

Emanuelle Schok Melo da Silva

**THIRD GENERATION PERSPECTIVES ON THE HOLOCAUST  
IN *EVERYTHING IS ILLUMINATED*, BY JONATHAN SAFRAN  
FOER, AND ITS FILM ADAPTATION, BY LIEV SCHREIBER**

Dissertação submetida ao Programa de Pós-Graduação em Inglês: Estudos Linguísticos e Literários da Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina para obtenção do Grau de Mestre em Letras.

Orientador: Prof. Dr. Daniel Serravallo de Sá.

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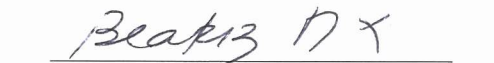
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*This is dedicated to all dreamers.*



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## RESUMO

Esta pesquisa investiga questões relacionadas à identidade judaica na Terceira Geração do Holocausto e sua representação no romance *Uma vida Iluminada* (2002) escrito por Jonathan Safran Foer e a adaptação fílmica dirigida por Liev Schreiber (2005). A análise consiste em examinar e discutir como o tema identidade é desenvolvido nos personagens principais e possivelmente alterado após sua viagem realizada para a cidade fictícia chamada Trachimbrod, na Ucrânia. A jornada revela temas relacionados a memória e trauma herdados, os quais são incluídos no livro e no filme. Os personagens Jonathan e Alex são os narradores da história e eles representam dois lados da mesma moeda. Jonathan é um judeu que mora nos Estados Unidos e desconstrói a visão ideal de vida judaica, tem como idealismo da comunidade judaica antes da guerra. Jonathan finalmente entende que a esmagadora presença da herança do silêncio é enraizada em suas questões de identidade. Por outro lado, Alex, seu guia e tradutor na Ucrânia, tem o sonho de se mudar para os Estados Unidos, pois ele e seu irmão sofrem com a violência doméstica infringida por seu pai. Alex é capaz de se libertar da vida abusiva após o contato com as memórias traumáticas de seu avô. Ao contrário de Jonathan, Alex demonstra que falar sobre traumas passados pode trazer cura e fomentar novos começos. A teoria desta dissertação partirá de duas fontes principais: o crítico Zygmunt Bauman guia a investigação ao discutir a representação de identidade; enquanto Marianne Hirsch é a fonte dos conceitos relacionados a memória e trauma herdados. Muito já foi escrito sobre o Holocausto, e nesse estudo não é possível englobar o assunto na íntegra. No entanto, a discussão nunca acaba, pois as consequências dos eventos que aconteceram há mais de setenta anos continuam a serem sentidas hoje.

**Palavras chave:** Trauma, Memória, Identidade, Holocausto, Terceira Geração, Silêncio.



## ABSTRACT

This research investigates deep-seated issues of Jewish identity in the Third Generation of the Holocaust and how this is represented in the novel *Everything is Illuminated* (2002) by Jonathan Safran Foer and in its homonymous film adaptation by Liev Schreiber (2005). The analysis consists in examining and discussing how the identity of the main characters is altered after their trip to a fictional town named Trachimbrod, in Ukraine. The journey reveals themes related to memory and inherited trauma, which are dealt in the book and the film. The characters Jonathan and Alex are the narrators of the story and they represent two sides of the same coin, Jonathan is a Jew who lives in America and deconstructs the ideal view of Jewish life, also the idealism of living in a Jewish community before the war. Jonathan ultimately understands the overwhelming presence of an inheritance of silence which is imbedded in his identity questions. Alex, Jonathan's guide and translator in Ukraine, has the dream of moving to America, as he and his brother suffered violent abuse from their father. He is only able to set himself free from an abusive life after getting in contact with the traumatic memories of his grandfather. In opposition to Jonathan, Alex ultimately demonstrates that talking about past traumas can bring healing and foster new beginnings. The theoretical framework of this thesis is mostly drawn from two main sources: critic Zygmunt Bauman's ideas guide this investigation when I discuss the representation of identity, while Marianne Hirsh is the source of concepts on the topic of memory and inherited trauma. A lot has been written about the Holocaust, and this study is unable to encompass the subject in its entirety. The discussion, however, is never over as the consequences of the events which happened over seventy years ago continue to be felt today.

**Key words:** Trauma, Memory, Identity, Holocaust, Third Generation, Silence.



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## INTRODUCTION

The Holocaust is a subject that has been extensively investigated and debated throughout the decades that followed the Second World War, often highlighting issues related to trauma, suffering, memories, survival, resistance and hope of the Jewish people and of many other groups that were involved in the horrors of Nazi Germany. Each subsequent generation of survivors have represented their views on the event, demonstrating how the consequences of the war still have an impact over the families who were involved in the war, as direct or indirect victims.

The Holocaust is an issue that has been debated in many fictional films belonging to a variety of different genres, such as: *Schindler's List* (Steven Spielberg, 1993), *La vita è bella* (Roberto Benigni 1997), *The Pianist* (Roman Polanski, 2002), *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* (Mark Herman, 2008), *Captain America* (Joe Russo, et al, 2011), *Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children* (Tim Burton, 2016), among others. Many of these films are, as a matter of fact, book adaptations, and some of these adaptations are based on true stories. A plethora of books have also been written about the Holocaust, by authors who are survivors of the war and by authors who have not witnessed it. The blending of fiction and history is one of the recurring strategies used by authors and directors to try to represent what happened during the Second World War and the long-lasting consequences of its horrors on the next generation of descendants, who inherited the ghosts, traumas and scars from the Holocaust.

This dissertation analyses the ways in which the representation of this inherited trauma and second-hand memories is portrayed in *Everything is Illuminated*, novel written by Jonathan Safran Foer (2002) and in its homonymous film adaptation, by Liev Schreiber (2005). It is my understanding that both narratives discuss, very aptly, issues and themes related to the Holocaust such as silence, void, emptiness, trauma, memory, the blending of history and fiction, and mostly, how identity is socially constructed and how it relies deeply on personal relationships.

The Third Generation of the Holocaust (i.e. the grandchildren and great-grandchildren of those directly involved in the war) is represented by means of two characters who exemplify different types of inherited trauma: Jonathan is unswervingly involved as his grandparents were Jews who fled Europe to America; Alex is the grandson of the friend of a Jew who betrayed him to save his family from the Nazis. A key theme in the narrative is the discussion around this inherited trauma and how it influences one's idea of self-identification. The identity of Jewish people

was profoundly reshaped in the Second World War; in the concentration camps their identity was reduced to a mere identification number and they were treated as a social malady that needed to be eradicated. In this sense, it is hoped that this research will contribute to a deeper understanding of identity-related issues and how the sense of identification can change and be resignified after the experience of traumatic events in life.

## 1.1 CORPUS

Divided in three different parts, which intertwine each other throughout the text, the novel *Everything is Illuminated* narrates the quest undertaken by Jonathan Safran Foer (the character and the author have the same name) and Alexander “Alex” Perchov (the translator and guide) in order to find a *shtetl*<sup>1</sup> named Trachimbrod, a fictional town in Ukraine devastated by the horrors of the Second World War.

The first part or layer is Alex’s view, “a ‘realistic’ account of the character Jonathan Safran Foer’s search for Trachimbrod and his grandfather’s past” (Shewchuk 232). Alex writes about their trip and, by means of his narration, the reader becomes acquainted with what happened in Ukraine and who each character is. Alex’s grandfather (also named Alexander – reinforcing the theme of ancestry and heritage) is their driver, and, as the trip goes on, Alex uncovers deep secrets his grandfather was keeping his whole life. Together with them goes the dog named Sammy Davis Jr. Jr., a character that gives a comic tone to some moments of the narrative. The group is searching for Augustine, a woman who saved Jonathan’s grandfather from the war and who is the reason why the protagonist endeavored in this quest. Augustine has a collection of objects that she took from the bodies of the Nazis’ victims. She is also part of Alex’s grandfather’s story, and that triggers him to share his past with Alex.

Jonathan accounts for the second layer of the novel, which is the description of Trachimbrod before the Second World War. He fictionalizes the history of his own ancestors, questioning the idea that life before the war was better than afterwards. By means of the story of

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<sup>1</sup> According to the Jewish Virtual Library, a *shtetl* is “Yiddish diminutive for *shtot* meaning “town” or “city” to imply a relatively small community; in Eastern Europe a unique socio-cultural communal pattern.

For more information, visit the website <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/shtetl>

Trachimbrod, Jonathan puts into perspective the notion of love and exposes how the gaps, voids and emptiness in someone's identity are the rule and not the exception.

The third layer corresponds to the exchange of letters and communication by writing between the characters. Alex sends a letter to Jonathan in response to the comments he gives about the writing of a book describing their trip (the first layer). The readers have access to Alex's letters only, Jonathan's responses are unvoiced, which reinforces the theme of silence as one of the protagonist's characteristics. In most of the novel, Alex is the one who provides information about Jonathan's perspectives and points of view. As the communicative character, Alex is the one who expresses opinions and gives voice to his family's struggles, the difficult relationship between him and his brother, Little Igor, with their father, who is abusive and violent. Also, his grandfather difficulties in facing his past ghosts and the consequences that his silence on the traumas he had suffered brought to his family.

The focus of this dissertation is to understand some of the elements of the trauma inherited by the characters representing the Third Generation of Holocaust, also to see how this is triggered during the trip they undertake, and to comprehend how this has shaped their identity. Other aspects and related themes that are also of key importance in this investigation are the role of memory and trauma in one's identification.

## 1.2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

*Everything is illuminated* was first published in April 2002, soon after the fall of the Twin Towers. For many people, the events that took place on September 11, 2001, brought back memories of the horrors of the Holocaust, as Anke Geertsma points out in her dissertation *Representing Trauma in Post 9/11 Fiction*: "re-opening of old wounds" (Geertsma 5) and pain from past traumas. According to Geertsma, for the survivors of the Holocaust, it brought back such terrors that it led some people to be hospitalized. For the Third Generation, however, it brought to the "forefront the gaps and holes in family histories, and the fate that so many fellow Jews had suffered" (Geertsma 5). Foer and Liev are the inheritors of this trauma from the Second World War and they chose to represent how it is like to have these wounds.

*Everything is Illuminated* is Foer's first book and it has been received with good reviews. As he is an ascending author, there is not much written about him in academia and, in this sense, this thesis is contributing to fill in a knowledge gap in contemporary American

literature, as a field of study. The novel was widely acclaimed when it came out in 2002. According to Deborah Solomon from *The New York Times*, it “sold more than 100,000 copies in hardcover and another 150,000 in paperback” (paragraph 6). This best-selling novel also won *The Guardian First Book Award 2002*, in part because Foer was able to deal with a difficult theme such as the Holocaust, using a writing style that shifts between comedy and violence. Daniel Mendelsohn from *The New York Magazine* called him the “Boy of Wonders” and pointed out that “this young author is sophisticated enough to know that all great loves, and literatures, are informed by a deep consciousness of loss” (paragraph 6). Another review from *The New York Times*, written by Francine Prose, praised the way Foer used the English language as “mauled and energized with such brilliance and such brio” (paragraph 4). In one of the few academic works on the novel, scholar Anke Geertsma affirms that “*Everything is Illuminated* values the importance of symbolic representation, or, in other words, the importance of literature, in relation to trauma, and in particular the trauma of the Holocaust” (17). Another scholar, Menachem Feuer, in *Almost Friends: Post-Holocaust Comedy, Tragedy, and Friendship in Jonathan Safran Foer’s Everything is Illuminated* says “it also touches on how, in the context of contemporary post-Holocaust literature and history, writing and memory must deal with the topic of reconciliation between Jews and non-Jews of the second and third generation post-Holocaust” (24). The academic article by Francisco Collado-Rodriguez, *Ethics in the Second Degree: Trauma and Dual Narratives in Jonathan Safran Foer’s Everything is Illuminated*, states that “the poststructuralist notion that maintains that language has a pervasive grip on our interpretations of reality is humorously dealt with in a book that investigates a past mythically recreated by a narrator-as-author” (56). In short, although the critical discussion about the novel and its author is still modest, the little that has been published about Foer’s first book consistently agrees that it deals with the difficult theme of the Holocaust, using language in a very creative and innovative manner.

*Everything is Illuminated* was adapted in 2005 by director and producer Liev Schreiber, who contacted Foer after the publication of his book. Schreiber’s first work as a director received some controversial critical opinions due to the differences between the narrative in film and the book, which are discussed in the next chapters of this research. *The New York Times* describes the film as “a gentle comedy of understanding and forgiveness played in the shadow of the Holocaust” (Scott, paragraph 1). *The Guardian* criticism focuses on the characters, stating that “the movie is never entirely far from sentimentality, which Alex’s funky cod-English

cannot filter out as effectively on the screen as on the page... grandfather's fate is odd: it does not satisfactorily discharge its own pent-up drama and tragedy" (Bradshaw, par. 6). *The Boston Globe* argues that "Schreiber has a strong visual sense and a way with actors; he has fashioned a whimsical, occasionally touching road movie that may enchant audiences who haven't read the book" (Burr, par. 2). Whilst little academic research has been carried out on the novel, there is scarcely any study about its film adaptation. In one of the few commentaries, which this research found about the film, Sarah C. Dean affirms that the adaptation "focuses more on healing rather than self-reflexively facing one's relationship to the Banality of Evil." (151).

Most film critics and reviewers look at the film with the eyes on the book, which is not a very effective way of evaluation. In her article about Literature and Cinema, Anelise Reich Corseuil affirms

Any type of comparison between an adapted movie and the literary text can be more productive if taken into account, both the specificities of each media as well as the similarities of the adapted narratives and, from this point on, intend a critical reflection on the effects that the film adaptation could or could not create. (296)<sup>2</sup>

In other words, it is more constructive to look at film and a book as separated units that, even though have the same core, each one is a detached institution that provides the public with specific aesthetics. Robert Stam, in his article *Beyond Fidelity: The Dialogics of Adaptation* also argues that there is a lot of prejudice when dealing with a novel and its film adaptation. He points out that "we need to be less concerned with inchoate notions of "fidelity" and to give more attention to dialogical responses – to readings, critiques, interpretations, and rewritings of prior material. If we can do all these things, we will produce a criticism that not only takes into account, but also welcomes the differences among the media" (Stam 76). Therefore, in accordance with the two critics, the goal of this dissertation is to examine the book and the film *Everything is*

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<sup>2</sup> Original in Portuguese: "... qualquer comparação entre um filme adaptado e o texto literário poderá ser mais produtiva se levadas em conta, tanto as especificidades de cada meio como as similaridades das narrativas adaptadas, e, a partir daí propor uma reflexão crítica sobre os efeitos que a adaptação conseguiu ou não criar.

