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**ILLUMINATED MANUSCRIPT: USES AND EFFECTS OF METAFICTION IN
EVERYTHING IS ILLUMINATED**

Porto Alegre

2013

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Trabalho de conclusão de curso apresentado como requisito
parcial para a obtenção do grau de Licenciado em Letras pela
Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul

Orientador: Prof. Dr. Ian Alexander

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Rust Costa, 19.12.2013

*AND IF WE ARE TO STRIVE FOR A BETTER FUTURE, MUSN'T WE BE FAMILIAR
AND RECONCILED WITH OUR PAST?*

ABSTRACT

This work examines the uses of metafiction within the novel *Everything Is Illuminated*, addressing specifically, at a subjective level, the effects of the novel's different narrative levels on the reading experience. While this novel reproduces the opposition between reality and fiction within the narration of the Holocaust in Soviet Ukraine with the aid of two narrators, I contend here that the structure of this novel creates a crisis of referentiality whose main purpose is to diminish the distance between the reader and the content narrated, entangling the reader's level of reality into the maze of narrative voices in order to provide the reading experience with a double perspective – Jew and Gentile – on the effects of the memory of the Holocaust in the present of its narrators.

Keywords: Metafiction, Levels of Reality, Holocaust

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2. Introduction

Since I first got inserted in the academic realm of literary studies, I have always experienced an overwhelming feeling towards every metafictional work that I read. Literature as a feigned discursive simulation of events and attitudes that could take place in the empirical world in order to pose questions about it is something that often intrigued me. How can a fictional construction, an invented story merely based on someone's perspective, arouse so much friction in the literature classes that I have attended throughout the last 7 years? What is its credibility? Still, such puzzlement is nothing in comparison to the effect caused on me by novels *admittedly* fictional, those who point the finger to its own construction strategies, to its own fictionality, to its own self. For this reason, something has been always certain about my final paper: it had to be on metafiction.

I found in Jonathan Safran Foer's first novel, *Everything Is Illuminated*, the ideal object in order to prove to myself that I could somehow explain at least to myself how does this effect work on me, and it is basically of this explanation that this work is consisted.

In the present work, I intend to demonstrate how the crisis of referentiality, so characteristic in metafictional works and so virtuously explored in this novel, entangles the reader and provides him with the illusory effect of absorbing the fictional world as if it was his own. Through the creation of doubles for both writer and reader who occupy instable roles within the novel's structure, I contend here that Foer uses metafiction as a device for breaking with the traditional distance between reader and the traditional form of the historical narrative. While composing a novel that comprises the opposition between reality and fiction – an opposition that is proper of the “real”, empiric world – within its own structure, the author turns the reader into a Holocaust witness calling him into taking part at the same level of reality of his characters.

In order to support my point, I counted on names that have made unequivocal contributions to studies of metafiction, such as Patricia Waugh and Linda Hutcheon. I also called into discussion Italo Calvino's notion of “levels of reality”, as well as his appreciation on the classical and decisive concept of Coleridge's Suspension of Disbelief.

3. What is Metafiction?

Metafiction is a literary device which challenges the notion of linear narrative. The use of this technique is frequently associated with aesthetics of post-modernism and experimental literature. Indeed the latter remains true, as long as any attempt to break with straight-forward, chronological, descriptive or “realistic” narrative is taken for experimental. However, the conception of metafiction as a feature present in a so-called post-modern aesthetic brings up a further discussion in which the concept of post-modernism and its realization in literature should be drawn. This, however, is not the aim of this work. Concerning the questioning of what-is and what-is-not post-modernism, it seems only pertinent to remark that the set of technical characteristics of what is called *metafiction* has been present in literature since the beginning of written times - much earlier, I assume, than the conjunctures that have provided the world its post-modern dimension.

In theory of literature, many authors busy themselves on the task of explaining metafiction. Brazillian UERJ teacher Gustavo Bernardo has in fact produced one of the most recent analytic compilations on the subject – a book called *O Livro da Metaficção* [*The Book of Metafiction*] (all quotations from this work were translated from Portuguese by myself). There, he states: “[metafiction] is a self-referential aesthetic phenomenon through which fiction duplicates within, speaking of itself or containing itself.” (Bernardo, 2010) In metafiction, self-referentiality is the key of an aesthetic effort whose priority, in terms of effect, is to present the reader with a ludic illusion. Because of this, the understanding of the term is often related to the idea of metafictional game.

