third generation writer views these events as an indirect part of the narrative, one balanced by other, also important, histories" (Lang 46). Krauss' novel, which tells three stories simultaneously (that of Alma, Leo Gursky, and Zvi Litvinoff), exemplifies this balance. Even though Krauss constantly shifts between these three distinct narratives "one story doesn't overpower another; one character doesn't reside in the shadow of another" (Lang 49). Jonathan Safran Foer's short story, "Here We Aren't, So Quickly," a love story between two unnamed characters which condenses these two lives into the minimal idiosyncrasies of their personalities, still shows clear Holocaust markers. Small instances hint at Holocaust trauma but never delve deeper than surface level comments. He includes phrases like "in a framed picture of dead family," "You were always too injured by things that happened in the distant past for anything to be effortless in the present," and "I was not neurotic, just apocalyptic" that demonstrate an underlying trauma and knowledge but that never brings that history to light (Foer, "Here We Aren't, So Quickly" 335-336). Upon first reading Foer's story, it does not seem to constitute even a Jewish story let alone a narrative that acknowledges the lasting effects of the Holocaust. Yet, these small instances reverberate; they remind the readers that even as Foer condenses these two characters' lives, the Holocaust persists.

Even Julie Orringer's novel, which does describe the Hungarian Labor camps, very rarely actually shares gory, highly specific details; instead, everything feels somewhat distant. Certain section titles like "Broken Glass," "Departures and Arrivals," and "By Fire" in her novel connote highly specific Holocaust imagery without directly naming the image itself. The third generation references these traumas without trying to appropriate them. Like Mendelsohn's memoir, Orringer's *The Invisible Bridge* is far more concerned with her character's love for each other and their lives before, during, and after the Holocaust than simply Holocaust trauma. Unlike survivor and second-generation writing, a sense of past, present, and future exists. The subtlety of third generational Holocaust imagery, however, does open itself up to the Shoah; it urges the reader to dig into the text, to uncover meaning, and to foster dialogue between themselves and the text itself. Uncovering meaning with only miniscule hints to work with reflects the very situation that the third generation faces.

The generational distance from the Holocaust, as seen in their writing that avoids the stark descriptions of life in concentration camps used by survivors and the second generation, causes the third generation to question what exactly it means to be Jewish as well as a grandchild of a survivor. Many third generation writers juxtapose extreme orthodoxy with more secular Judaism throughout their stories, which reflects the survivor and second generation turn away from religion as well as a reconnection with religion. In both Nathan Englander's short story "What We Talk About When We Talk About Anne Frank" and Julie Orringer's short story "The Smoothest Way Is Full of Stones," one set of the Jews present in the narratives has converted to a strict, ultra-orthodox form of Judaism while one set remains much more secular. The protagonist in Orringer's story is a young adult still in the process of determining her own identity as an individual and is therefore highly representative of the third generation. Throughout the story the anonymous protagonist struggles to decide whether she will assume the same extreme orthodoxy as her cousin and aunt who have converted to Orthodox Judaism or remain secular like her parents. However, she never definitively chooses one religious outlook or the other and when another member of the orthodox community asks her if she believes in God she responds, "I don't know" (Orringer, "The Smoothest Way Is Full of Stones," 56). At the conclusion of the story, Orringer leaves the answer up to the reader.

Englander's story, "What We Talk About When We Talk About Anne Frank," similarly presents two religious extremes that force us to question what exactly makes one Jewish. The two couples play Deb's twisted "Anne Frank" game. While Deb's secular husband would undoubtedly save her, the orthodox husband would not save his own wife. So what, exactly, does it mean to be Jewish? In many cases, identification with Judaism reflects more than upbringing or religious observances and the Holocaust itself can often serve as a crucial connection to a shared Jewish past. David Bezmozgis in "An Animal to the Memory" describes such a situation. The protagonist, Berman, who has just attacked a classmate and fellow Jew on Holocaust Day, finally experiences a kind of childhood trauma that spurs respect for Holocaust trauma and his shared Jewish past:

- How is it that all of this doesn't mean anything to you, Berman? Can you tell me that?
- It means something. [...]
- Berman, a Nazi wouldn't do here what you did today. Don't tell me about how you feel.
- I'm not a Nazi.
- No, you're not a Nazi? What are you?
- A Jew.
- What?
- A Jew.
- I can't hear you.
- I'm a Jew. [...]
- So that my uncles hear you in Treblinka!