*Illuminated* as different narrative forms, each production is taken here as complementary of one another, respecting the differences in genre and media. Also, it is not the purpose of this research to analyze the film adaptation as a work of film studies, but only to focus on the choices for the plot development. The pictures taken from the adaptation are only to exemplify the aspects analyzed on the plot.

### 1.3 THE HOLOCAUST ACROSS GENERATIONS

The Third Generation of the Holocaust is a designation that refers to a group of people who descent directly from the Jewish survivors of the Second World War genocide (Victoria Aarons, 2017; Alan Berger, 2010; Marianne Hirsch, 2008). They are usually the grandchildren of European Jews, whose lives stories have been marked by an indirect traumatic experience. The so-called third generation inherited a series of voids, silences, and absences, which are the socio-historical consequences of what happened to their ancestors in Nazi Germany and elsewhere during the war. In the novel *Everything is Illuminated* and in its film adaptation, topics and themes related to these historical voids are discussed by narrators Jonathan and Alex, putting into question issues such as trauma, identity and memory.

The aim of this research is to investigate these narrative voids, silences, and absences in both novel and film, seeking to identify how the main characters Jonathan (representing the Jewish identity) and Alex (somehow representing the perpetrator's identity), are depicted in the narratives and, ultimately to explain how the understanding of their inherited trauma helps (or not) in the reinterpretation of their self-identification as inheritors of the Holocaust.

In her work *Holocaust Representation since 1975* (2013), Francesa Haig affirms that it is generally believed that the Holocaust is an issue that should be handled as a “solemn or even a sacred event” (9), since it marked the lives of so many around the world. Indeed, the Holocaust is still a very sensitive matter and it is not an easy topic to discuss, as it involves the history of different peoples over, at least, three generations. To a certain extent, the novel and the film *Everything is Illuminated* adhere to such view in the ways they describe the two characters who represent the Third Generation of the Holocaust, the inheritors of the memory and trauma their forefathers endured. However, they also challenge this “solemn and sacred” perspective with the use of humor and playfulness in the use of language.

Examples of this more sober and sanctified outlook on the

Holocaust can be observed in some of its first descriptions, which were based on the actual memories of people who had been through the horrors of *Shoah*<sup>3</sup>. These early works were mostly based on personal statements (diaries, letters, memoirs) and they are testimonials that crossover the limits of fictional (literary) and non-fictional (documentary and history) genres. Thus, the Holocaust is not only a historically sensitive matter but it is also a complex subject in terms of establishing a clear-cut discussion about narrative genre, fact and fiction, reality and memory. Each generation that followed that of the Second World War survivors has been handling the theme in its own way, and one of the forms that they found to deal with the ghosts from the past is through writing.

Throughout the twentieth century, the Holocaust has consolidated the status of an utterly controversial issue, a thorny subject which “assumed a deified status, and has been passionately defended by historians and philosophers” (Haig 8). It was once believed that this matter should be represented as accurately and faithfully as possible and, even though the first accounts were described by people who witnessed the events, each person had its own, subjective memories and experiences of the war, which makes that type of historical account a rather slippery category. In this regard, the themes of memory, subjectiveness, lapse, and void emerge here as key aspects of the discussion I seek to develop.

The First Generation of the Holocaust addressed their traumatic experiences using writing as testimony. Survivors’ memoirs, such as Primo Levi’s *If This is a Man* (1947), Ida Fink’s *A Scrap of Time and Other Stories* (1985), Elie Wiesel’s *Night* (1958), and also *The Diary of a Young Girl*, by Anne Frank (posthumously published in 1947), are exemplary of this type of writing. Their texts were met with “critical and

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<sup>3</sup> “The biblical word Shoah (which has been used to mean “destruction” since the Middle Ages) became the standard Hebrew term for the murder of European Jewry as early as the early 1940s. The word Holocaust, which came into use in the 1950s as the corresponding term, originally meant a sacrifice burnt entirely on the altar. The selection of these two words with religious origins reflects recognition of the unprecedented nature and magnitude of the events. Many understand Holocaust as a general term for the crimes and horrors perpetrated by the Nazis; others go even farther and use it to encompass other acts of mass murder as well. Consequently, we consider it important to use the Hebrew word Shoah with regard to the murder of and persecution of European Jewry in other languages as well.

For more information, visit the website:  
[http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/holocaust/resource\\_center/the\\_holocaust.asp](http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/holocaust/resource_center/the_holocaust.asp)

popular acclaim” (Haig 2) and their goal was to express as truthfully as possible their experience living through the Holocaust.

However, not all survivors wrote about their experiences, some dealt with it in silence and reclusiveness. In the article *Talking like a Jew: Reflections on Identity and the Holocaust* (1996), Bernard Harrison states that silence is understandable, “for they had not merely survived; they had survived as people, by which I mean that they were, after atrocious experiences still capable of turning towards life and of making new lives.” (12). In other words, Harrison explains that such uncommunicativeness was not just the silence of the shattered; it was the muted of the indomitable. Their silence was not only representing their feelings in relation to what they had witnessed but, also a lack of words to describe the feeling of preserving their humanity throughout all of the suffering.

The Holocaust survivors who were children at the time are called the 1.5 Generation. In regard to their response to the trauma, Haig notes that the writings of these survivors are characterized by “themes of unstable identity and psychological splitting, a preoccupation with absence, emptiness, silence, a permanent sense of loneliness and loss” (2). Raymond Federman’s novel *Double or Nothing: A Real Fictitious Discourse* (1971), and George Perec’s *A void (La Disparition* 1969) *The Exeter Text (Les Revenentes* 1972) and *Life: A User’s Manual (La Vie mode d’emploi* 1978) are some examples of how this generation dealt with the horrors of the Holocaust and with their trauma. Their depiction of the war memories are often blurred and confused, as they were too young to fully comprehend what was happening or, sometimes even to actually remember what was going on around them. Their literature and their words are often packed with grief and trauma.

According to Arlene Stein, the Second Generation are those who encouraged their parents to start talking about the Holocaust (33). Influenced by the many activist and libertarian groups that flourished in the 1960s and 1970s, this generation created their own groups and started sharing how it was like being the child of a Holocaust survivor. Stein affirms that “by telling personal stories about their lives and naming themselves the second generation, they helped to transform their personal experiences into something of a collective identity”(33). Facing their family ghosts and secrets head on, this generation helped to understand history, developing new ways to preserve the memories of their forefathers and their own legacy. Moreover, as described by Megan Reynolds in her work *Constructing the Imaginative Bridge* (2015), the Second Generation, also called “children of Job” often attempted to appropriate their parents’ trauma in their writings (1). Even though they



did not experience the trauma in flesh, they are the inheritors of their parents' trauma, which emerges thoroughly in their writings. Some works by the Second Generation are: *Where She Came From: A Daughter's Search for Her Mother's History* (1997), by Helen Epstein; *Shtetl: The Life and Death of a Small Town and the World of Polish Jews* (1997), by Eva Hoffman; *Maus* (1980), by Art Spiegelman; and *Elijah Visible* (1996), *Second Hand Smoke* (1999) and *Gotham* (2002), all by Thane Rosenbaum – The last three are considered the “Post-Holocaust trilogy”, works that “have given voice to their horrendous inheritance” (Royal 1). Here again the issue of inherited memory arises as a marker of an identity in search of representation.

The point here is that many survivors kept silent about their own experiences both in the public and in the private/domestic spheres. Stein points out that this “silence has instilled a public sense of taboo about the subject” (36) and, since their experiences involved distinct feelings (trauma, shame, guilt and even anger) it was a very difficult burden to deal with, as a matter of fact, a very personal onus, which impacted people in different ways. According to Arlene Stein in *Feminism, Therapeutic Culture, and the Holocaust in the United States: The Second-Generation Phenomenon*, the Second Generation initiated a movement that used “storytelling as a vehicle for self-transformation, collective identification, and social action” (Stein 27). Over the years, these positive attitudes, which sought to eliminate the stigma of “Holocaust victims” gradually allowed Jewish people to embrace their identity again, without fear or shame.

The “Grandchildren of Job”, or the Third Generation of the Holocaust survivors, also manifest signs of traumatic inheritance in their writings; however, the matter is approached in a different manner or perspective. The Third Generation writers differentiate themselves from the previous generations as they include some specific characteristics in their works, Megan Reynolds in *Constructing the Imaginative Bridge: Third-Generation Holocaust Narratives* affirms that: “the desire to uncover the truth, various struggles with Jewish faith and identity, innovative uses of imaginative leaps, and the surprising presence of survival hope.” (Reynolds 2). In the previous generations, there were basically two groups: the ones who urged to talk about it and the silent ones. In this sense, it is possible to argue that the need to “uncover the truth” present in the Third Generation is more pressing than in the generations who inherited only silence in their families. Some recent examples of this kind of writings are Daniel Mendelsohn's *The Lost* (2006); Joseph Skibell's *A Blessing on the Moon* (1997); Nicole Krauss

three novels *Walks Into a Room* (2002), *The History of Love* (2005) and *Great House* (2010); and, also Jonathan Safran Foer's *Everything is Illuminated* (2002), the object of this research. Hope for the future is one of the marks of their writings. Their creativity leads them to be glad for their lives, and the awareness of knowing that they are alive because their ancestors survived a horrific genocide, finds a positive expression in their literature.

The representation of the Holocaust has changed remarkably over the years and, according to Haig, it seems to be moving in two opposing directions: "empathy and identification" or "the increasing tendency towards impiety" (10). Empathy can lead to a problematic view about the perpetrators, as it can be observed the movie *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* (2008), directed by Mark Herman. The film's narrative is constructed to make the spectatorship feel sorry for the German boy who dies, because he was not supposed to be there, and the fact that the Jews were imprisoned and killed becomes overlooked. On the other hand, the consequences of impiety operates the other way around; it provokes numbness and indifference, for example: not feeling sorry for any side. Both of these positions are confronted, debated and challenged in the narrative *Everything is Illuminated*, the narrator Jonathan and Alex are representative of these two opposing stances in search of a resolution.

I have briefly discussed here how the interpretation of the Holocaust has changed over the years. I argued that the initial voids, silences, and absences – as responses to the trauma experienced by the survivors of the *Shoah* – gradually give way to communication and identity reinterpretation. To the date, seventy-three years separate the Third Generation from the end of the Second World War (1945), and the way people look at history changes and moves forward. When talking about the Holocaust, new perspectives are required in order to deal with such a horrific event and, at the same time, to find a way to preserve the memory of what happened, so that people can ensure that it will not happen again. It is writing and language that gives people the possibility to express how the experiences of their forefathers continue to move on from generation to generation.

#### 1.4 HYPOTHESES:

The narrative approach mainly the topic of inherited trauma and how this influence in one's idea of self identification. Jewish people lost their identity in the Second World War, they became mere numbers and were treated as a disease that need to be exterminated. After the Second

World War the people who were persecuted because of prejudice had to restart the idea of being a Jew. In her article “Broken Identity” Katarzyna Prot affirms that “one of the most important aspects of personal identity is the sense of continuity of the self throughout the life span, the sense of always being the same person” (240). It is in this sense that the Jewish people had their identity destroyed in unprecedented ways during the Second World War. Recognizing oneself when a society that one lives in says that one should not exist is a difficult, almost impossible task.

The first hypothesis is that this sense of identification shifts throughout the story, especially for Alex who discovers the story of his grandfather. Also, Jonathan is looking for answers and the way he portrays the inhabitants of Trachimbrod says a lot about how he sees the Jewish people, which implies in how he sees himself.

Another point is the role of perpetrator and victim. The novel and the filmic adaptation show a lot of differences in Alex’s grandfather’s story. In one he is Jew and in the other only his friend was Jew. Analyzing how this difference changes the reader/spectator view of the same character is one element to be discussed. Another point that is linked to this is the Banality of Evil, discussed in the novel but due to this small change, lost in the filmic adaptation.

The main hypothesis is that all characters have to deal with some sort of absence, and that this void does not need necessarily to be a bad thing. Everything can be transformed into something new. The result of this void is a choice of the person alone, with the help of other people around them they can, in the end, fill the void with different kinds of love, and that does not end the void completely, it just gives it a purpose and a meaning, however it will always be there.

## 1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

*Everything is illuminated* is a great narrative that brings to light several themes related to the Holocaust that can be studied and analyzed. In this research only some are suggested: The subject of identity, how do Jonathan and Alex deal with the findings they uncover during their trip to the *shtetl* of Trachimbrod? How does Jonathan’s creation of the history of Trachimbrod contribute to the construction of his identity? Is the absence of this element in the adaptation important to the construction of meaning? The theme of the Holocaust involves the subject of memory and trauma. How are they presented in the plot?

In order to answer these research questions, this study develops: (1) an analysis of the narratives regarding their use of the narrative

apparatus and plot devices; (2) a comparison of the different representations or portrayals of Jonathan and Alex in the novel and the film; (3) an analysis of how identity theory can help explain and/or contextualize their representation, and to do this Zygmunt Bauman's theory on modern society and identification in post-modern times will be used. (4) An analysis of how trauma and memory theory can help contextualize the representation of inherited trauma; for this Marianne Hirsch's theory on inherited trauma and transmitted memory will be employed.

The dissertation is organized around these research questions and it is divided in three main parts. Chapter 2 "Theorizing Identity, Memory and Trauma", deals with the theoretical approach of this research. The main tenets of identity theory, memory and trauma theory are here discussed in this section.

Chapter 3 "Jonathan in the novel – The collector of Memories and (de)Constructor of Identities" discusses how the process of identification is represented towards the character Jonathan specifically his description in the book. Taking into account his inherited traumas and memories to shape his identity.

Chapter 4 "Jonathan in the Film Adaptation" comments how the character is presented in the plot, taking into account the elements that are similar and/or diverse from the book narrative. In this chapter, pictures from the film are present to illustrate the development of the plot.

Chapter 5 "Alex – The Guide, Translator and Writer" examine the character in the book showing how his sense of identity shift, even though it may seem that he was not in search for answers. It also take into account his inherited trauma and memories, specially his relationship with his grandfather.

Chapter 6 "Alex in the Film Adaptation – The Singular Translator" reasoning about the presentation of the character in the film adaptation, also bringing pictures to illustrate the plot. The focus is to show his chrysalis throughout the narrative.

Chapter 7 "Final Statements" discusses the results of the research and if the questions and hypothesis were validated. Also an overview of the research is provided in this section of the writing.

## 2. THEORIZING IDENTITY, MEMORY AND TRAUMA

This chapter provides the theoretical foundation upon which the analyses of both the novel and the film adaptation of *Everything is Illuminated* is based. The center of my discussion of identity is on Zygmunt Bauman's characterization of the theme in both modern and post-modern life. He states that " 'identity' has now become a prism through which other topical aspects of contemporary life are spotted, grasped and examined. Established issues of social analysis are being rehashed and refurbished to fit the discourse now rotating around the 'identity' axis." (p 369). It has become an important discussing in people's lives as it has to do with the society as a whole. Also in this part a brief inquiry into the concept of pilgrim in modern life is given as *Everything is Illuminated* presents this concept in one key secondary character.