Another definition, this one provided by Patricia Waugh in *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*, also highlights the self-referential quality of metafictional novels: “Metafiction is a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artifact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality.” (Waugh, 1984) This author calls attention to the *status as an artifact*, which is a characteristic of all works of art, but which is not often elicited within their own structure. In this sense, the line which brings fictional works apart from metafictional ones is established by the specificity of metalanguage – a linguistic tool used for describing language itself. Following this reasoning, the definition of Linda Hutcheon helps us to clarify the

analogy: "[Metafiction] is fiction about fiction - that is, fiction that includes within itself a commentary on its own narrative and/or linguistic identity" (Hutcheon, 1980).

There are many different manners through which metafiction can be recognized as a present feature in a literary work. Nevertheless, such diversity seems to be based on a common ground, that is, an illusory impression motivated by the crossing of two (or more) different diegetic levels within the work. This illusion is usually consequential of a conflict of referentiality experienced by the reader, who finds himself in trouble when trying to regard the hierarchic coordination of the diegetic levels of the narrative in his hand. Out of this conflict, the reader is induced to feel as if being part of a game of illusions which provides means to believe that he is either participating on the content narrated, or that the fictional content is penetrating his surrounding reality.

A simple yet clear example of this problem in narrative process can be found in J.M Coetzee's *Slow Man*: the reader is at first presented to a narrative about a man – Paul Rayment – who receives in his house a strange woman who claims to be a writer. In a further episode, this man enters her room and opens her diary, while also allowing the reader to discover what is written on it. There, the reader finds the exactly words which first introduced the narration of the novel that he is holding in his hand. This episode illustrates a canonic movement within metafictional literature – a moment when representative linearity is replaced by an absence of referentiality: the reader, who had previously trusted he was going to read a book about a man who receives a writer in his house, has now to rearrange his reading framework in order to accept that, in fact, the book can be about a writer who develops a conflictual relation with one of her characters.

The example above illustrates the effects of the communication between two different diegetic levels, which has as a main consequence the approximation between the reality of the reader and the one that is constructed in a fictional narrative. In effect, the reality of the reader becomes a constitutive part of the narrative process, attaching itself to the literary work as a new, additional strand. In case of Coetzee's work, the narrative of Paul Rayment reaches the reader's level of reality as soon as it is realized that both reader and character are now able to share the same reading experience. It is the moment when a character understands his role as such, while, at the same time, the reader too feels himself as a character trapped in a metafictional game.

In an essay called *Levels of Reality in Literature*, Italo Calvino explains that "in a work of literature, various levels of reality may meet while remaining quite distinct and

separate, or else they may melt together, achieving a harmony among their contradictions or else performing an explosive mixture.” (Calvino, 1978) The brief examination of the formal structure of Coetzee’s novel, which leads us to perceive two levels of reality within his work, helps us to understand how metafiction subversively articulates these levels of reality in order to promote an impact in the reading flow through the rupture of the referential sense acquired by the reader throughout his reading.

But to begin with, where does the reader take his first sense of referentiality? A work of fiction is, before all, a feigned thing. Bernardo states that “in the same manner that it is necessary an absolute reference in order to establish any sort of relation, reality is necessary for fiction to be constructed from it or against it.” (Bernardo, 2010) Following this path, it becomes clear that a reader’s first referent in order to accept what is going to be read is his own reality. This movement of acceptance of the text as an unreal though still worth reading was explained by Samuel Coleridge under the name of Suspension of Disbelief.

In his essay, Calvino defines Coleridge’s concept as “the condition on which the success of every literary invention depends, even if it is admittedly within the realm of the fabulous and incredible.” (Calvino, 1978) Its name is easily understandable. Disbelief is the reader’s first perception concerning the fictional status of the story narrated, as if saying “this is not real”. Suspension is the somewhat conscious movement of agreement done in order to accept the content of the text within its fictionality, as if admitting “even though this is not real, it may be worth reading anyway”. The reader literally suspends his disbelief, putting aside his reserves concerning the “falseness” of the content while still allowing himself to learn from it. In other words, the suspension of disbelief is the reader’s attitude towards the credibility of the narrative: the reader regards what is being narrated as a hypothetical truth in order not to violate the story’s content, as if it would guarantee to his reading a comforting sense of conclusion.

Bernardo explains that, while bringing the level of reality of a character into the level of reality of the reader, metafiction “would break through the illusory agreement between author and reader, precluding the suspension of disbelief which is necessary for the pleasure of reading”. (Bernardo, 2010) In metafictional writing, believing what is written as a feigned truth is no longer sufficient to provide the reader with an illusory experience of representation. Whether it is a Foster Wallace’s or Borges’ fictional

footnote, a telephone call for Paul Auster in his *New York Trilogy* when he is *not* a character in it, a narrator who is able to establish a direct communication with Don Quixote, or even the presence of factual, historical elements – such as the Holocaust – in a novel admittedly fictional are more than enough to generate a misleading move in the reader's balance between reality and fiction.