He tightened his grip on my shoulder until he saw it hurt. I was convinced he was going to hit me. That last thing I wanted to do was start crying, so I started crying.

- I'm a Jew! I shouted into his face. [...]
- Now, Berman, he said, now maybe you understand what it is to be a Jew. (Bezmozgis 75-77)

Only after Berman experiences a kind of trauma that forces him to accept his Jewishness, does he begin to understand what Jewishness even means. It is, however, only a beginning. The third generation struggles with the question of what exactly it means to be Jewish throughout their writing and never arrives at a concrete answer, only a feeling that it is crucial to their self-identity and inescapable.

Englander's character Deb further complicates notions of Jewish identity. While technically not a child or grandchild or survivors, Deb is of the same age as the second generation. The third generation, unlike its predecessors, extends inclusion to non-survivor grandchildren who also write from a third generation perspective because trauma affects not

only descendants of survivors but also “member[s] of the ultra-Orthodox community” (Perlstein and Motta 102). Some third generation writers choose to juxtapose two religious extremes (one of which being the ultra-Orthodox) to bring this question of religious identity to light, but others reflect the ambiguous nature of identity in general. The third generation acknowledges their Jewish history, but still feels distant and disconnected from their Jewishness. Susan, in Margot Singer’s short story “Deir Yassin,” “is the kind of person to whom people sometimes say, But you don’t look Jewish...The truth is that inside, where her blood jangles and her breath beats against her ears, she doesn’t exactly feel Jewish either” (Singer 419). Jewish identity, according to Singer, clearly represents more than a bloodline, but what exactly it means remains unclear. As Osborne explains, grandchildren of survivors, unlike their predecessors, experience much more caution when declaring their identity, if they declare one at all. Their writing is “not an assertion of identity” but a “quest for or question regarding identity” (Osborne 160). Instead of laying claim to an identity, the third generation, in part due the gaps in knowledge, question identity; they search for it in these narratives but never seem to find a definite answer. Susan, in Singer’s story, describes this as a hollow feeling, the feeling that something is missing, but that she cannot quite figure out what exactly that is.

4. Reconstructing Lost Worlds

This sense of hollowness and loss leads circuitously back to the desire to uncover the truth about one’s own history. Unfortunately, even if the third generation may be able to fill in some of the holes they have, they often times encounter dead end after dead end. These dead ends often take the form of “lost worlds” throughout third generation narratives and represent a past that can never be fully recovered either physically or emotionally. Emotional lost worlds draw from fears of how to write about the Holocaust without a direct connection to the actual historical event; the third generation must determine how to discuss the Shoah even as survivors die. For many third generation writers, issues of memory and specifically memory loss correlate with the overwhelming fear of losing their connection with their past. Avraham’s wife in Margot Singer’s short story suffers from severe Alzheimer’s disease. With “her memory gone, her mind as blank as air,” Avraham’s wife represents an emotional lost world (Singer 414). Without access to these memories the third generation once again encounters dead ends and silences. Shoshana, a Hassidic convert in Nathan Englander’s short story, worries about Alzheimer’s disease since one side of her parents’ family has a history of the affliction. The other side, she jokes, “is blessed only with dementia” (Englander 16). Memory loss appears completely unavoidable for Shoshana. However, the imperative to “Remember; don’t forget” that follows Holocaust survivors and their families puts the third generation at odds with their realities (Bezmozgis 73). In stories that address issues of memory loss such as Singer’s and Englander’s, how can the third generation remember when the only witnesses of the actual event present in the narratives do not remember themselves? The third generation, at a loss, continually includes imagery of lost worlds representing their longing to remember but their inability to access the past, their disconnect with the memories they feel commanded to remember.

Emotional dead ends are not the only representations of lost worlds in third generational narratives though. Nicole Krauss and Jonathan Safran Foer include physical examples of lost worlds in their novels. In Krauss’ novel, Leo describes his childhood home as a “village that no longer exists, in a house that no longer exists, on the edge of a field that no longer exists” (Krauss 11). Foer’s novel similarly describes Tracimbrod, the fictional Jonathan’s ancestral shtetl, as completely gone. These physical lost worlds, similarly to the emotional lost worlds, signify that the third generation encounters what they perceive as unrecoverable memories and histories. Both forms of lost worlds capture the third generation’s fear that they have lost access to history and that the only possibilities they may have to uncover the truth all lead disconcertingly to dead ends.