The concept of memory and inherited trauma is developed by Marianne Hirsch. She discusses the ideas of rememory and post-memory, which are respectively "a memory that, communicated through bodily symptoms, becomes a form of repetition and reenactment, and, on the other hand, one that works through indirection and multiple mediation" (Hirsch 82). Rememory is felt within, while post-memory is indirect and mediated. Further, she brings the importance of photography when dealing with memory and trauma. She explains that Photographic images conduct people to "simultaneously find truth and obscurity, exactitude and simulacrum. Historical photographs from a traumatic past authenticate the past's existence." (p 37). A photography is the element that instigates the character Jonathan to pursue the trip, so it is very important to the development of both narratives.

### 2.1 IDENTITY IN A POSTMODERN WORLD

Critics such as Anthony Giddens (1991), Beverly Skeggs (1994) and Stuart Hall (1996), among others, have greatly helped to situate the problem of identity in the contemporary world. This research, however, draws mostly from the ideas of Zygmunt Bauman, Marianne Hirsch, and Katarzyna Prot because of the specific connections they establish with Jewish identity.

According to Zygmunt Bauman, in the book *Life in Fragments* (2007), the "problem of identity" is different in a modern and in a postmodern society. Bauman argues that in the modern world the idea of building an identity and keeping it solid and stable prevails; while in a

post-modern world the matter is “primarily how to avoid fixation and keep the options open” (88). In a post-modern, globalized world to keep options open to new and diverse opportunities means a potential improvement in life quality; whereas being solid and stable may lead to stagnation and/or dismissal of an eventual better opportunity. In the last decades, matters of social and cultural identity became a key discussion in the definition of the subject and subjectivity, becoming an incessant undertaking.

In his book *The Individualized Society* (2001), Bauman discusses how identity has been reshaped in modern times and how it continues to be a pivotal element in contemporary society. He explains that modernity exposed “the fragility and unsteadiness of things and threw open the possibility of (and the need for) reshaping them” (375). The notion of a personal and unique identity was not a concern for people who lived in old communities, as their individual role on society was normally steady and predictable. However, as communal life changed and the need for a reexamination of values came into being, especially after both World Wars, the issue of “identity sprouts on the graveyard of communities, but flourishes thanks to its promise of a resurrection of the dead” (400). Therefore, as the security of old communities was shaken by modernity the issue of a personal or individual identity became more and more the focus of attention.

Another important subject Bauman rings to light is that the concept identity is keenly linked with the concept of morality, and related to issues of integrity. In *Life in Fragments* (2007), Bauman describes the alterations that the concepts of morality and responsibility undergone over the time. He explains that the pre-modern era was mostly shaped around religion and that it would preach the idea of “repentance and surrender” (15). The point here is that even though there was the possibility of redemption through religion. Later, with the rise of the modern world and its project of a life without sin, the law became the backbone of ethical behavior. This change from religion to law took the responsibility away from the individual to an institution that upholds the ethical authority (16), and with this came a list of absolute truths and universal principles.

Bauman’s argument is that there are universal thoughts and morals that stand comprehensible around the world i.e. “shall not kill”. However, even if that could be called an universal truth, it is not the same as considering all people equals and denying the cultural and individual differences, concepts that are highly problematic in practice and at odds with universal truisms. With the rise of the postmodern world, it came the

apogee of individual freedom, where each and every person is responsible for their own decisions. Even though choices are an individual undertaking, its consequences can be felt within the society, as “identity is not a private matter” (380). Within all these changes in how identity and morality are conceived, the individual is given moral power over decisions and consequently he/she is the one who should deal with the accountabilities of personal choices. In other words, according to Bauman, morality no longer belongs to the Church or the State: in the postmodern it is a matter of private decisions with public consequences.

During the wartime, Erik H. Erikson coined the term “identity crisis” to describe mental patients that had “lost their sense of personal equality and historical continuity” (qtd. in Bauman 390). Nowadays, the term, which is associated with feeling of insecurity within the society, continues to be a problem not only among mental patients but also to healthy human beings. In the twenty-first century, the “problem of identity” raises new questions for all individuals seeking identification: “Where could or should I go? And where this road that I took will lead me?” (388). These questions reflect the numerous options that have been opened up to the individual with the advent of globalization. That is to say identity is never crystalized, it is in a constant state of incompleteness and, to use Bauman’s analogy, identity seekers invariably face the self-defeating task of “squaring a circle” which denotes task that can never be completed anytime soon but, are assumed to be able to reach completion “in the fullness of time – in infinity...” (16).

More to the point, Bauman develops the idea of modern life as a pilgrim in his book *Life in Fragments*. He states that Jewish culture is rooted within experiences of “spiritual dislocation and homelessness” (90). He affirms that

...the pilgrim was the most fitting metaphor for the modern life strategy preoccupied with the daunting task of identity-building, the stroller, the vagabond, the tourist and the player offer jointly the metaphor for the postmodern strategy moved by the horror of being bound and fixed. (97)

In other words, the lifestyle of a pilgrim, once viewed as something to be avoided, is the model in modern life as it does not require deep connections with a place of living. The image of the stroller brings with it the idea of a *flâneur*, “psychically, strolling means rehearsing human reality as a series of episodes, that is as events without past and with no

consequences” (98). The *flâneur* had all the desires of modern life without the sufferings accompanying.

From a pilgrim perspective, life is understood as a collection of episodes; once they are connected, they form one’s existence. A person’s subjectivity and identification is a collection of choices presented to the individual in the course of life. In this regard, Jewish people had their sense of identification shattered after the Second World War which needed to be reinvented in ways to deal with trauma and forms of finding new definitions of what it meant to be a Jew. In her article “Broken Identity” (2008) Katarzyna Prot affirms that “one of the most important aspects of personal identity is the sense of continuity of the self throughout the life span” (240), the sense of being someone important, even though “incomplete” (as identity is always under construction). It is in this sense that the Jewish people had their identity destroyed in unprecedented ways during the Second World War. Recognizing oneself as an individual or even as a group when the society in which one lives in says that one should not exist is a difficult, almost impossible task.

The identity of the Third Generation of the Holocaust is filled with voids and absences, as the past is inaccessible as memory (only as history). Therefore, one of the ways this generation finds to articulate their own sense of self is through writing. Literature can illuminate different people’s stories and help them to move past their personal trauma. Moving away from the narratives that denounce the horrors of war, Third Generation artist have contrasted matters of identification using strategies that approach the Holocaust in terms of narratives that provoke empathy (taking sides) and/or impiety (indifference). In the novel and in the film *Everything is Illuminated*, these positions are confronted and challenged in the discourses of characters Jonathan and Alex. In a postmodern world, and by means of a postmodern writing, both Foer and Schreiber are in search of a resolution that can accommodate the contemporary Jewish identity.

I have discussed here issues of sociocultural identity in late modern society, highlighting Bauman’s ideas regarding the fluidity of identity, as it is always in progress. I also discussed the problem of identity or the “identity crisis” of the contemporary individual. Moreover, I examined the pilgrim as a metaphor for a person pursuing identification, as life is lived in episodes within the postmodern societies, I argued that Jewish self-identification was transformed by the event of the Holocaust, also the view of life after the wars changed drastically, not only with the advent of globalization, but also with the difficulties of staying in the place where the persecution from the war was more vivid.



## 2.2 TRAUMA AND MEMORY

In her book *The Generation of Postmemory: Visual Culture After the Holocaust* (2012) Marianne Hirsch<sup>4</sup> combines a discussion between feminist theory with memory studies. Focusing on the transmission of memories of violence across generations, she does not study the Holocaust alone but genocide in general. According to Hirsch, memory has four formats: individual, social, political and cultural. Her work builds upon and advances the ideas of scholar Jan Assmann, who also works on the transmission of memory, and divides memory in two strata: communicative and cultural. Hirsch understands that communicative memory is “located within a generation of contemporaries who witness an event as adults and who can pass on their bodily and affective connection to that event to their descendants” (31). Memories can arguably be transmitted by up to three to four generations, or eighty to one hundred years after the events. In this sense, the inheritors of the memories of the Holocaust are up until now imbedded with remembrances from their ancestors, since about eighty years have passed since the Holocaust first took place (approximately 1938-1939).

Therefore, within Jewish communities these memories can be interpreted as “living connections” (33) that are often mediated by different items such as literature, photography, as well as by objects and also by discourses, such as testimony. These memories are transferred down the generations through these means, which can trigger symptoms that are, in fact, consequences of these horrific recollections. Hirsch points out that “witnessed by those who were not there to live it but who received its effects, belatedly, through the narratives, actions, and symptoms of the previous generation, trauma both solidifies and blurs generational difference” (81). The people that are part of the following generation display different responses to the traumatic memories they inherit, it can become something that attaches them even more to the horrific past that their ancestors had undergone or even an actual appropriation of the physical and psychological suffering, which is defined as rememory, for example “[a] memory that, communicated through bodily symptoms, becomes a form of repetition and reenactment”

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<sup>4</sup> Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University and Professor in the Institute for Research on Women, Gender, and Sexuality. For more information about Marianne Hirsch visit the website <http://blogs.cuit.columbia.edu/mh2349/>

(82). Hirsch's work focuses mainly on the idea of postmemory, which does not imply the appropriation of others sufferings, but, entails a distance that is impossible to be connected again, in which there are voids and emptiness.

Postmemory implies a temporal distance between the self and the other, daughter and mother.... That distance cannot ultimately be bridged; the break between then and now, between the one who lived it and the one who did not remains monumental and insurmountable, even as the heteropathic imagination struggles to overcome it (Hirsch 85).

While rememory tries to repeat the sufferings, postmemory only tries to understand the voids and emptiness towards the trauma that are left between generations.

Photographs can give the sense of concrete when related to trauma. Hirsch explains that photographic images bring people "simultaneously truth and obscurity, exactitude and simulacrum. Historical photographs from a traumatic past authenticate the past's existence" (p 37). They somehow prove that the trauma is not only in the mind, but a real thing. Hirsch also explains the importance of photography in terms of postmemory, as they become "screens – spaces of projection and approximation, and of protection" (37-38). Photographs allow the present generation to have a glimpse on how the world was before, during and right after the moment of trauma. It works as a portal into the happenings of the past.

According to Hirsch, "when we look at photographic images from a lost past world. Especially one that has been annihilated by force, we look not only for information or confirmation, but for an intimate material and affective connection that would transmit the affective quality of the events" (37). People construe in their minds images about stories that were told, and the photographs can work as a confirmation that these are not just stories but events that really happened. These images of the past create small points of memory, defined by Roland Barthes as *punctum*:

"The punctum of time is precisely that incongruity or incommensurability experience, object, or image *then*, and the one it holds *now*. It is the knowledge of the inevitability of loss, change, and death. And that inevitability constitutes the lens through which we, as humans, look at the past" (qtd. in Hirsch 62).

According to the critic, when looking at an image of the past, the knowledge of what happened in its future and the certainty of death is unsettling. Hence, fantasies are created based on photographs, as “attempts at mourning and repair” (73). Images and photographs link the desire of people in the present with the past world they apparently portray.

Pictures collected from survivors, which depict their lives before the war, are incomplete documents that reveal only glimpses of memory from that period of time. Nonetheless, they allow the descendants to fantasize about that lost world. Hirsch argues that “[t]he fantasies they call forth are deep and often inarticulable and uncontrollable” (73). Even though many inheritors visit the locations they see in the photos after the war, it is not the same as it was when portrayed in the photograph. The only option left is to fantasize and imagine how life was in that place, in that specific moment in time and wonder how life could have been, if the horrific events had not taken place.

The feelings postmemory generates across generations normally bring the desire to return to the location where the events took place. The narratives result from this are called *narratives of return*. Although the return to the place is desired, it is always frustrated, as nothing remain the same. In other words, when visiting their ancestor’s homes, the inheritors do not find the same location in which their ancestors lived, but completely new ones. The experience is often unfulfilling because the place is no longer a reflection of the people that lived there in the past, it is a new picture of the new owners or an image of emptiness.

These return journeys are undertaken by future generations either alone or together with survivors. However, the experience of coming back to a place where one was forced to leave can release “latent, repressed or dissociated memories – memories that metaphorically speaking, remained behind, concealed within the object” (Hirsch 211). The view of the places illuminates the memories of the survivors, and they have the ability to “create sparks of connection that activate remembrance and thus reactivate the trauma of loss” (Hirsch 212). For the survivors, the trip can release the trauma once lived and help the person to overcome it.

In this chapter I discussed the role of images and photographs according to Marianne Hirsch’s concept of postmemory and how it operates in the minds of survivors of Holocaust and their descendants, I highlighted the role of voids, gaps, holes and general emptiness in the memories of the inheritors of the Holocaust and I argued that artists from the Third Generation do not attempt to “fill in the holes” but to show what it is like to have a cultural heritage that is marked by absences.



### 3. JONATHAN IN THE NOVEL - THE COLLECTOR OF MEMORIES AND (DE)CONSTRUCTOR OF IDENTITIES

In this section I make a close reading of the character Jonathan in the novel, who represents an inheritor of the Holocaust. He is the grandson of Jewish citizens who left Europe and started a new life in the United States, therefore, he is a Third Generation Jew who makes a trip to Ukraine, seeking to discover more about his identity. The initial spark for this quest comes from a photograph that his grandmother gave to his mother two years before (Foer 61).

As Hirsch points out “[m]ore than oral or written narratives, photographic images that survive massive devastation and outline their subjects and owners function as ghostly revenants from an irretrievably lost past world” (36). In this regard, the photograph is almost a portal into the past, a glimpse into what life was like at that moment in history. The objective of the journey is to find a woman in the picture, someone who saved his grandfather from the Nazis during the Second World War. His intention is to discover her current retreat and also to locate the town where his grandfather would have lived his life.

Jonathan’s interest in returning to the places where the horrors of the Holocaust took place is a matter of identity, it is a characteristic of the Third Generation of Jewish immigrants, who according to Reynolds, “do not enter the camps biographically but instead describe the horrific experiences through their fictional characters” (11). The so-called “Grandsons of Job” (Berger, Raczymow, Hirsch) attempt to reconstruct the fragmented lives of the survivors and, therefore, to articulate a fragmented part of their history by “incorporating their knowledge of their families’ past into their own sense of identity in order to construct a complete sense of self” (8). In this sense, the trip to Trachimbrod is intended to fill the gaps of Jonathan’s own inheritance and help him build a cohesive sense of identity in a post-modern society.