4. The Object

4.1 The author

Jonathan Safran Foer is a Jewish-American writer. He was born on February 21st 1977, and had his first novel, *Everything is Illuminated*, published at the early age of 21. This literary effort is a result of his attendance to a creative writing course in Princeton, where he had Joyce Carol Oates as his writing adviser. He is also the writer of two other fictional works, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005), whose narrative takes into account the terrorist attack of 9/11, and *The Three of Codes* (2010), a highly experimental work where form and content are challenged through the very act of paper printing. He has also a non-fictional work that suggests some sort of intellectual activism towards his vegetarianism: *Eating Animals* (2009) is a work in which he explores the themes of factory farming while comprising the cultural meaning of food.

Professor Amy Hungerford of Yale inserts Foer within a set of Jewish American contemporary artist who would belong to a post-modern/late-modern period of literature (YaleCourses, 2008). In this sense, his writing stands beside authors such as Philip Roth, Michael Chabon and Nicole Krauss (who is, in fact, his wife), who take their Jewishness as a permanent component in their works. As a student of Princeton, it may be also possible to find in Foer's work influence of his former teachers Jeffrey Eugenides and Joyce Carol Oates. Professor Hungerford also points to the proximity between *Everything is Illuminated* and Toni Morrison's work while considering topics such time traveling in narrative and collective culture, since Morrison also used to teach there and has those features present in some of her books. On the account of the Holocaust, Foer belongs to the American shelf which is also honored by the presence of masters of the post-war narrative, such as Art Spiegelman (whose *Maus* dialogues in huge proportions with the book of this analysis) and Kurt Vonnegut. Finally, the latent talent on the play with literary formal structure echoes on many other experimentalist contemporary Americans, specially John Barth, David Foster Wallace and Thomas Pynchon, all of them contributing to a virtuous class of writers who were capable of transforming and combining factual life into writing craft – and vice versa.

4.2 The Work

Everything is Illuminated is a novel that tells three stories at the same time and has the Holocaust as a main theme. After the decoding of the hierarchical demands

which structure the novel, it becomes easier to understand what it is about. It tells the story of the trip to Ukraine made by Jonathan, who acts in the work as Foer's fictional double. Jonathan goes to Ukraine in order to learn about Trachimbrod, the region where his ancestors have once lived before its devastation during World War II. There, he meets Alex, who acts as his translator and also as a tour guide. The journey ends up becoming an experience of learning from the war events which affects not only Jonathan's fate, but also Alex's, who discovers that his grandfather has omitted his relations to Trachimbrod's massacre for more than 40 years. More than a plotline aiming at retelling this story, this work presents the reader the manner how such discovery affects Alex, turning him into an unexpected protagonist.

The book brings two different narrators who demonstrate, through the act of writing, the effects that the Nazi events had in their lives. For so, the work is constructed upon three, interlaced diegetic levels, which receive different functions within the narrative. The first diegetic level forms a myth-oriented biography which comprises the early foundation and tragic destruction of Trachimbrod, a Jewish shtetl that used to exist in the countryside of Ukraine. Meanwhile, this strand aims at narrating the life story of Trachimbrod's inhabitants, regarding its specific emphasis on a set of characters which form the lineage of the narrator's ancestors. Nevertheless, this strand is pervaded by elements of fantastic realism, culminating into an overtly fictional biography.

The second and third strands are composed through the narrative voice of Alex, a second narrator which interacts with the first in different levels of textual comprehension. The first consists of Alex's literary effort on retelling the events of the trip. The third, in the form of letters, brings his personal appreciation on the events reported in the second, demonstrating how the experience has affected him at a personal level.

The book appears as a consequence of the meeting and agreement between Alex and Jonathan of working in the composition of two different novels.

Jonathan Safran Foer brings to his *Everything is Illuminated* a set of coinciding information between his life and that of his alter-ego's, hereafter addressed solely as Jonathan. Before World War II, his ancestors used to live in a Jewish shtetl named Trochenbrod, a rural area that belonged to Poland and, after World War I, Ukraine. In the beginning of the eighteenth century, Russian Jews were allowed to farm unfarmed land, and the swampy and unfertile area was then transformed into a prosperous and

autonomous colony. The community would produce goods for its own consumption and, afterwards, for exportation, providing the region with expanding economic development. In some sense, it could be considered as the promised land of the Jews, since it was, besides Israel, the only place in the world inhabited only by Jewish people. In March of 1942, it was destroyed by the Nazis.