Margot Singer’s story “Deir Yassin” encapsulates both the physical and the emotional lost world. The very title itself is that of a lost world both physically in Israel and emotionally in the loss of memory and personal history. Physically, Avraham is an archaeologist, an individual trained to uncover lost worlds and try to recreate them, to retell their story. He realizes though that some worlds can never be uncovered physically or emotionally, that some memories cannot be excavated, and that some recollections must invariably remain lost in the past. He tells his colleague, “Listen: don’t you think we owe it to our children to go back and get the story straight? Don’t you think they deserve to know the truth?” (Singer 425). His sentiments reflect the drive for the truth and the desire to uncover the past that the third generation continually pushes for. However, his colleague responds, “History schmistory...Just because they call it revisionist you think it has to be the truth?” (Singer 425). Even if these authors (represented here by Avraham) could somehow exhume these lost worlds they may never know the truth behind them as well as the third generation’s growing fears of how to discuss the Holocaust after the survivors, the direct witnesses, have died. While these lost worlds simultaneously represent the fear of how to portray the Holocaust with no direct access to

those memories or witnesses and the third generation's lack of knowledge, they also prove particularly troubling for the third generation as they try to fill these gaps in their writing. The third generation, faced with trying to piece together fragments of memory, must figure out a way to recover these lost worlds not only in the knowledge they discover personally but how to then articulate that knowledge as well.

To do this, they turn to innovative imaginative leaps. All postmemorialists, including the second generation, use imaginative leaps to fill the gaps in familial knowledge. However, the second generation attempted to appropriate their parents' memories and imagine detailed descriptions of life inside the camps. Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, for example, tells his father's concentration camp experience in an imaginative and innovative way: the graphic novel. Despite his innovation though, Spiegelman still takes us directly into the concentration camp in an autobiographical way, perhaps even more so because of the graphic novel's visual nature. The third generation, conversely, uses imaginative leaps to reflect their fragmented identity and knowledge. Due to grandchildren's increased emotional and historical distance the Holocaust is "increasingly a subject for the imagination" (Lang 44). The third generation must make bigger leaps to compensate for the larger distance they must cover. While this does make discovering one's family history harder it also means that "[t]he third generation is much less restrained than its predecessors. They search for memory even while giving free rein to artistic imagination that informs a variety of innovative narrative techniques" (Berger, "Unclaimed Experience: Trauma And Identity In Third Generation Writing About The Holocaust." 158). These "innovative narrative techniques" can be broken down into two categories: imaginative uses of form and imaginative uses of language and content.

Creative approaches of form include structural innovations of the story itself (chapter breaks and shifts between narrators) and the linear narrative (jumps throughout time taking the reader from past to present and back again). More often than not, the imaginative leaps in form shape the ways in which third-generation authors break up their narratives. Breaking the narrative, shifting back and forth between one narrator to the next or between one protagonist to another reflects the third generation's fragmentation, but also the way in which they balance Holocaust trauma with other elements of the story and with a sense of life before and beyond the Holocaust. The third generation's use of innovative structural forms represents their "resistance to the use of a linear or neatly cohesive narrative" (Osborne 153). Writers like Jonathan Safran Foer, Nicole Krauss, and Margot Singer all experiment with form by pursuing multiple story lines throughout their narratives. Instead of transitioning smoothly from one storyline to the next, each author jumps, chapter to chapter, among different characters' perspectives. This gives the reader a kind of whiplash effect, especially in Foer's novel that jumps from past to present consistently throughout. The push and pull between the past and the present mimics the third generations' constant debate about how much of the past they can plausibly carry forward and still remain aware of their present lives and circumstances; third-generation writers want to include the past, but must find ways to incorporate that past with the present they choose to write about. Experimenting with form in this manner also forces the reader in multiple directions causing them to constantly remind themselves of what just happened in one story line and how that connects to the next storyline, which mirrors the fragmentation in grandchildren of survivor's lives. While Foer and Krauss shift between storylines throughout a longer narrative, Singer does so in a short story. Instead of fully explained stories, Singer includes vignettes, small instances of particularly strong imagery. Her story, due to these unique vignettes, functions like memory itself, reliant on a quick succession of images of poignant moments in our lives.