As one of the narrators of the story; Jonathan is also the creator of the fiction part that describes the life in a Jewish *shtetl* before the war. The narrative of return “in which children of survivors return to find their parents former homes, to ‘walk where they once walked’” (Hirsch 204). The fictional re-imagination and re-creation of the story of the inhabitants of Trachimbrod is the way that he found to articulate his own trauma, using language and discourse applied to literature (a book within a book). Geertsma states that

The (re)invention of the shtetl is acknowledged to function as a cure for the post-Holocaust generation. In fact, the process is considered to be of extreme importance. For Jonathan, it functions as a “writing cure” for the disappointing outcome of his journey to the Ukraine. This journey has not “illuminated” anything for him. His past remains inaccessible, and in the ultimate realization that this will forever stay the same, he invents his own heritage in order to assuage his feelings of loss (21).

Even though the trip was successful in finding the place where the town was, it was not an enlightening experience, as everything was destroyed in the war and the location remains empty. The questions he had in relation to his grandfather’s past still persist and the solution was to create his own perspective of how life in the *shtetl* was before the war. His narrative is by means idealized; his characters suffer horrible traumas even before the horrors of the Holocaust, which indicates how brave are the ones who survived.

In psychological terms, the character Jonathan is mostly known by Alex’s narrative. There are few moments in which Jonathan talks about his life but, even these statements are narrated by Alex, with the use of indirect speech. However, through the re-imagination of the past of Trachimbrod some clues are presented that could be insightful of his own identity.

For example, he is a collector, who uses the fragmented pieces of ordinary things to create a whole. His collection can be considered a reflection of his self-identification: always searching for something new that could fit the hole on his existence. In his search for answers related to his own self, he fictionalizes the trip to Trachimbrod in terms of his personal questions. On the trip he encounters someone very similar to himself: Augustine. She collects the objects from the dead bodies, organizes them in boxes in hope that, in a possible future, someone would reclaim them. These objects or memorabilia can be considered fragments of both individual and collective memories and identity, as Reynolds affirms “memories pass from a living person to another living person” (5). Even though the town is destroyed, the memory of the place remains by means of a sole survivor, who will then pass on these fragments of memory to another living person, in this case Augustine will pass on to Jonathan and Alex.

Jonathan accesses his own memories during the trip in his conversations with Alex (who speaks broken English), showing how silence and miscommunication were part of his own history. There is one moment when he starts describing his relationship with his grandmother as a child. He recalls how he would hide under her skirt and talk to her in English while she replied in Yiddish<sup>5</sup>, a language that he did not speak or understand.

In regard to language and identity, Alan Berger affirms that “symbolically, he remains a child in the womb” (156). For example: Jonathan’s is unable to ask anything to his grandmother and, in many ways, he stills sees himself as an infant who has no voice. As Jonathan talks about his relationship with his grandmother, Alex observes how he makes long pauses in his speech, and comments: “This was so difficult at times, because there existed so much silence. But I understood that the silence was necessary for him to talk” (Foer157). Silence is part of his family and this absence is also part of his identity. Hirsch affirms, “silence, absence, and emptiness are also always present, and often central to the work of postmemory” (247). To put it differently, Jonathan talks about his identity with words as well as with silence, which represents empty memories, voids or gaps in his own self. Reynolds explains that

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

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<sup>5</sup> A language used by Jews in central and Eastern Europe before the Holocaust. It was originally a German dialect with words from Hebrew and several modern languages and is today spoken mainly in the US, Israel, and Russia. According to Hans Liebermann “Yiddish is the XIV century idiom of the German language. You know when the Polish and the Russian Jews were driven out of Germany during the period of the Black Death, 1338, and when they came into Poland and Russia where they were invited at that time to stimulate the still feudal economy there, they were not allowed to live in the cities and they lived in Ghettos. They never had an opportunity of integrating in the Polish and Russian environment. They continued to speak this German idiom without participating in the evolution of the German language even since then, and of course, this German idiom of the time was mixed up with Polish, Russian, Hebrew expressions. The result is Yiddish.” (Oral History – United States Holocaust Memorial Museum). For more information visit <https://www.ushmm.org>

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. (16)

The voids in his speech are a reflection of his desire to know more about his history albeit the impossibility to access the information lost forever in his past.

As a result of this lack of connection and communication in his family, the identity-searching trip starts with little information, “[t]his is all I have, these maps and the photograph. It’s not much” (Foer 62). The only concrete information about Trachimbrod is the writings on the back of the picture, which is “very difficult to read” (Foer 60) and, to complicate the matter, written in Yiddish. Also, there are two more people on the photograph but nothing is written about them, which makes Alex ask: “‘Why do you think he remarks only about Augustine and not the other two people in the photograph?’ ‘I don’t know’ ‘It’s queer, yes? It is queer that he remarks only her.’” (Foer 60). Jonathan has no idea of the whereabouts of this people and refuses to ask his family about them. All the information he has is filled with gaps, as a broader reflection of the absences, voids and silences that still marks Jewish lives.

Jonathan did not tell anyone about his identity-searching trip, neither he tells when he finally returns to America. When writing about Trachimbrod’s inhabitants, Jonathan states: “They were strangers, like my grandmother and me!” (Foer 82). His idea about the people that lived in Trachimbrod somehow express the thoughts he has about himself and his family, he is conscious of the distance between his family members. It seems they hardly know each other, even though they lived together. The information about his relatives’ past is hollow and sketchy, and the idea of an identity-searching trip as a way to look for answers does not prove to be any more elucidative in terms of clarifying his identity issues

The collection of memorabilia seems to be a central aspect of Jonathan’s identity. He takes notes of almost everything during the trip, and he also carries Ziploc bags, eventually picking something up and putting it inside one bag to take it home (Foer 187). Jonathan’s collection seems to be random, however the objects he selects are connected mainly with the people around him. The collection of objects that randomly fit and form his collection can be associated with his sense of self. Identity in itself has this sense of being something random that is sometimes incoherent and dissociative, according to Bauman, this sense of “disembeddedness” will happen many times throughout one’s life:



The ‘beds’ in view look rather like ‘musical chairs’ of various sizes and styles as well as of changing numbers and mobile positions, forcing men and women to constantly on the run, promising no rest and none of the satisfaction of ‘arriving’, none of the comfort of reaching the destination where one can lay down one’s arms, relax and stop worrying. There is no prospect of a ‘final re-embeddedness’ at the end of the road; being on the road has become the permanent way of life of the (now chronically) disembedded individuals (386).

In this sense, Jonathan’s collection will never end, there will always be something new to add and attempt to fill the empty spaces within it. The feeling that something is missing within his identity will never go away, it is an endless job.

The relationship between Jonathan and his grandfather Safran is depicted as withdrawn and aloof, only bonded by blood. In the novel, his grandfather dies before he is born: “my grandfather (who died only five weeks after coming to the States, just half a year after my mother was born)” (Foer 98). They do not have a relationship; everything he knew about him was through other people. As Jonathan does not have a close bond with his grandfather it brings a distance between them that allows him to invent Safran’s history when describing the *shtetl* of Trachimbrod.

Jonathan invents the story of Trachimbrod to fill the holes of his own history and memories but, according to Hirsch, “[n]arratives of return are quest plots holding out, and forever frustrating, the promise of revelation and recovery” (204). Even though he tries to recreate the past through writing, he remains frustrated, as it is impossible to genuinely access the past again. From the beginning of the story, which starts with the fragments of Brod’s chariot floating on the river, Jonathan shows that reality can only be known in pieces. The fictionalization of the historical facts of the *shtetl* is deemed by Anke Geertsma in her research about the Foer’s narrative as a “typical aspect of the post-Holocaust generation’s attempt to recover the lost spaces of the Holocaust” (19). In his narrative, Jonathan does not romanticize the community; on the contrary, he chooses to depict life filled with difficulties and problems within a community. This is not singular to his narrative, postmodern narration and identities are presented throughout the whole novel. As Geertsma argues, Foer is calling the attention to this outlook on life, “[t]hose who seek salvation by clinging to a (romanticized) notion of pre-Second World War *shtetl* life are thus criticized (in the narrative)” (19). Thus, Foer

criticizes the representation of the Jewish people ‘as better than ordinary’ by showing Trachimbrod with the flaws that are normal in different communities around the world in any moment in history. In the light of Martin Heidegger’s discussion about knowledge quoted by Bauman in *The Individualized Society*:

One does not see what is all-too-visible, one does not note what is ‘always there’, things are noticed when they disappear or go bust, they must first fall out from the routinely ‘given’ for the search after their essences to start and the questions about their origin, whereabouts, use or value to be asked. (372)

Jonathan chooses to represent Trachimbrod with all its shortcomings to bring the readers attention to what is “always there” but should be questioned. Alex is the one making the questions regarding this portrait of the inhabitants of the town. Hirsch explains “[t]hrough ‘discursively implanted’ memories the subject can participate in the desires, struggles, and sufferings of the other” (85). Alex participates in the suffering of the people of Trachimbrod. It bothers him to the extent that he asks Jonathan: “if we are to be such nomados with the truth, why do we not make the story more premium than life?” (Foer 179). He is one that would like to read something romanticized, for him it is very difficult to read something as heartbreaking as Jonathan’s narrative and look at himself only to realize how similar his life is. The point here is that Jonathan’s fictional recreation chooses to de-mythologize the idea of the *shtetl* as a perfect place.

Jonathan re-creates the life of the people from the town, describing his grandfather’s life, Safran, as lived in episodes, as someone who did not think much about the consequences of his acts. He can be compared to the *flâneur* described by Bauman, as one which “had all the pleasures of modern life without the torments associated with it” (98). Grandfather Safran’s behavior before the war, as described by Jonathan, is that of a reckless person: he is depicted as a womanizer who sleeps with all possible women on the *shtetl* and also cheats on his wife on his wedding day with the bride’s sister (Foer 164). In other words, his lifestyle is a picture of modern life mentioned by Bauman, which does not seek commitment, each moment is a complete and disconnected event, nothing attached.

The way Jonathan chooses to describe his grandfather’s lifestyle is fragmentary, gapped and void, which is a reflection of the postmodern life described by Bauman. He depicts modern life as pilgrimage and he

connects this lifestyle with Judeo-Christian culture in which has in its roots the Exodus, moment described by Richard Sennett in which their faith “started to conflict with the place” (qtd in Bauman 90). Bauman understands that for Jewish culture the “pilgrimage in search for God was an exercise of self-construction” (91). In the same way, Jonathan is constructing his own identity using his fiction story about his own family and by describing his grandfather as a pilgrim it seems that he is, in fact, (de)constructing his own identity as a Jew.

As Jonathan did not have a relationship with his grandfather and possibly was not able to gather lots of information about his lifestyle from his family, why would he portray his ancestor as a pilgrim? One possible answer could be that he is in fact describing Alex’s lifestyle. Jonathan is describing the life Alex describes for himself in the beginning of the novel. “I have many many girls, believe me, and they all have a different name for me. (Foer 1) Alex carries on describing that each of these girls have a different name for him (all night, currency, Baby) because, like Grandfather Safran, he lives his life in episodes. Jonathan is describing Alex’s life through the fictionalized story of his grandfather. In part, this is the reason Alex gets very upset with the manner Jonathan chooses to describe Safran: “How can you do this to your grandfather, writing about his life in such a manner? Could you write in this manner if he was alive? And if not, what does that signify?” (Foer 179). Even though it seems Jonathan is picturing Alex on the story, by the end, Alex recognizes himself as one of the girlfriends of Safran, but not Safran himself:

We are talking now, Jonathan, together, and not apart. We are with each other, working on the same story, and I am certain that you can also feel it. Do you know that I am the Gypsy girl and you are Safran, and that I am Kolker and you are Brod, and that I am your grandmother and you are Grandfather, and that I am Alex and you are you, and that I am you and you are me? (Foer 214)

At this point the narrative of Trachimbrod seems to be describing not really the lives of strange people, but the fragments of Jonathan and Alex’s life in a postmodern society. Both narrators are the different sides of one coin, as they complement each other’s identities and both have to deal with the consequences of the same inheritance that is the Holocaust. Both identities are under revision: the Jewish and the non-Jewish one.

Jonathan deconstructs the idea of identity by means of his fictional re-creation of Trachimbrod representing Jewish life in a *shtetl* before the war as something controversial and reproachable, even before the event of the Holocaust happen. In other words, he de-constructs the idea that life before the war provided an individual and complete Jewish identity.

Foer uses the character Jonathan as a writer who mingles history and fiction and criticizes the people who believe that the world before the war was somehow more organized than it became after it. Hirsch points out that “for postmemorial artists, the challenge is to define an aesthetic based on a form of identification and projection that can include the transmission of the bodily memory of trauma without leading to the self-wounding and retraumatization that is rememory” (85). Foer is able to portray the trauma using a comical style in order not to cause rememory. Throughout the narrative of Trachimbrod it is possible to conclude that the representation of the characters that lived before and after the war are broken identities that, collected into a coherent whole, form the identity of a person. Just like a collection of random items, it is never finished, and something new can always be added.

The trip they make can be resumed in one of the episodes in Safran’s life before the war, involving him and Augustine and preserved in a picture. Inside Augustine’s house, more pictures of Grandfather Safran are given to Jonathan and his reaction to the discovery of this less admirable side of his Grandfather, is extremely emotional.

I gave the hero each picture as she gave it to me, and he could only with difficulty hold it in his hands that were doing so much shaking. It appeared that a part of him wanted to write everything, every word of what occurred, into his diary. And a part of him refused to write even one word. He opened the diary and closed it, opened it and closed it, and it looked as if it wanted to fly away from his hands. (Foer 154)

Given that memory is an important element in Jewish communities, when he found documents about his grandfather, he discovers a new side of his grandfather’s life, which means a lot to him as it receives a special place in his collection, dedicated exclusively to Safran. According to Eric Langenbacher and Yossi Shain:

Perhaps nowhere else do such concerns of memory still weigh as much as with Israel and Jewish communities worldwide ... memory has been the

constitutive component par excellence of Jewish identity throughout history, informing Jewish religious practices as well as secular and national variants of Jewish existence. (Langenbacher and Shain13)

Being able to find something about his grandfather even though Trachimbrod was completely destroyed is a trophy. On the description of Trachimbrod, the fiction story created by Jonathan, there is “The book of Antecedents” as well as “The book of Recurrent Dreams”, each used by the inhabitants to transcript the happenings of the *shtetl*. “*It is the act of remembering, the process of remembrance, the recognition of our past ... Memories are small prayers to God, if we believed in that sort of things ...*” (Foer 36). By showing the importance of memory to the people of the *shtetl*, Jonathan is reaffirming that it is one of the marks of being a Jew, he even affirms that memory is one of the senses of Jewish people:

Jews have six senses  
Touch, taste, sight, smell, hearing ... memory.  
While Gentiles experience and process the world through the traditional senses, and use memory only as a second-order means of interpreting events, for Jews memory is no less primary than the prick of a pin, or its silver glimmer, or the taste of the blood it pulls from the finger. (Foer 198)

Memory for Jews is deeply connected with survival. Reynolds, for example, states that “[f]or many Third Generation writers, issues of memory and specifically memory loss correlate with the overwhelming fear of losing their connection with their past” (16). The search for more information about the past of their families is a way to keep a connection with their own history. It seems that this is the reason why Jonathan could not simply leave his memories behind and reset his identity as he pleased; he wanted not only to keep his bond with his past, but also reassure it through his trip to Ukraine.