In the novel, the name was adapted, being transformed into Trachimbrod. The original name, Trochenbrod, referred to facts that hold similarity to the ones recreated by Foer in his work. Trochen was the name of the owner of the land, and Brod the name of the river that flows along with the perimeter of the town. Because of the wet, swampy solo, the only manner Trochen could cross the land was by horse wagon. In the novel, a horse wagon with the name *Trachim* on it has an accident in the Brod, episode that inspires the naming of the shtetl. Nevertheless, the Jewish name Trochenbrod could not be stated as official. Under Russian rule, the land had to have a Russian name, and for this reason, it ended up being officially named Sofiowka.

The book “The Heavens Are Empty”, written by the researcher Avrom Bendavid-Val and prefaced by Foer himself, recollects all sorts of descriptions made by refugees of Trochenbrod who managed to survive the Nazi attacks by following the swamp drains (which had been previously built in order to dry the land and make it fertile) and hiding in the woods. These people describe all sort of information related to the shtetl, specially its inhabitants, who had different jobs and specific attributions within that small society: the blacksmith, the leather manufacturer, the dairies producer, etc. Such categorization is also present in the novel, for the author attributes to his characters, by adding his occupation beside his name, the role of the creation of a peculiar, perhaps folkloric narrative where the characters occupy social functions inside the structure of the shtetl: the antiques salesman Shloim, the dentist Eliezar, the lonely candle dipper Mordechai C, the disgraced usurer Yankel D – who is one of the protagonists –, and the mad squire Sophiowka, a deceitful character who represents the presence of inconsequent evil in the community, frankly inspired by the mandatory urgency of renaming Trochenbrod with a non-Jewish name.

In his fictional retelling of the history of Trochenbrod (or Trachimbrod, whose name choice appears as a distinguishing feature in order to establish an opposition between the world of historical facts and the fictionality of the written world), Jonathan’s strand covers the story of the foundation of the shtetl until it is finally destroyed by the Nazis, while focusing on some remarkable members of his ancestry.

But more than providing an ideal plot which runs from foundation to destruction, the author establishes a reasoning which pretty much comprises the construction of identity through facts of memory, which in turn reshapes the concept of material life to the extent that it might overcome physical death as long as its memory is maintained. Such an approach can be directly associated to the Jewish tradition, which has been kept alive for thousands of years through the practice of storytelling and memory eliciting. To illustrate this emphatic view, his characters-ancestors share, in spite of time passing, common features, characteristics and memory which lead to the understanding that they all constitute the same, unique string of life.

The reading of this novel clarifies that the inspiration for this biographic strand comes from the narrative of the second strand, which takes into account the journey of Jonathan to Ukraine in search of the history of his family origins. It must be pointed out that the actual writer indeed took a 3-days trip to Ukraine, which remained unsuccessful in terms of findings, as can be seen in original webpage of the book:

In the summer of his junior year of college, Jonathan Safran Foer journeyed to Ukraine with a faded photograph, hoping to find the woman who saved his grandfather from the Nazis. He intended to write a non-fictional account of his experiences, but he returned home deeply disappointed, having found next to nothing. Fortunately, Jonathan turned his journey into a miraculous work of fiction. (www.jonathansafranfoerbooks.com)

Yet, the necessity of understanding his past in order to conform to his present combined with the absence of useful discovery may have been the elements which, with the aid of fictional writing, transformed his factual failure into a literary organism. In effect, the word *absence* appears in the novel countless times in a variety of episodes, proposing a wide range of meaningful insights. It was the absence of knowledge about his past that lead him to fictionalize it in order to better understand his present – or, as said by Yankel D, *the origin of a story is always an absence*.

4.2.1 The disposition of chapters

The book opens with the first chapter of Alex's book, which aims at telling the events of the trip, under the supervision of Jonathan, who acts as his editor. His strand contains commentaries addressed to Jonathan.

Next, two chapters of Jonathan's story appear, with the intention of recreating the life that once existed in Trachimbrod.