Erika Dreifus plays with form in yet another manner; she directly addresses the reader in her short story "Matrilineal Descent." The title recalls the presence of the intergenerational transmission of trauma throughout third generational narratives, but her stylistic choices also remind the reader that this is, in fact, a work of fiction. While still concerned with what exactly mothers pass onto their children (specifically in the Jewish culture Jewishness itself), it also relies on imaginative leaps to tell the story. By addressing the reader directly, Dreifus invites us to participate and implores us to remember that "this story is about what [the records] do not tell" (Dreifus 41). Her creative manipulation of form shows not only Dreifus' flexibility as a writer, but also a self-consciousness about her writing. It is as though she wants to remind the reader that she too is unaware of all of the facts, that she and the reader are on a journey for the truth behind the records together. Dreifus' story strives to give a voice to the silence surrounding the Holocaust and especially give a voice to those who did not get to speak for themselves. The fact that Dreifus attempts to go behind the records demonstrates the necessity of these imaginative leaps in third generational narratives; they have no other way to tell the story.

These creative manipulations of form indicate that the third generation feels much less restricted than the second and first generations to tell an absolutely factual story about the Holocaust. Instead these narratives focus more on how they tell the story and on their search for identity. To do this, the third generation must be willing to take imaginative leaps to glue together their fragmented knowledge. Orringer, despite her initial inspiration to tell her grandfather's story, maintains that a "writer needs to be spontaneous and see where the narrative takes you" (Rightmyer 9). However, without a clear sense of their own familial history these imaginative leaps in content often

include the use of myth or fable. In Krauss' *The History of Love*, Alma's little brother believes he is one of the legendary lamed vovniks, one of the thirty-six holy people on whom, according to Jewish tradition, the existence of the world depends. For the most part, Krauss' inclusion of myth does not direct the narrative but serves as a personality trait for Alma's younger brother. This once again demonstrates how third generation authors tend to balance Holocaust trauma and memory with other important aspects of the narrative.

Foer, in *Everything Is Illuminated*, essentially creates his own originary myth. For many third generation writers who face "the absence of historical 'facts,' myth becomes a valid alternative to illuminating one's origin" (Codde 65). Foer begins his origin myth, a "version of the past [that] has no qualms about being openly fictional," with his distant grandmother who is quite literally born into trauma (Feuer 36). After her parents' bizarre deaths in a wagon crash into a river, a newborn girl, "still mucus-glazed," floats to the river's surface amidst the physical wagon fragments but also the fragments of her now lost life (Foer 18). Foer creates the image of a newborn literally born into wreckage and into a life with no parents and subsequently no explanations about her own familial past. The newborn's fragmentation clearly represents the intergenerational transmission of trauma and the peculiar situation of the third generation. The only direct witnesses to the event are the fictional Jonathan's distant grandmother's parents (who died) and a few townsfolk who did not actually see anything. Not only does this passage depict the struggle the third generation faces when trying to piece together the fragments of their past, but also the unique way in which they choose to do so. Foer does not try and recreate a factually-based, historical representation of his family's origins, instead he paints a picture of a child destined for trauma, a child floating amidst the remnants of a lost world, destined to search for meaning amongst the fragments. Even Daniel Mendelsohn, an author primarily focused on discovering the truth about what happened to six members of his family, points out in an interview that he can experiment with narrativity and various forms of story-telling "because [he is] a little bit distant from this tragedy" (Kalman Naves 70). It is, therefore, precisely the third generation's distance that affords them more freedom to take more imaginative leaps than survivors who felt absolutely compelled to explain what the camps were actually like and the second generation who tried to recreate their parents' experiences.

5. Survival and Hope

The third generation's distance leads to one last defining characteristic, the presence of survival and hope. Holocaust narratives, typically not thought to be hopeful or to possess happy endings, begin to shift with the third generation because, as Monica Osborne suggests, "the third generation is uniquely equipped to tell the partly happy story, the story where survival outweighs loss" (Osborne 155). Grandchildren of survivors recognize that for them to exist someone had to survive. The third generation, instead of attempting to recreate Holocaust trauma, looks "towards discovering what it looks like to survive, even and perhaps especially the shape that survival takes generations later" (Osborne 152). Nicole Krauss's novel depicts three separate narratives about what it means to survive a tragedy. Leo, after escaping the Holocaust, must continue on with his new life despite losing the love of his life to another man. Zvi, also a Holocaust survivor, creates a new life in South America. Alma, the third generation representative, undertakes the task of not only discovering how to carry on when her father dies, but also trying to help her mother move forward as well. The presence of survival and the various forms it takes throughout third generation narratives suggest that survival can occur in any number of ways and that survival may not be complete until generations later.