The blend between reality and fiction is a recurrent theme in *Everything is Illuminated*. This intersection between dream and reality is discussed by Bauman as one of the elements for holding identity together in postmodern, liquid society. According to the critic “the experienced, lived identity could only be held together with the adhesive of fantasy, perhaps day-dreaming” (83). Therefore, when juxtaposing reality and fragments of imagination, the fulfillment of identity fantasies become real, and at the same time continues volatile as one can change dreams

and pick a new one on the way of life. One of the quotes from the Book of Recurrent Dreams mention the creation from God:

In the water I saw my father's face, and that face saw the face of its father, and so on, and so on, reflecting backward to the beginning of time, to the face of God, in whose image we were created. We burned with love for ourselves, all of us, starters of the fire we suffered – our love was the affliction for which only our love was the cure... (Foer 41)

The Creation is mentioned in a book supposedly made to record only dreams, which could be understood as a comparison between life and dream: they are one and the same. Also, when Yankel, Jonathan's great great great great great grandfather, who is also represented in his fiction about the *shtetl*, receives the news that he is going to be a father. At this moment the Book of Recurrent Dreams is closed (Foer 41), which could be inferred that the dream is over and life would begin after that moment. Trachimbrod was brought to life with the union of Brod and Yankel. Right after their union, Trachimbrod is given a name that was chosen by him "YANKEL HAS WON AGAIN, he said. YANKEL HAS NAMED US TRACHIMBROD" (Foer 51). Here again the issue of language (naming things, writing stories, creating narratives, etc.) emerges in the novel, suggesting that life only starts after a name is given and that is only possible when the dream becomes a reality, in this case Yankel becoming a father and Brod gaining a family.

I argued here that in the novel the character Jonathan shows his own identity through the narrative of Trachimbrod, which also helps Alex to review his own lifestyle and change it. I also discussed Jonathan's relationship with his grandmother and grandfather, highlighting the silences and lack of communication within his family bond and showing how these relations shaped his sense of self. Also, I argued that the gaps in his identity remain even after his trip, demonstrating his penchant for collections and how he tries to fill the identity and memory gaps with the objects from his personal collection. All in all, this collection represents the importance of memory in the preservation of Jewish identity.

#### 4. JONATHAN IN THE FILM ADAPTATION – THE WEIRDO COLLECTOR

This section discusses aspects of Jonathan's identity and identification in Liev Schreiber's film, highlighting the representation of Jonathan during his trip to Ukraine and how the relationship between himself and both his grandparents guide his way during the trip.

In the film adaptation Jonathan is a peculiar person in glasses with some odd habits. In the very beginning, the camera shows the image of a wall filled with a variety of objects of all sorts inside Ziploc bags. The representation of the character starts with his collection and the loss of his grandparents, emphasizing the importance of collections and memorabilia:

Figure 1 - Jonathan's collection - 00:07:42



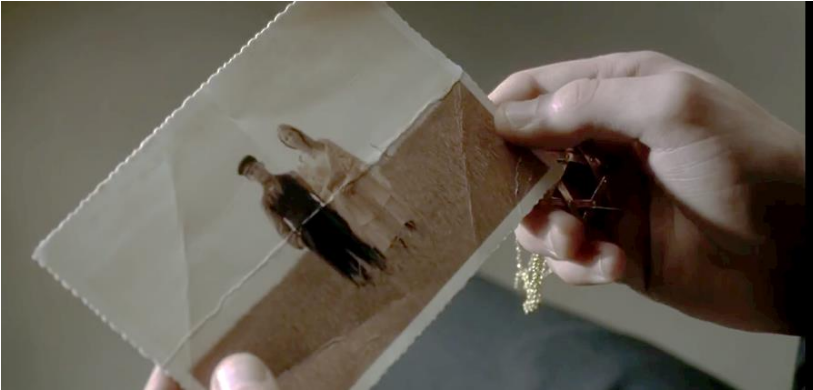
Fonte: Filme "Everything is Illuminated" de Liev Schreiber.

Jonathan collects ordinary, seemingly meaningless things, which, however, gain significance once connected with a specific person and context. Henri Raczymow states that grandchildren of Job are left with a "memory shot through with holes" (qtd in Berger 150), also Marianne Hirsch affirms that "[p]ostmemory is a powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation" (qtd in Berger 150). That is to say, the character Jonathan is exemplary of how a person can complete the "holes" of both his individual (personal) and collective (family) memory, using both objects and his imagination to create a collection. As Bauman affirms "the world

became a vessel of potentially interesting objects and the task consists of extracting from them all the interest that they may contain” (107). The ultimate undertaking is to see meaning where apparently there is none, and Jonathan is able to do that by means of his Ziploc collection.

The idea of identity as a mere construct becomes clear to Jonathan when he gets the picture of his grandfather with Augustine; it is the clue that leads him to Trachimbrod. In the film, Jonathan receives it from his grandmother moments before she dies, and in it there is only his grandfather and Augustine. As his grandmother passes away, there is no possibility for him to talk to her about the picture, and to decipher what is written on its back.

Figure 2 - Photograph of Safran and Augustine - 00:05:04



Fonte: Filme “Everything is Illuminated” de Liev Schreiber.

The relationship between Safran and Jonathan is not portrayed in the film, it only shows that Jonathan is a grown-up child when his grandfather dies, the scene shows him in the room when he passes. One may conclude that they were close, but when looking at his collection there is only one object belonging to his grandfather, as an indicative that their relationship was not so intimate. Even though there is not much of Safran on his collection, he occupies a special spot on his wall, his picture stands alone in front of Jonathan’s seat. This shows that there is something special about his grandfather, that calls Jonathan’s attention and sets him off to pursue his identity-search trip in Trachimbrod, the town of his grandfather, not his grandmother, who was also a Jew but from a different place.



Figure 3 - Jonathan's collection - 00:08:46

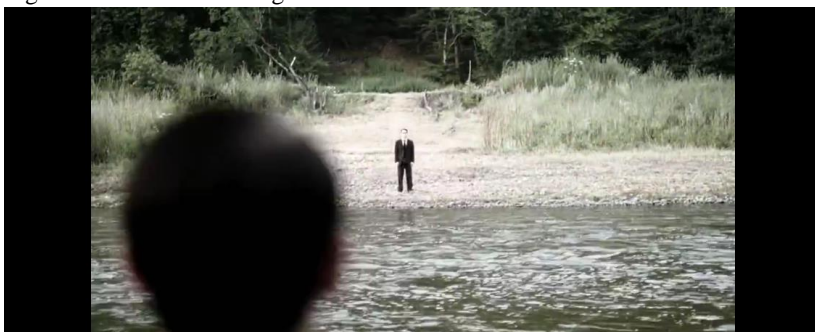


Fonte: Filme “Everything is Illuminated” de Liev Schreiber.

The unknown features and elements of Jonathan's own identity are, partially, a reflection of the unknown related to his grandfather's history, and this is something he is keenly looking for during his trip to Trachimbrod.

In relation to life as episodes, as a postmodern take on contemporary life, this view is represented in the film at the moment when Jonathan is on the margin of the river, looking at the flow of the waters and then he sees someone on the opposite margin, someone who is similar to himself (or to his grandfather) and soon after that his Ziplocs are floating down the river.

Figure 4 - Jonathan looking at himself across the river - 0:54:42



Fonte: Filme “Everything is Illuminated” de Liev Schreiber.

Figure 5 - Jonathan's Ziplocs floating on the river - 0:55:08



Fonte: Filme "Everything is Illuminated" de Liev Schreiber.

Here, life can be compared to the flow of a river and the connection of each episode in life is what makes it meaningful, both the good and the bad events. In this passage, it seems that Jonathan is looking at his own identity, filled with all the meaningful moments of his life. The identity-search trip obtains real meaning when he arrives at the deserted, empty place that is Trachimbrod now, and by means of the river metaphor, he sees the opportunity of starting over and reinventing himself, letting go old memories. Using Bauman's analogy "nobody goes to the desert to discover their identity, but to lose it, lose their personality, become anonymous" (90). Jonathan can be whoever he wants, as he found a desert on his trip, he is free to let go of the memories and let the river of life flow.

Inside Augustine's house, more pictures of Grandfather Safran are given to Jonathan. Even though it seems that he wants to let go of the memories, it also seems that his curiosity towards his family's history does not allow him to do so. At this point in the film, he is given a box with pictures and objects from Trachimbrod, which leads him to write the book *Everything is Illuminated*.

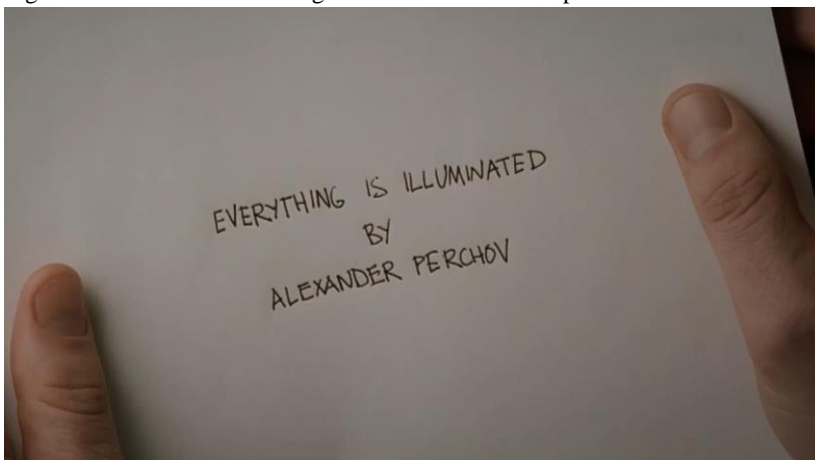
Figure 6 - Jonathan looking at his grandfather's pictures at Augustine's house - 1:06:26



Fonte: Filme "Everything is Illuminated" de Liev Schreiber.

Even though Jonathan is the one with the idea of writing a book about his trip, at the end of the film it is Alex who does so, which reinforces the argument that both characters are two sides of the same coin. This is also how the film resolves the issue of Jonathan's silence that is present in the novel; it is Alex (the articulate one) who will write the book. Both of them are inheritors of the Holocaust, but each has their own specificities: Jonathan as a Jew, and Alex as the one who discovers that his true roots are Jewish. Both of them are able to move on, but only Alex is able to articulate his feelings.

Figure 7 - Alex finishes writing the book about their trip - 1:34:43



Fonte: Filme "Everything is Illuminated" de Liev Schreiber.

The blend between reality and fiction is a recurrent theme in both narratives. At the end of the film, Jonathan is represented as if he had lived a dream. All the different people he encounters during the trip actually appeared in the airport, as if he slept during his flight and dreamt the whole adventure. Life is so “liquid”, to use Bauman’s expression, that it is difficult to separate what is the reality from the mere representation of it. This is how Liev Schreiber represents the overlap between history and fiction in the film adaptation.

Figure 8 - The waitress in the hotel - 0:27:37



Fonte: Filme “Everything is Illuminated” de Liev Schreiber.

Figure 9 - The attendant at the airport. 1:35:01



Fonte: Filme “Everything is Illuminated” de Liev Schreiber.

In here it show the same woman as a waitress in the restaurant they are in the middle of the trip and she as the receptionist at the airport when he gets out of the airplane.

Figure 10 - A farm boy that flat their tire in the middle of the trip - 0:41:25



Fonte: Filme “Everything is Illuminated” de Liev Schreiber.

Figure 11 - At the airport with his mom - 1:35:14



Fonte: Filme “Everything is Illuminated” de Liev Schreiber.

Here there is a boy chewing gum who make a prank with the car after the men stop to ask for directions, and the same child at the airport also chewing gum.

Figure 12 - Men working in the middle of the trip - 0:45:12



Fonte: Filme “Everything is Illuminated” de Liev Schreiber.

Figure 13 - Men working on security at the airport - 1:35:30



Fonte: Filme “Everything is Illuminated” de Liev Schreiber.

These two picture a group of working men, in the first they laugh at Alex after he ask for directions together with Jonathan, and the former show them at the airport checking people’s luggage.

The closure of the film leads the spectator to believe that Jonathan, as a representative of the Jews, has forgiven the perpetrators (in the image of grandfather Alex) and is able to live a “happy” life after dealing with all the memorabilia he found with Augustine. He became friends with Alex and is portrayed as content with his trip.

Figure 14 - Jonathan at the end of his trip - 1:32:22



Fonte: Filme “Everything is Illuminated” de Liev Schreiber.

In this section I developed the idea that Jonathan is a Jew with deep-seated gaps in his identity, his attempt to fill these gaps materialize by means of his collection, however with time the collection is not

fulfilling enough and he undertakes an identity-search trip to Ukraine looking for clues that can possibly satisfy the void inside him. His trip is not enlightening, as his past remains inaccessible, so with the help of Alex he starts to mingle reality and fiction in a work of literature, re-creating the story of Trachimbrod. Fictionalizing the characters that lived in the *shtetl*, he deconstructs the romantic idealism about being a Jew: “The Jewish dead were absolutely good, the Nazis and their collaborators were absolutely evil... the Holocaust was not simply a *Jewish problem*, and not an event in *Jewish history* alone.” (Bauman 20). He re-imagines his grandfather’s experiences to show that there is no point in holding too tightly to one moment, in postmodern fashion life is to be lived in episodes. Articulating the characters in such a raw manner, he is able to help Alex overcome his traumatic inheritance, but not much is revealed about Jonathan himself. The holes remain, nonetheless, the silence was broken and when looking at the end of the adaptation, reconciliation is shown as a possibility for the Third Generation. After verbalizing his past memories (invented or not) Jonathan seems able to move past his trauma.





## 5. ALEX – THE GUIDE, TRANSLATOR AND WRITER.

In this section I will make a close reading of the character Alex in the novel. Alex is the third from a generation of Alexander. His father and grandfather have the same name and they work together at Heritage Touring, a company that takes Jewish people to visit the remains of the locations in Ukraine that suffered attacks during the Second World War. In the very first chapter Alex states his opinion about Jewish people before engaging in his trip with Jonathan, he describes them as “having shit between their brains” (Foer 3), as he cannot understand why so many people would like to visit Ukraine in search of their past.