Then comes a letter from Alex to Jonathan. In this letter, he discusses some issues present in his and Jonathan's work, as well as some details of his own life. Alex's letters appear as responses to Jonathan's letters, even though the latter's are never presented to the reader. Although Jonathan's amount of chapters sent may vary, the order above described patterns the chapters' disposition. The final organization as it is presented in the book can be seen below:

Table 1 - Order of chapters

Chapter	Narrator	Name of chapter
1	Alex	An overture to the commencement of a very rigid journey
2	Jonathan	The beginning of the world often comes 1791
3	Jonathan	The lottery 1791
4	Alex	Letter – 20 July 1997
5	Alex	An overture to encountering the hero, and then encountering the hero
6	Jonathan	The book of recurrent dreams 1791
7	Jonathan	Falling in love 1791-1796
8	Jonathan	Another lottery 1791
9	Alex	Letter – 23 September 1997
10	Alex	Going forth to Lutsk
11	Jonathan	Fall in love 1791-1803
12	Jonathan	Recurrent secrets 1791 - 1943
13	Jonathan	A parade, a death, a proposition 1804-1969
14	Alex	Letter - 28 October 1997
15	Alex	The very rigid search
16	Jonathan	The dial 1941-1804-1941
17	Alex	Letter – 17 November 1997
18	Alex	Falling in love
19	Jonathan	The wedding was so extraordinary or It all goes downhill after the wedding, 1941
20	Jonathan	The dupe of chance - 1941 - 1924
21	Jonathan	The thickness of blood and drama 1934
22	Alex	Letter - 12 December 1997
23	Alex	What we saw when we saw Trachimbrod or Falling in love
24	Jonathan	Falling in love - 1934 - 1941
25	Alex	Letter – 24 December 1997
26	Alex	An overture to illumination
27	Jonathan	Falling in love - 1934 - 1941
28	Alex	Letter - 26 January 1998
29	Alex	Illumination
30	Jonathan	The wedding was so extraordinary or The end of the moment that never ends, 1941
31	Jonathan	The first blasts, and then love 1941
32	Jonathan	The persnickiness of memory, 1941
33	Jonathan	The beginning of the world often comes 1791 - 1942
34	Alex	Letter – 22 January 1998

(As can be seen, Alex's strand opens the novel, even though I chose to call it "the second strand". An explanation on my decision can be read on the introduction of the sixth chapters of this work.)

5. The First Strand Analysis

5.1 The Safrans' Saga

This fictional narrative strand consists of the story written and narrated by Jonathan, the alter-ego of the author, as a result of his quest for the origins of his family in the countryside of Ukraine. The details of this journey, however, are told in a different strand, in which Jonathan – there also referred as ‘the hero’ - is treated as a major character, from the perspective of a second narrator (Alex), namely the person who receives, guides, translates and is inspired (and even encouraged, in a third, epistolary strand) by his new Jewish-American *hero* to write his own novel (which shall be described and analyzed in the next chapter of this work).

The narrator's namesake, borrowed from the author Jonathan Safran Foer – the *real* one who has written *Everything is Illuminated* – happens to be a first hint of the issue of identity (and authorship, as a direct consequence of such debate), a matter widely explored in the book that gets specially confusing when taken to account the fact that the writer himself has indeed been to Ukraine more or less for the same reason as the one described by Alex in his respective strand: the seeking for family roots. In spite of the rather convenient coincidence, the book does not aim at depicting the actual travel. Instead, through the medium of an alter-ego, the author fictionalizes his experience by constructing a long and inventive family biography which, in the lack of useful findings (to the extent of the search itself, the author's trip has remained unsuccessful – or, quoting one of the characters of his section, *the origin of a story is always an absence* pg. 230), may provide a convincing explanation of who he is and how the string of life has managed to put him where he now stands.

The story begins with an accident in a nameless Jewish shtetl, *when Trachim B's double axle wagon either did or did not pin him against the bottom of the Brodriver* (pg. 8). While the presence of the vehicle's owner during the event remains uncertain, another body is found floating nearby the place where the thing sunk, in an implicit, yet direct reference to the biblical episode of Moses floating on the Nile. Out of this event, the body of the little girl is saved and sent to be cared by *the disgraced usurer Yankel D.* When this character is finally told the news, the narrator comes to mention his personal relation to the narrative when defining him as his *great-great-great-great-great-great-grandfather* (pg. 42).

5.1.1 The disgraced usurer Yankel D

Throughout the novel, the name *Safran* comes and goes. It first appears when related to *Yankel D.* Before receiving that name, the *disgraced usurer* had been called Safran. For some reason – that remains unexplained -, the character has got involved in some kind of judicial problem. *Yankel pleaded guilty to all charges of unfit practice with the hope that it might lighten his punishment. In the end, he lost his usurer's license* (pg. 46).

From this episode, the reader learns that this first Safran has suffered a complete identity recasting, for both his name and public figure have come to getting socially readjusted.