The third generation continues the survival that survivors began because the third generation itself brings with it the promise of new life. In Erika Dreifus' short story "Homecomings," a survivor returns to Germany. Despite the fear and apprehension she feels when visiting, "this fall promised hope and happiness amid the usual dread. Because the baby was due" (Dreifus 95). The continuation of life spurs hope, even among "the usual dread," and testifies to and memorializes their survival. In another of Dreifus' short stories, "Mishpocha," the protagonist, David, discovers that his parents adopted him. After years of searching for the truth, when he discovers it, even though it only brings more questions, David maintains hope that he can find his birth parents. In Krauss' novel, the third and the first generations finally meet at the end of the story. For the first generation this means understanding that their memories and their lives are still important, especially to the third generation, and that their memories will go on, or survive. For the third generation, the reconnection with survivors signifies that some scrap of truth can be unearthed as well as a reconnection with survivors who felt permanently and utterly separate. Krauss' ending, divergent from the preceding two generations, most significantly represents that healing can occur even generations after the event. Healing affects not only survivors, but the third generation as well because they too show symptoms of the intergenerational transmission of trauma.

Love, according to Julie Orringer's novel, not only allows healing to occur even generations later, but also helps her protagonists, Andras and Klara, survive. While some may dismiss her ending as cliché or impossibly optimistic, the very presence of the third generation suggests that survival occurred, that some Holocaust victims escaped. When Orringer shifts to the third generation in the epilogue, the unnamed granddaughter hopes that one day she will know her familial history. Ending her novel in this manner implies that the third generation may break the silence one day and that survivors' histories will be shared. The granddaughter realizes that "[m]aybe that was the problem: She hadn't asked. Or maybe even now they didn't want to talk about it. But she would ask, next time she went to visit. It seemed right that they should tell her" (Orringer 597). The entire novel, after reading this epilogue transforms into the story that Andras and Klara have kept hidden from their granddaughter; the novel represents their story being told. The fact that Orringer keeps the granddaughter unnamed signifies that this novel is not about her, but about her grandparents' epic triumph over death and their will to begin again. The third generation strives to break the silence, hoping that their generational distance proves enough to promote intergenerational discussion.

6. Conclusion

Overall, the third generation differentiate themselves in many ways from the previous two generations of Holocaust writers. Driven by a strong desire to uncover the truth about their familial history, grandchildren of survivors write to fill in the holes they have about their traumatic past. Emerging from these gaps, the third generation struggles with identity, never claiming a fixed identity but constantly questioning and searching for what it means not only to be Jewish in a post-Holocaust world, but a grandchild of survivors. Unfortunately, they also continually encounter "lost worlds," pieces of memory and history that can never fully be uncovered. To try and piece together their fragmented knowledge and exhume these lost worlds, they create innovative imaginative leaps both in form and content. Unlike the previous two generations, the third generation's distance allows them take such creative risks. Their narratives also contain a surprising amount of hope not seen in either survivor or second-generation testimonials. They acknowledge the suffering their families underwent during the Holocaust, but also the fact that they survived. For this reason, many third generational Holocaust narratives step away from bleak details about the Shoah and focus instead on what it looks like to survive such a horrible event and then begin anew. Despite the inclusion of hope, these narratives demonstrate unflinchingly the persistent presence of inherited trauma. As Foer describes in his fictional history of Trachimbrod, the

children had it worst of all, for although it would seem that they had few memories to haunt them, they still had the itch of memory as strong as the elders of the shtetl. Their strings were not even their own, but tied around them by parents and grandparents – strings not fastened to anything, but hanging loosely from the darkness. (Foer, *Everything Is Illuminated* 360)

The Holocaust clearly still affects the third generation, illuminated in the ways they choose to write about their traumatic family histories. The intergenerational transmission of trauma and memory continues to transform with each generation, an evolution in modes of bearing witness and Holocaust representation.

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