In the very first chapter, the reader is already introduced to his family members, including his grandfather’s peculiar dog. Throughout the whole story, his relationship with his family is presented as being of key importance in his life; especially the relationship among the men probably bringing the focus to the inherited trauma that comes from Grandfather, also as the description of his mother is almost non-existent. The first chapter also includes a brief mention to his mother, describing her as a simple woman who works a lot: “Mother is a humble woman. Very, very humble. She toils at a small café one hour distance from our home” (Foer 2). Henceforth his relationship with his mother is not mentioned any longer.

His grandfather first appearance in the narrative shows that he has a temper: “Grandfather punched the table with much violence and shouted, ‘Do not forget who is who!’”(Foer 6). He is retired from working in different places “[h]e toiled for fifty years at many employments, primarily farming, and later machine manipulating. His final employment was at Heritage Touring, where he commenced to toil in 1950s and persevered until of late. But now he is retarded and lives on our street” (Foer 4). He is also a stubborn person, as he insists that he is blind and needs his dog to see, its name is “Sammy Davis, Junior, Junior” the “seeing eye bitch” (Foer 1). The dog’s name is a reflection of the racial prejudice among his family. Grandfather insists in taking the dog with him on the trip: “because a Seeing Eye bitch is not only for blind people but for people who pine for the negative of loneliness” (Foer 5). He calls Alex by his other name Sasha and he is used to yell at him a lot, especially after grandmother died: “Sasha, do not be so lazy! Do not be so worthless! Do something! Do something worthy!” (Foer 5). Alex’s relationship with Grandfather is described as “a silence you could cut with a scimitar” (Foer 7). Their relation changes during Jonathan’s identity-search trip, as they

spend more time together and old memories from his grandfather emerge throughout their journey.

His father is an extremely violent man: “Father removed three pieces of ice from the refrigerator, closed the refrigerator, and punched me. ‘Put these on your face’ he said, giving the ice to me, ‘so you do not look terrible and manufacture a disaster in Lvov.’ This was the end of the conversation I should have been smarter” (Foer 29), he wants Alex to continue working in the family business after him: “you are going to toil at Heritage Touring when you are graduated. It is necessary employment, premium enough for Grandfather, premium enough for me, and premium enough for you” (Foer 28). Alex was never able to confront his father previously to the exchanging letter with Jonathan.

He has a younger brother named “Litter Igor” who he tries to protect from his abusive father: “And look at me, Little Igor, the bruises go away, and so does how you hate, and so does the feeling that everything you receive in life is something you have earned” (Foer 68). His relationship with his brother is presented in terms of Alex trying to be an outstanding and experienced person, so his brother will like to be like him when he gets older. “I desire him to feel as if he has a cool brother; and a brother whose life he would desire to impersonate one day. I want Little Igor to be able to boast to his friends about his brother, and to want to be viewed in public places with him” (Foer 144). His relationship with his brother is one of the reasons that will drive him to confront his father, as he feels the need to protect Little Igor from the reprimands of their father.

Alex is portrayed in the novel as a womanizer, one who goes to the nightclubs and enjoys every moment with a different girl. “Many girls want to be carnal with me in many good arrangements, notwithstanding the Inebriated Kangaroo, the Gorky tickle, and the Unyielding Zookeeper. If you want to know why so many girls want to be with me, it is because I am a very premium person to be with” (Foer 2). Some time after he confesses that all this is a lie and that he does not like going to nightclubs: “I often inform Father that I will go to a famous nightclub, but then I go to the beach. I do not go to a famous nightclub so that I can deposit my currency in the cookie box for moving to America with Little Igor” (Foer 215). These lies are a form of protection from his violent father as the lies reflect a lifestyle that his father would be proud of “[f]ather asks me very often about girls, and which girls I am being carnal with, and in what arrangements we are carnal. He likes to laugh with me about it, especially late at night when he is full of vodka” (Foer 144). He lies to his family to appear happier and funnier person than he is in reality. By confessing that

it is all a lie, he diminishes the trust the reader possibly had in his narrative, so one could say that all his stories are questionable, as he is a confessed liar.

Alex expresses himself in English and although he is spontaneous, his language skills are limited. His collocations and his choice of words are often inadequate and funny. As well as a lack of trust in his stories, his broken English adds to the readers' detachment in relation to what is being said, as understanding Alex requires a lot of interpretation from the reader. As Geertsma states "Alex's "realistic" representation is undermined by his lack of control of the English language, and his status as a self-confessed liar" (20). His abilities as a translator are also compromised as he picks words from strange contexts, also in some passages he translates differently what Grandfather says to Jonathan, as he believes that Grandfather's speech would be offensive for him: "I hate Lvov,' Grandfather rotate to tell the hero. 'What's he saying?' the hero asked me. 'He said it will not be long,'" (Foer 57). Therefore his translations are also not very trustworthy.

In the novel, although being a non-Jewish Third Generation of the Holocaust, he also carries the inheritance of the horrors that happened during the Second World War. Berger argues that:

*Everything is Illuminated* illuminates several key psychological points. The legacy of trauma effects the third non-Jewish, generation. The maturing of Alex's own identity occurs over time and in stages. He confronts his own alcoholic and abusive father's throwing him out of the house. He accepts the responsibility for raising Iggy, his littler brother, and his letters and advice to Jonathan become increasing sophisticated and insightful as he develops a respect both for himself and for the Jewish tradition. The racial insensitivity displayed by the dog's name is matched by Alex's initial ignorance of and hostility towards Jews coming to the Ukraine to search for traces of family murdered in the Shoah. (Berger 156-157)

Alex's development throughout the narrative is evident and profound. The findings during the trip and his correspondence with Jonathan change his perspective about his own life and lead to a complete

transformation in his relationship with his family and with himself. Geertsma states that “the correspondence between Jonathan and Alex functions as a tool of reflection and (self-) understanding for both characters, yet most particularly for Alex, for whom the letter writing, and reading, provides an insight into his situation” (21). It is through the correspondence that Alex finds the way to deal with his violent father.

Alex’s worldview was very limited before his adventure with Jonathan, and with the exchanging letters his eyes are opened and his voice is finally heard as he breaks the silence that has been haunting his family since the moment Grandfather had to make his arbitrary choice. As Dean argues “[s]ilence and shame work on multiple levels throughout Alex’s story of his family and the abuse is the first to be acknowledged” (140). Once Grandfather is able to speak about his traumatic experience, Alex understands that he is not a bad person but he feels terribly guilty about the actions that lead to his friend’s death and at the same time, saved his family’s lives. “Everyone performs bad actions, I do. Father does. Even you do. A bad person is someone who does not lament his bad actions. Grandfather is now dying because of his” (Foer 145). Instead of being aggravated with his grandfather for repressing his feelings and allowing violent behavior in their house, Alex is compassionated and tries to understand how his relative is dealing with his emotions.

Grandfather has an important role in Alex’s change. Their relationship at first is very distant and filled with lacking information: “‘That is reasonable,’ I said. It sounded a queer thing to say, but I have never known what to say to Grandfather without it sounding queer” (Foer 110). Even though the trip is meant for Jonathan, in some ways, the ones who benefit most from it are Alex and Grandfather. After they spent this time together and Grandfather talks about his past, their relationship takes a new turn. Both of them express their feeling towards each other:

‘You have children?’ she (Augustine) asked Grandfather while she gathered her breath. ‘Of course,’ he said. ‘I am his grandson,’ I said from the back, which made me feel like such a proud person, because I think it was the first occasion I had ever said it in the loud, and I could perceive that it also made Grandfather a proud person. (Foer 182)

After all the revelation that haunted Grandfather all those years, Alex embraced him and both of them felt accepted. They connect to each

other in a deep sense after the revelations, starting to live as family for the first time.

Trachimbrod is the place of return for Grandfather, and Alex is the one who narrates all the stories uncovered during their trip, both during the trip as a translator and later on, when writing the book. Hirsch states that such “return to place literally loosens the defensive walls against the sorrow of loss that refugees build up over decades and that they pass down to their children” (206). Grandfather goes through “the return” and as Augustine starts speaking about what supposedly happened to her he loosens up and starts to reminisce the horrific position he was put in by the Nazis: the choice between his family or his friend. “He lived in Kolki, which was a *shtetl* near to Trachimbrod. Herschel and Eli were best friends, and Eli had to shoot Herschel, because if he did not, they would shoot him. ‘Shut up,’ he said again, and this time he also punched the table. But she did not shut up” (Foer 152). Augustine is the one who revealed the story and, little by little Grandfather gives in and reveals himself through his attitudes. When Augustine tells her story, Grandfather’s answers reveals his own struggles and trauma during the war, showing that most people did not have a choice when revealing the Jews to the Nazis, “if they had helped, they would have been killed, and so would their families ... you would not help somebody if it signified that you would be murdered and your family would be murdered” (Foer 187). Grandfather was given a ‘choiceless choice’, as he would be murdered if he helped his friend. However, the guilt of surviving and the traumatic feeling of killing someone you cared about consumed Grandfather and generated the abusive behavior he passed down to Father.

The revelation of Grandfather’s past actions connects Alex and his relative as never before. Their relationship was previously filled with distance and silence and, once this is broken, they are able to embrace their family bonds, “[o]nce verbalized the individuals’ memories can be exchanged, shared, corroborated, confirmed, corrected, disputed – and, last but not least, written down” (Aleida Assmann qtd in Hirsh 32). Alex as a translator is the one who brings memories back to life when recounting the story in a different language. It is possible to say that not only he shared the stories through translation, but also confirmed them when he wrote them down, “[w]ith writing we have second chances” (Foer 144). Writing gives him the opportunity to make amends and help other people (as well as himself) to achieve freedom.

It is possible to say that Alex was naïve and believed in a perfect world, he was lost in his own home. During the trip he comes to learn

more about his grandfather, likewise he learns that his country, Ukraine, was permissive in relation to the Holocaust: “Ukrainians were known for being terrible to the Jews. So were the Poles. Listen, I don’t mean to offend you. It’s got nothing to do with you. We’re talking about fifty years ago.’ ‘I think you are mistaken,’ I told the hero. ‘I don’t know what to say.’ ‘Say that you are mistaken.’ ‘I can’t.’ ‘You must’” (Foer 62). It seems that he did not realize many things about his own life and about his country until he talks to Jonathan. His past was completely repressed and, as he lives in a violent family, the possibility of asking questions is null. He does not comprehend his own home, he is dislocated and, therefore, he starts looking for a new one: America. He does not know what it is to live in a community, as Bauman points out:

“Identity owes the attention it attracts and the passions it begets to being a surrogate of community: of that allegedly ‘natural home’ which is no longer available in the rapidly privatized and individualized, fast globalizing world, and which for that reason can be safely imagined as a cozy shelter of security and confidence, and as such hotly desired” (400)

One could say that before the identity-search trip, Alex avoided his own reality by lying to his family and focusing on the dream of living in America. However he is only able to move on from his present situation after dealing with his family issues.

Dean affirms that Jonathan ruins “Alex’s fantasy of love and truth as simple concepts and forces him on a path of self-reflexivity that finally allows him to openly talk about his family’s history” (131-132). Ideals are simple; the world is complex and wrought. When reflecting upon himself, Alex understands that as he does not want his little brother to become his father, he also does not want to become him that impels him to act upon his reality and set himself free. “I do not want him (Little Igor) to feel violence anymore, but also I do not want him to one day make others feel violence” (Foer 145). For Alex, becoming a translator for Jonathan helps him comprehend what happened in his own past and after articulating the events that occurred with Grandfather, he finds the courage he needs to face his own reality and change it, “[a]s he becomes the translator of the events, Alex is coming to a more intimate understanding of what the Holocaust means” (Dean 134). “You cannot know how it felt to have to hear these things and then repeat them, because when I repeated them I felt like I was making them new again.” (Foer

185). With the identity-search trip he understood what happened within his family and in his country, and in order to not perpetrate the same horrific events, he faces his abusive father and does not allow that situation to continue.

When choosing Jonathan and Alex as two different inheritors of the Holocaust, Foer brings to attention the dichotomy of perpetrator and victim. This discussion is complicated and deep, and when adding the story of Grandfather, Foer brings to light the “banality of evil”, notion developed by Hannah Arendt in her book *Eichmann in Jerusalem* quoted in Tania Crasnianski’s book *Children of Nazis* (2018). Crasnianski explains that it is the lack of ability to differentiate good from evil, being unable to realize the bad within us: “she (Arendt) does insist how inhumanity can lodge deep within each of us and that it is imperative to continue to think, to never stop listening to reason, to always question oneself, so as to never sink into the same banality of evil” (14). According to Crasnianski’s study, perpetrators do not realize the depth of their actions, and believe that they were doing the right thing: “Gustave M. Gilbert, an American psychologist who studied the principal Nazi criminals whose fates were decided at Nuremberg, concluded that the distinguishing feature of these men was their lack of empathy for others, and he showed that executioners are less likely to experience depression than their victims because they are convinced they are good men who have no choice but to follow orders” (Crasnianski 17). Lack of empathy and guilt are a mark of a perpetrator in the Nazi regime.

Dean addresses the possibility of Grandfather being also Jewish in the novel, and by giving away his friend instead of himself he “compresses victim with perpetrator” (Dean 136), which leads to an uncomfortable relationship to the theme of banality of evil:

“Alex’s Grandfather’s section of the novel functions as both a deathlife narrative through the role of the perpetrator and as a view of the Banality of Evil, one that invites the reader’s identification with his grandfather since it is difficult to imagine what one might choose in the same situation. That, however, does not lessen the guilt that Alex and his grandfather feel nor does it lessen the ongoing impact of that decision, which begins a cycle of violence that Alex decides to break.” (Dean 135)

Alex’s resolution to forgive his Grandfather for his betrayal and trying to understand the decision he made during the war is only acceptable when the banality of evil is understood in terms that

Grandfather was also a victim of the Nazis and not really a perpetrator, but one given a choiceless choice. In this sense, there is no dichotomy: victim versus perpetrator; there is only victims (in this case specifically). This conclusion is plausible when looking at Grandfather as Alex does: one that feel guilt cannot be a perpetrator.