Before the trial, Yankel-then-Safran was unconditionally admired. In this book, the character of Yankel D happens to be the one – yet the farthest to the narrator – to insert the artistic interest in the lineage of Jonathan, as if it was a first impulse which would have reached its completion in the form of this novel – just as if the novel itself, in its effort of getting to be what it is (i.e. a work of art that won't erupt out of a sudden) was seeking for its own roots too.

Yankel D. is described as having had (before the trial) profuse relations with art studies.

“He was the president (and treasurer and secretary and only member) of the Comitee for the Good and Fine Arts, and founder, multiterm chairman and only teacher of the school of Loftier Learning, which met in his house and whose classes were attended by Yankel himself (...)”(pg. 46)

Accordingly, the narrator attributes to Yankel the most individualistic – not to say solitary – aspect of being an artist (or closely related to it), a choice, it is said, that can even lead to death (in the effort of remembering to whom could the wrecked wagon possibly belong, the dubious and disliked character Sofiowka conceives the possibility by saying, while retracting from a previous thought, *No, wait. He died from being an artist* (pg. 9)).

Addressed to the extent of the narrative's quest, the descriptive paragraph above quoted also mentions a *traveling artist to paint a portrait of him* (Yankel), what is more or less the same thing that Jonathan, the narrator, does in his work, although through writing instead of painting.

So in spite of all this admiration, the trial ends up weighting more in Yankel's life than in his intellectual status. The character leaves the shtetl and changes his name in an effort of changing his life into a shameless one by forcing a drastic alteration in two basic identity operators (name and home place). Nevertheless, he will only have his faith restored when fathering Brod, the baby that was found floating in the river after the wagon incident.

The loneliness of Yankel is also heightened by the fact that he has been left by his wife, who goes away with another man while solely leaving a note saying *I had to do it for myself*.

So when Brod is finally given to Yankel, the character has to find a manner to explain the absence of her mother without breaking her heart, since the character has developed an extreme affection for his adopted daughter. In order to undertake such task, Yankel decides to make up a story that will both comfort and satisfy her maternal needs, while once again reaffirming the thesis that *the origin of a story is always an absence*. In such a manner, the disgraced usurer "made up a story about her mother's early death – *painless, in childbirth* – and answered the many questions that arose in the way he felt would cause her the least pain". Considering the narrative structure of *Everything is Illuminated*, it is interesting to notice that this episode mirrors the role of fictional writing within the project itself, which is to provide an alternative, fictional version of the past in order to explain the present.

5.1.2 The Kolker

Along with the name *Safran*, more meaningful absences are also found in the narration of this next (Brod's) generation. As if in a narrative movement of substitution, another *Safran* is given place in this story right after a previous one, the disgraced usurer Yankel D, dies of natural causes on the floor of his library. While Brod is crying on the face of his dead father, *a wink of lightning illuminated the Kolker at the window* (pg. 91).

By definition, a Kolker is a person that comes from the Kolki, a city alluded for being the home of the workforce of Trachimbrod. The usefulness of these men is illustrated at first by the fact that it was some of them who were requested to remove the wagon from the river Brod. Afterwards, it is also mentioned that these people constitute a considerable parcel of the workforce of the flour mill that is situated in the shtetl.

Despite having been born Shalom, the character who is introduced at the moment of Yankel's passing is effectively known as Kolker.

This character appears in the narrative when Yankel dies, and in spite of Brod's insistence for the man to go away, the Kolker's refusal to leave leads Brod to end up choosing him as her man, demonstrating respect to Yankel's wish of never having a man while he was alive.

Brod lived an intense marriage with the Kolker until the last minute of his life, even though a tragic incident in the flour mill had altered the dynamics of their affection. In the night before the event, *Brod said 'don't go' (to work) to her new husband, too familiar with the flour mill's course of taking without warning the lives of its young workers* (pg. 212). Later on, the reader is informed of how a disk-saw blade escaped the engines of the mill, running through the working area and finishing its journey *embedded perfectly vertical in the middle of his skull* (pg. 125). The Kolker, it is said, *was barely hurt at all* (pg. 126). However, the accident caused him a strong Tourette's syndromes, besides turning him unrecognizably aggressive. For this reason, the Kolker had his young life shortened, and when death finally started to surround him, Brod *persuaded him to change his name for a second time* (pg. 136). Like in the Greek myth of Sisyphus, who was punished by the gods for trying to deceive death, Brod thought that the name change *would confuse the Angel of Death when He came to take the Kolker away (...). So Brod named him Safran*. Almost simultaneously, Brod gives birth to their baby while *Shalom-then-Kolker-now-Safran dies*, and without ever acknowledging the exact moment of his death (*the house was so consumed with new life that no one was aware of new death*, pg. 139), she found herself unable to homage her husband, since *the Jewish custom forbade the naming of a child after a living relative. So instead she named him Yankel, like her two other children*.