Grandfather calls Alex Sasha from the beginning and, in his final letter to Alex he states: “It means that I am dead, and that Sasha is alive.” (Foer 274). Being Sasha an endearment term, this represents a return to a familial state in which he is loved. Even though in Ukrainian Sasha is a short word for Alexander, this name could represent that Alex has created a double self in order to overcome his traumatic experience with his father. Geertsma affirms “The phrase “Sasha is alive” suggests that Alex has managed to successfully confront his trauma and thereby lost the shield that was initially necessary to protect him from it” (25). He lost the attachment he had with his family inheritance (the name Alexander) and after that he was able to pursue the identity he dreamed about. In her article entitled *Broken Identity*, Prot states that many survivors of the Holocaust could only live through the horrors by separating their own selves in two different worlds, “[i]n some survivors this splitting within the self is expressed in the feeling that “that happened to somebody else” or in their current “double life” – living at once in actual reality and in their “second self” (240). Alex somehow has a double life the entire time: he lies about his nightlife to his father and brother at the same time that he saves money in an attempt to move to America. “I think I manufacture these not-truths because it makes me feel like a premium person. ... I know that it would disappoint him (his father) very much if he knew what I am really like” (Foer 144). He wants to please his father, besides the mistreating. Also when talking frankly with his grandfather, he states that it felt as if he could not be himself with his grandfather:

I will tell you, Jonathan, that at this place in the conversation, it was no longer Alex and Alex, grandfather and grandson, talking. We yielded to be two different people, two people who could view one another in the eyes, and utter things that are not uttered. When I listened to him, I did not listen to Grandfather, but to someone else, someone I had never encountered before, but whom I knew better than Grandfather. And the person who was listening to this person was not me but someone else, someone I had never been before but whom I knew better than myself. (Foer 245)



Both Alex and Grandfather set themselves free from the first self who was imprisoned within the trauma and allow the other identity to take over liberating both from guilt and shame, allowing them to start again. Even though Grandfather decides to take his life he is free while Alex confronts Father for the first time and gains control of his fate.

Jonathan and Alex are the narrators of the story. As previously mentioned, Jonathan's parts are not linear, he moves from past to present throughout the narration, while Alex's writings have a linear development. According to Geertsma, "Alex's notion of time stresses the influence of human action, and consequently the notion that there is a specific human agency, that can, for instance, be blamed for the Holocaust" (20). This understanding shows why Alex decides to act upon his own reality, as he considerate human agency in historical events. Also, when looking at Grandfather and Augustine, and how both of them are trapped in the past, it becomes evident that repression is not a good option, "[t]he symptoms of repression that Grandfather displays, and Augustine's preoccupation with the past demonstrate the necessity to articulate trauma" (Geertsma 21). This shows not only that trauma needs to be expressed but, it also points out to the tendency of living life in episodes: not getting too attached to one specific moment can lead to a healthier way of life, "[t]he overall result is the fragmentation of time into episodes, each one cut from its past and from its future, each one self-enclosed and self-contained" (Bauman 96). To live life in episodes helps people not to get too much attached to one specific traumatic experience.

In this chapter I tried to explain how Alex was able to move from a place of trauma into freedom. His identity was forged with lies and misunderstandings, nonetheless with the trip to Trachimbrod he is able to articulate his family past trauma and that enables him to stop perpetrating the abusive behavior he inherited from the Holocaust. His relationship with Grandfather was reshaped as well as his own identity. The ideals he had towards people and his country were broken and when faced with the horrors people can do, he decided to act upon it and change it, not only for himself, but also to his entire house. His attitude shows that there is human agency in trauma and in the perpetrating of its consequences; Grandfather did not have human agency during the Holocaust, he was forced to betray someone he cared about, however to maintain the abusive behavior or to stop it is a choice (human agency), and Alex is able to stop it.



## 6. ALEX IN THE FILM ADAPTATION – THE SINGULAR TRANSLATOR

This chapter discusses aspects of Alex's identification showed in the Liev Schreiber's film, highlighting the character's representation of him during the trip to Ukraine and how the relationship between him and his grandfather becomes key in the process of understanding his family's past and changing their present.

In the film adaptation, Alex is portrayed as a creative person, right at the beginning he is depicted as the writer of the book *Everything is Illuminated*. The socializing dynamics of his family is represented in the opening scenes, concentrating on his father's authoritative behavior. He punches Alex during dinner time just because he bought his brother a hat and Father did not like it.

Figure 15: Alex being punched in the face at dinner – 0:10:26



Fonte: Filme "Everything is Illuminated" de Liev Schreiber.

Figure 16 - Alex's father punching him in the face at dinner – 0:10:38)



Fonte: Filme “Everything is Illuminated” de Liev Schreiber.

In this illustration it seems that the viewer is also receiving the punch in his/her face, as Father's fist comes in the direction of the camera.

As Alex describes his family, the viewer becomes acquainted with Alex's broken English, which in the film is very pronounced and humorous. He is characterized as a good dancer, who spends lots of money at nightclubs and who has a unique sense of style. The comic tone is given by the way he dresses, by his speech, by the way he walks and all of these come together with an Ukrainian music in the background that (in a very stereotypical manner) fits his humorous profile.

Figure 17 - Alex's life at nightclubs– 0:13:38)

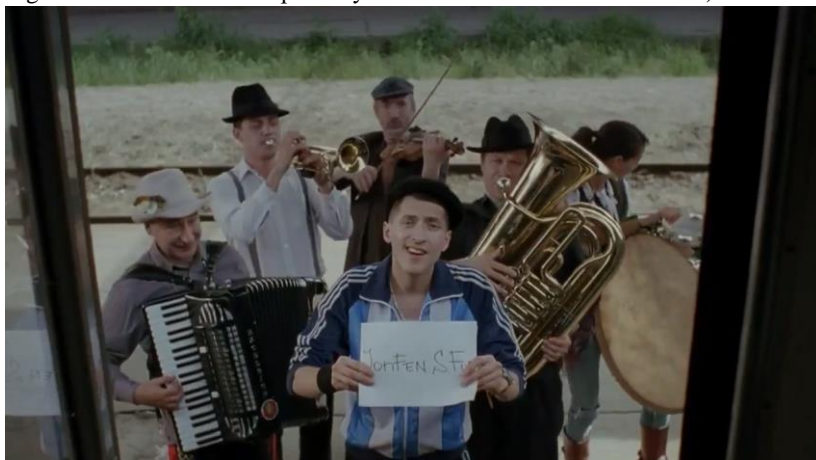


Fonte: Filme “Everything is Illuminated” de Liev Schreiber.

The way Alex presents himself gives a hint that all this popularity is not the reality he lives in. After his father's punch at dinner, the camera goes into an extreme close-up, which ends up inside his eyes and can be interpreted as part of his imagination.

Alex's form of picking up Jonathan at the train station also reinforces the comic aspect of the character. He decides to call the musicians from the station to play the American hymn for Jonathan, however, he makes the whole band run after the train instead of waiting until it comes to a complete stop on the platform.

Figure 18 - Jonathan's reception by Alex at the train station– 0:19:25)



Fonte: Filme "Everything is Illuminated" de Liev Schreiber.

Even the way he writes and speaks Jonathan's name is humorous. All of this effort to show himself as a special person is in accordance with what Bauman states in *The individualized society*, "[n]eeding to become what one is is the feature of modern living (381-382). Alex's discourse and attitudes seek to reinforce the identity he wants to project to other people: that he looks American and that he is a funny, smart and cool person. According to Bauman "[m]odernity replaces the *determination* of social standing with a compulsive and obligatory *self-determination*" (382). Alex is rather compulsive in relation to his self-image and identity among other people.

Just like in the novel, his performance as a guide and translator is not very trustworthy from the beginning. When Jonathan meets Grandfather for the first time, he is asleep in the car and Alex claims that "he is a premium driver", even though he is sleeping at work. Also, his

translations of the dialogues with his grandfather are not exact; he filters a lot of what Grandfather speaks, because his hate for Jews is evident in the way he communicates:

Alex: The Jew wants to know if we are close?  
 Grandfather: Tell him to shut the hell up!  
 Alex: Grandfather says we are very proximum, it will not be long until we get to the superway.  
 Alex: How long from here to Lutsk?  
 Grandfather: Perhaps you would like me to stop the car and you two can fuck yourselves to Lutsk!  
 Jonathan: What did he say?  
 Alex: Grandfather says you should look out the window to the premium countryside (0:25:57 – 00:26:21)

Figure 19 - Alex's translation of Grandfather's speech to Jonathan– 0:26:00)



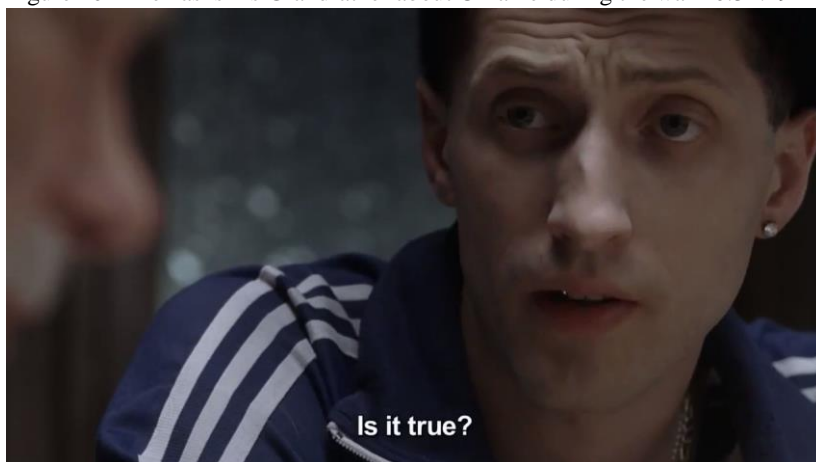
Fonte: Filme "Everything is Illuminated" de Liev Schreiber.

His translation is somehow a continuum from his identity, as Bauman states in *Life in Fragments* that "identity today becomes a freely chosen game, a theatrical presentation of the self" (87). Alex is representing the whole time, his mistranslations of Grandfather to Jonathan are not difficult for him to perform as lying became a part of his being; it turns out to be natural for him.

During the trip, Alex asks lots of questions to both Jonathan and Grandfather, it seems that he is seizing the opportunity to get to know his possibilities. He is trying to understand how life is in America, at the same time, he sees that his life is becoming more remarkable as he is figuring

out his grandfather's past and also his own country's history. Alex questions his Grandfather about the way Ukraine treated the Jews before the war. That point is the beginning of Alex's understanding of what the Holocaust was and how his life and his country are connected to it. Even though his grandfather does not answer him right away, later on, before going to sleep he tells Alex that it is his desire to help Jonathan find Augustine. It is the beginning of Grandfather's change of heart in relation to Jews.

Figure 20 - Alex asks his Grandfather about Ukraine during the war– 0:32:19



Fonte: Filme “Everything is Illuminated” de Liev Schreiber.

The questions from Alex can be seen as another characteristic of identity in modern society. Bauman states that “[r]ational conduct in such a world demands that the options, as many as possible, are kept open, and gaining an identity which fits too tightly, an identity that once and for all offers ‘sameness’ and ‘continuity’, results in the closing of option of forfeiting them in advance” (392). Alex is opening up his view of the world and he is analyzing all his possibilities. Since he does not have to possibility of asking much at home, due to the abusive environment, the trip is the moment to do so.

After asking for directions, Alex feels angry as the men make fun of him and he hit the dog, which causes his grandfather to hit him and curse him a lot. At this moment, when the issue of repressed violence emerges, the mood of the film changes from comic to dramatic.

Figure 21 - Grandfather realizes the abusive behavior towards Alex.– 0:47:38



Fonte: Filme “Everything is Illuminated” de Liev Schreiber.

In this scene one can see the expression of fear in both characters, showing that now the moment is serious and no longer humorous.

As they approach Trachimbrod, Grandfather starts to grieve and the past, repressed memories start to rise. Hirsch affirms that “[t]he language of family, the language of the body: nonverbal and precognitive acts of transfer occur most clearly within a familial space, often taking the forms of symptoms” (34). Grandfather realizes his own symptoms as they get closer to Trachimbrod. Right after beating Alex and leaving him on the ground, Grandfather returns to the car with a sad expression on his face, giving the impression that he feels guilty about what he just did. His abusive behavior can be seen as symptoms of the trauma he suffered during the Holocaust, and now, as he takes the return journey, all the repressed feelings come forth again. “[a]s much as survival might be a struggle against the return of trauma, structured by forgetting or denial, the mark is there, present, even if it remains submerged, disguised, invisible to the naked eye” (Hirsch 77). Trauma in its accurate significance is an injury inflicted on the flesh, it hurts.

As they drive around Ukraine, Grandfather starts recognizing the locations and, as the rememory occurs, he revisits the horrors of the Holocaust.



Figure 22 - Grandfather's past start to rise 0:49:34)



Fonte: Filme "Everything is Illuminated" de Liev Schreiber.

Figure 23 - Grandfather recognizes the places they are driving through. 0:50:14



Fonte: Filme "Everything is Illuminated" de Liev Schreiber.

Alex does not understand what his grandfather is going through at this point. Also, he does not have the courage to ask him what is happening, and he tells Jonathan that asking him is impossible.

After the recollection Grandfather starts to tell how beautiful Ukraine was before the war. Then, they stop exactly at Augustine's sister's door. A place filled with sunflowers and with very white bed sheets hanging under the blue sky.

Figure 24 - Augustine's sister's house. 0:59:39



Fonte: Filme “Everything is Illuminated” de Liev Schreiber.

As they arrive at the place where Augustine's sister lives, the past starts re-emerging as she brings out the objects she collected from the dead bodies and kept all these years in her home. Hirsch points out “past and present coexist in layered fashion, and their interaction is dominated by objects that provoke deep body memory and the affects it triggers” (216). Augustine's sister has been living trapped in the past, it could be seen as a consequence of living imbedded around all these objects. She states that she does not live by herself, “I have all of them” (1:03:11). She does not even know if the war is over, she is trapped in the past by memories, objects, and trauma.

For Grandfather it is different, he left the traumatic objects behind. As soon as they arrive at the place where Trachimbrod once was, his story emerges.

Figure 25 - Grandfather's rememory of the Holocaust 1:18:35



Fonte: Filme "Everything is Illuminated" de Liev Schreiber.

In the film adaptation, Grandfather is portrayed as Jew, who was a victim of shooting, but survived. In these pictures it is portrayed the lined up, putting the viewer in the position of the shooter.

Figure 26 - Grandfather's alive in the middle of the dead bodies 1:20:50



Fonte: Filme "Everything is Illuminated" de Liev Schreiber.

Figure 27 - Moment when Grandfather decides to abandon his Jewish identity  
1:21:18



Fonte: Filme “Everything is Illuminated” de Liev Schreiber.

These two images show his face, a mixture of hope for a new beginning and the guilt of the survivor, as it is difficult to move on in the middle of such a tragedy.

Once he is able to come out, “resurrecting” among the corpses, he decides to leave his Jewish identity behind. He throws his jacket with the Jewish star and leaves, from now on denying his heritage in his new life in Odessa. Up until now he kept all these experiences within himself. When doing the return trip he recalls all those feelings, and feels sorry for Augustine’s sister as he understands that she never left, and continues to feel all that pain.

Figure 28 - Grandfather tells Augustine's sister that the war is over 1:26:12



Fonte: Filme "Everything is Illuminated" de Liev Schreiber.

This image shows Grandfather with a similar look in his eyes from the moment he left his identity behind. Again a mixture of hope with the guilt of the survival.

Hirsch states that "memory is repetition but always with some change, reincarnation but with a difference"(214). Grandfather is the one to tell her that the war is over, because with the return to Trachimbrod and the reminiscences he had, he is the one that ends the war inside himself and somehow helps Augustine to understand that the Holocaust is in the past. He is able to let go of his past for real now, through his suicide.

Figure 29 - Grandfather smile at Alex and touches his face. 1:27:29



Fonte: Filme "Everything is Illuminated" de Liev Schreiber.

In the image, his smile is of someone who is free and happy, it shows relief. At the same time it is dark, providing a clue that this relief will cost his life, it is a goodbye. Alex also understands that as he mentions: "He seemed, for the first time in his life, contented where he was" (1:34:08). Alex does not know much about his family's past. But, even though he is unaware of the past, he tells Jonathan that Grandfather is a good person. And, the way grandfather is portrayed in the film adaptation he really is only a victim.

Alex's return trip with his Grandfather is illuminating for him, as he starts to see his Grandfather with new eyes and understand the pain he went through. The gaps in his story remain, but his position in relation to them is different. "Silence, absence, and emptiness are also always present, and often central to the work of postmemory" (Hirsch 247). Alex does not remember (term Hirsch uses to refer to reminisce), as he does not know the complete story, his position is the postmemory. He does not feel the pain of living the memory again, as it is not his own, as the translator he mediates Augustine's sister story, which puts him in the position of postmemory. Hirsch points out that "postmemory is not an identity position but a generational structure of transmission embedded in multiple forms of mediation" (35). Alex is the mediator, not only for Jonathan, but also for himself.

After Grandfather's suicide, Alex takes Jonathan to the train station and Jonathan gives him his Jewish star as a gift. "Individuals are part of social groups with shared belief systems that frame memories and shape them into narratives and scenarios" (Hirsch 32). Both Jonathan and Alex now share a bond as they discover that both of them are Jews.



Figure 30 - Jonathan gives Alex his Jewish star. 1:31:08



Fonte: Filme “Everything is Illuminated” de Liev Schreiber.

As The Star of David is one of the symbols of Jewish community, as the kippah. In the end of the film, at Grandfather’s funeral, all men in Alex’s family are wearing it, as a sign that their lives have changed and they have embraced their Jewish identity.

Figure 31 - Alex’s family burying Grandfather. 1:36:42



Fonte: Filme “Everything is Illuminated” de Liev Schreiber.

In this chapter I discussed how Alex is also an inheritor of trauma, although it works differently in his family socialization, as it manifests itself not by silence but by abuse and violence, I also explained how the

film adaptation is different from the novel, particularly in relation to the Grandfather, who is forced to betray his friend in the novel. Trauma is part of everyone's identity but its articulation can have different consequences. For Grandfather the return journey was painful and difficult, which lead him to take his own life. For Alex approaching the issue was a way to come to terms and understand the repressed anger in his family. Alex ceases to be an inveterate liar and embraces what once was lost, their Jewish identity. Also, in the film there is not the exchanging letters between Jonathan and Alex, the "writing cure" for Alex was through the writing of his own book, which enabled him to move on to a different life.



## 7. FINAL COMMENTS

I have been arguing here that identity; trauma and memory are intrinsically related in *Everything is Illuminated* novel and film adaptation. At a broader level, I also argued that these matters can shape one person's sense of self and I sought to highlight these issues in Foer's and Schreiber's representations of the Third Generation of the Holocaust. My argument is that themes such as inherited silence voids and absences are central to both narratives. I also argued how memory and trauma exercise a substitution function in self- and mutual-identification between people.

The book narrative is not linear, Reynolds points out that

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 the sense of life before and beyond the Holocaust (19).

This non-linear structure often chosen by Third Generation artists and writers is a way to show their constant debate towards how much of their past they can understand and how difficult it is to articulate this fragmentary history with their present lives. Foer uses language organized in the form of literary discourse to enunciate an inherited trauma and demonstrates "faith in the (redemptive) power of language and literature" (Reynolds 17). Literature is used here as a way to mourn the relatives they did not meet, evincing an effort to comprehend their Jewish identity and heritage.

The main characters in *Everything is Illuminated* were analyzed within the lenses of the theories from Bauman and Hirsch and the conclusion is that their sense of self is different in the end of each narrative. Jonathan started his journey due to a photograph of his grandfather, Hirsch points out that photographs are similar to "a window to the past" (Hirsch 38) and that is precisely what motivates Jonathan. The photograph allowed him to glimpse into his grandfather's past and triggered him to pursue a trip to Ukraine in order to see what his grandfather saw and stand where he once stood. Even though he did not find vestiges of Trachimbrod, he found a way to articulate his trauma: in the novel – through the creation of his fictional narrative about the inhabitants of Trachimbrod and; in the film by means of the friendship he

develops with Alex, travelling around the country (and all the conversations they had). Jonathan is dealing with a silent inheritance, and at the end, the silence remains, as he cannot talk his way through the trauma with a living person from his family (like Alex does with Grandfather), Jonathan articulates his trauma within his silence. In the novel, the characters of Trachimbrod's narrative are a blend of fiction and reality, and through them Jonathan finds a way to criticize what he wants to criticize: the idealization of Jewish life and culture before the war.

Jonathan's identity is explicit neither in the beginning nor at the end. There are only glimpses of ideas about his identity imbedded in the middle of his narrative of Trachimbrod and, by means of Alex's letters, answering Jonathan's queries. His identity continues to be fragmented with gaps and voids, but there is hope for understanding when dealing with Jews and Ukrainians. In the novel, their friendship starts with an exchange of letters and in the film, the scenes at the end shows that he is content with the results of his undertaking around Ukraine.

Even though Jonathan's memory remains filled with holes and voids, he demonstrates, with his fondness for collections, how he tries to build a sense of identity and fill holes in the memory with the objects from his personal collection. All in all, his collection represents the importance of memory in the preservation of Jewish identity. With Alex's help, he looks back into his relationship with his grandmother, and with the help of Augustine's sister, he recovers his grandfather belongings which provides him with the tools he needed to recreate the story he was unable to reach: Trachimbrod's past.

Alex is more articulate and, because of that, the changes in his own identity are more perceptible. He becomes aware of the events that happened in his country, as well as of the difficulties he deals with in his own home. During the trip, he finds out about his grandfather's past, which enables him to act upon his own history and change the inherited behavior of violence that was a consequence of the Holocaust in his family. Alex demonstrates that talking about past traumas can bring healing and foster new beginnings.

Alex is the inheritor of the Third Generation of non-Jewish victims of the Holocaust. His trauma is brought to light by means of his grandfather's revelation of betrayal against his Jewish friend. Berger states that "the novel's great ironic twist, however, concerns three Ukrainian generations: Alex's grandfather, his father, and himself. Alex may be at home, but he is very much in a strange land. Guiding Jonathan, Alex discovers his own identity" (156). Apparently, Alex is the one in

need for an identity, as he deals with the consequences of trauma due to the domestic violence inflicted by his father, also by his grandfather.

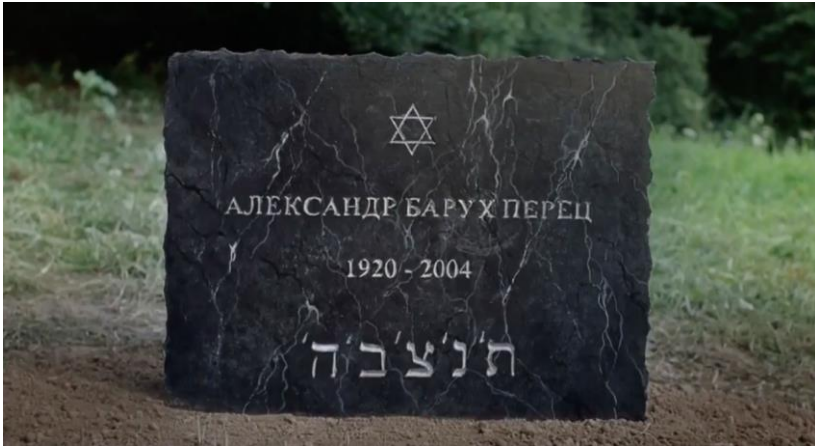
Alex's relationship with his family is central in both narratives, the rather naïve conception he has about his country and family is deconstructed during their trip, which enables him to make a move towards changing the heritage he carries and move past his family's problems that are the consequence of the Holocaust trauma. At the beginning of the narrative, with his amusing broken English, Alex is not very trustworthy and his communicative and interactional style does not help the reader/spectator to trust his words. However, as the narratives develop and his character starts to show a more profound sense of understanding about what happened in his country and with his family, the reader/spectator views on him gradually change. One could argue that he is the main character, the one who accepted help and that support made it possible for him to change his life. In the end of the narratives, his worldview changes and he is able to accept who he is (a Jew – in the novel, this is only implicit; in the film, it is glaring).

His relationship with Grandfather becomes closer and that allows him to see his relative rememory, which means to live and to feel the pain of the memory he lived in the past. In the role of Jonathan's translator, his relative rememory permit Alex to post-memory, as it is shown in the moment he mediates Augustine's sister's memory to Jonathan and also Grandfather's memory to himself. Through the exercise of post-memory he understands the impact the Holocaust had and still has in people's lives, and by doing that he is able to see Grandfather also as a victim, which leads him to act upon the inherited violent behavior in his own home and stop it from moving forward. Alex is the materialization of how the talking cure can help traumatized people and assist their families to move past the trauma and regain their human agency.

Furthermore, Alex's freedom from his life of abuse is a symptomatic characteristic of Third Generation writers. Reynolds points out "the Third Generation's distance leads to one last defining characteristic, the presence of survival and hope" (22). Even though his grandfather commits suicide, arguably an indicative of release from his past, it is Alex's attitude of dealing with his past trauma before his final decision, and also the exchanging letters with Jonathan, that helps Alex find the means to set him and his brother free from his abusive father. "Healing affects not only survivors, but the third generation as well because they too show symptoms of the intergenerational transmission of trauma" (Reynolds 23). This shows that there is hope for a better future when trauma is dealt with and silence is courageously broken down.

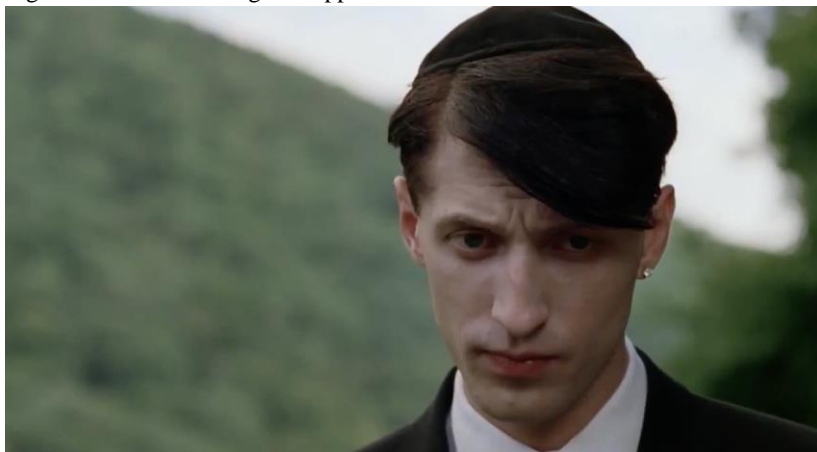
The banality of evil is presented in the book narrative, when it suggests an ambiguous identity for Grandfather: there is not an explicit affirmation telling the reader that he was Jew, only a hint. If he was indeed a Jew, he would have betrayed his friend with a lie about his own identity, which leads to the banality of evil: one that does not have the ability to put themselves in the position of others. In the film adaptation, this discussion is left aside, as he is portrayed as Jew, one that had to experience the shooting and survived. According to Sarah Dean “the focus on the Banality of Evil from the text is lost, a choice that releases the audience from facing one of the brutal facts of the Holocaust – that the choices we make can potentially lead us to participate in widespread evil” (119). In the film, Alex’s grandfather is represented as a Jew (showed by the star presented on his grave), turning him into one more victim of the Nazis, which by all means, turns Alex into a Jew. This fact is explained only in the end of the adaptation, when he appears wearing a kippah, which symbolizes that he embraced his Jewish identity previously abandoned by his grandfather during the war.

Figure 32 - Alex’s grandfather grave - 01:36:52



Fonte: Filme “Everything is Illuminated” de Liev Schreiber.

Figure 33 - Alex wearing the kippah - 01:36:52



Fonte: Filme “Everything is Illuminated” de Liev Schreiber.

At the end of the film, the analogy is that Jonathan and Alex are two sides of the same coin, this appears very clearly in a scene where they are both throwing a handful of dust on the grave of their grandfathers, as a symbol that their mourning are over and their new beginning is just getting started.

Figure 34 - Jonathan holding a handful of dust at his grandfather's grave - 01:36:21



Fonte: Filme “Everything is Illuminated” de Liev Schreiber.

Figure 35 - Alex holding a handful of dust at his grandfather's grave - 01:36:40



Fonte: Filme "Everything is Illuminated" de Liev Schreiber.

The suffering their ancestors have been through is represented in many Third Generation narratives, but the hope of survival is the main focus. Reynolds points out that "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." (Reynolds 25). Throughout the narrative there is the representation of inherited trauma, still at the end, there is the idea that healing is possible and a new beginning can happen as trauma is dealt with. I believe that, reconciliation was only possible for Alex as he concludes that Grandfather was a victim (in the novel), due to the guilt he felt his whole life and, in the end, that consumes him, leading Grandfather to commit suicide.

Jonathan and Alex have to deal with inheritances from the Holocaust that shaped their views on life. Some of these views change with their trip, mainly because they are opposites and decided to pay attention to each other in order to complement the views they could not possibly acquire by themselves. I understand that the moment when they are all together in the restaurant and the potato falls on the floor and all of them starts laughing, is exemplary of how important it is to try "to get in someone else's shoes":

"Grandfather started laughing. 'Welcome to Ukraine,' I translated. Then I started laughing. Then the hero started laughing. We laughed with much violence for a long time. We obtained the

attention of every person in the restaurant. We laughed with violence, and then more violence. I witnessed that each of us was manufacturing tears at his eyes. It was not until very much in the posterior that I understood that each of us was laughing for a different reason, for our own reason, and that not one of those reasons had a thing to do with the potato.” (Foer 67)

Different views are only possible when people enable themselves to look at the other and try to understand how different their look is. Jonathan and Alex allowed themselves to see with a different eye and Alex in special put into practice how looking with a different perspective can be a positive thing in people’s lives.

Let’s laugh with violence and, also allow the other to laugh with violence for a different reason.





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