From this episode, it becomes possible to infer that all male characters of this family might carry either the name of the original Safran or its analogous name choice, Yankel, until the day it reaches the narrator, Jonathan *Safran* Foer, resembling the Colombian novel *100 Years of Solitude*, in which the names of the first male offspring is perpetuated through the whole chronological extension of the story, as in an effort to reinforce the uniqueness of the lineage identity.

5.1.3 The Dial

Differently, though, from the work above mentioned, in *Everything is Illuminated*, its author will not contend the narration of every generation until it gets to his own. Instead, another device is going to be used in order to separate past and present while still joining them into a same, continuous narrative flow: the Dial.

According to the online version of the Jewish Encyclopedia, a dial is a device for displaying the time by means of the shadow of a gnomon or style thrown by the rays of the sun on a graduated disk. In other words, a dial is a type of sundial. So as it turns out to be, the reader is able to understand that the tragic fate of the Kolker was not caused by an event as random as it might have seemed. When the author attaches a disk-saw blade in the head of the Kolker, he rather manages to build a symbolic tool precisely in the body of his character. Necessarily, the dimension of such a symbology is expanded when this image is physically fixed in the context of the novel through the raising of a monument:

The men of the flour mill (...) chipped in to have the Kolker's body bronzed, and petitioned the governing council the statue in the center of the shtetl square as a symbol of strength and vigilance which, because of the perpendicular saw blade, could also be used to tell more or less accurate time by the sun. (pg. 139)

5.1.4 The grandfather

As it is going to be further explained, the Dial circumscribes the passage of time in the novel, filling a chronological gap that starts in 1809, when the Kolker dies, and ends in 1924, when the narrative starts to cover the life of the narrator's grandfather, namely the third and last Safran of the novel (except for Jonathan himself) and the protagonist of the second part of this strand.

The narrator's grandfather plays a key role in the novel, since it is mainly because of his history that Jonathan goes to Ukraine to find out about his family origins. Outside the novel, the author's grandfather really lived in a shtetl in that country. In reality, he was one of the only survivors of the Nazi attacks that struck and erased the region from the map. Safran, the grandfather, managed to escape the bombing and flee to the United States, where he would die five weeks after arriving.

The character of the grandfather is depicted as a prolific lover, being in charge, since very young, of the “consolation” of the widows that inhabited the shtetl: the synagogue of which he took part would *pay him to perform (...) services for the widows and feeble ladies* (pg. 169). His helpfulness, of a rather sexual efficiency in spite of his early age – he was only ten when he started to undertake such tasks – is also explained through the occasion of an absence. Accordingly, this Safran was born with teeth, what would make *his mother’s nipples bloody and sore*, and which *eventually made breastfeeding impossible* (pg. 165). As imagined by the author, it was this physical anomaly that made his grandfather to grow up without ever receiving the nutrients that his body needed. Such an absence would be responsible for another one – the movements of his right arm. So the success with women is here fully attributed to the *dead arm*, which would start arousing pity and would end up working as a seductive tool. Among a whole set of other attributions – because of his arm, he did *not*: a) work in the flour mill; b) get sent off to be killed in hopeless battles against the Nazis; c) die trying to swim back the Brod river to save his wife when Trachimbrod was under attack; d) drown himself in the river, (pg. 166) –, it’s from the arm of this third Safran that this biographic project came up, which is basically learned when it is read that *his arm saved him again when it caused Augustine to fall in love with him and save him*. Had not the arm helped him to both float in the Brod and seduce Augustine, would this narrator have been able to write his story?

In her turn, Augustine first appears in *Everything is Illuminated* in a different strand, where the reader learns that the writer’s only clue to start his search in Ukraine is a photograph of his grandfather with her after the war had ended. This character (or *anticharacter*, since she it never really appears in the novel) is the only evident connection between the two strands. In this biographic strand, Augustine is first introduced when Brod – the daughter of Yankel –, using her telescope to foresee the future (among other things), happens to have the lens of the fantastic instrument pointing to the very picture that has triggered the search. Augustine is a mysterious presence that remains unsolved in the novel, even in spite of its role of being, at the same time, the main object of the author’s search in Ukraine (objectively speaking, for it is his only clue), and the reason why he is able to be writing his novel (under the supposition that, once the shtetl was completely devastated by bombing, he would not have been born if Augustine had not saved his grandfather).

To conclude the cyclic lineage chaining that links the four Safrans of this novel – Yankel, the Kolker, the grandfather and Jonathan – an episode shall be observed here that functions as a consolidation of the identity issue that has been explored in the present section of my analysis.

As was previously mentioned, a statue was built from the very body of the Kolker, which would come to be interpreted as a Dial and which would circumscribe the passage of time in the novel. Allocated in the main square of Trachimbrod, the Dial is depicted as a sacred image that represents strength, vigilance and, soon, luck's power. It was adored in such a manner that *men and women journeyed from distant shtetls to rub his nose, which was worn to the flesh in only a month time and had to be rebronzed* (pg. 140). So many times was it touched, rubbed and kissed that it would more often than not require a new layer of bronzing, what would gradually make it less and less similar to the original Kolker. *For each recasting, the craftsman modeled the Dial's face after the faces of his male descendents – reverse heredity*. In this passage, the narrator draws attention to the fact that, in his lineage, not only future generations learn and apprehend from their isolated past – in this particular case, through every new session of rebronzing, the memory of the past keeps pace with the renewed generations. In parenthesis, the narrator adds:

(So when my grandfather thought he was growing to look like his great-great- great-grandfather, what he really saw was that his great- great- great-grandfather was growing to look like him. His revelation was just how much like himself he was) (pg. 140).

As it can be seen, the Dial was not only a conceptual invention of general time to be taken into account within the symbolic representation of time through a Jewish sun-clock in order to assign an abrupt narrative break, chronologically speaking. Other than all that, the Dial elicits an identitarian unity that embraces the sequence of Safrans that share a somewhat common memory, as if merging them (literally, in bronze) into one ideal archetype whose main characteristic is to face a love dilemma of different natures, yet all of them being expressed with sizeable proportions: Yankel's unconditional love for Brod and his fear of dying; the Kolker's love for Brod and his unmanageable violence towards her; the grandfather's love for his yet unborn daughter and his fear of losing her to the war that was approaching the shtetl; the narrator's love

for Augustine (which is better exposed in Alex's strand), for having saved his also beloved grandfather, for his own past, roots and origins and, therefore, for himself.

At the end of this strand, two days after the first bombing of Trachimbrod, the reader is finally able to witness the symbolic encounter between the grandfather and the Kolker who, personified in the Dial, could actually respond to the former's questioning.

Still overwhelmed by the terror of the war attack that took place right at the moment of his nuptial night, the grandfather receives a complete lesson on loving from the Kolker. As in a self-reflective moment (since the statue is described as looking pretty much like himself), the grandfather reveals – just like his antecedents – his fear of dying in love with his recent wife Zosha.

In response, the Kolker explains that his love is actually for the baby in Zosha's belly. *The others are being pulled back, and you are being pulled forward* (pg. 264), he adds, highlighting that his interlocutor's very concern is, above all, with the continuity of his lineage and, therefore, the long lasting of his memory.

In order, then, to express his profound knowledge on the subject of love, the Kolker uses two stories that, in context, function as parables that illustrate how love supposedly works. Interestingly, both stories are once again supported by absences.

In the first one, the Kolker reveals that his wife Brod would go to his bedroom every night and share his bed with him while he was asleep. Here, it is necessary to clarify that, after his accident in the flour mill, the Kolker and Brod would sleep in separate rooms, so she would not get hurt by his involuntary acts of violence. Representing this absent control of his own body, a hole on the wall that separated their beds was the safest choice that they found to keep close enough to see and feel each other – and even make love (it was through this hole that their child was conceived). In this small tale, the Kolker tells the grandfather that, in the end, *the hole didn't matter* (pg. 264), as if to explain that the absence – in this case, the literal absence of the other in the same room – is a natural, maybe even necessary feature of love.

The second narrative of the Kolker tells about what it is like to live next to a waterfall. After moving to their new home, Brod would complain about the sound of the waters: *I can't even hear myself thinking* (pg. 265). Here, he addresses his point to time as the necessary feature in order to get love properly shaped. *Time, I urged. Give it time.* (pg. 265), he reproduces to the grandfather. In the end, the sound is gone, for time has made them accustomed to it.

Life continued, as life continues, and time passed, as time passes, and after a little more than two months: (...) do you hear that thing?

What thing? She asked.

Exactly! (...)

And this is what living next to a waterfall is like, Safran. (...)" (pg. 265)

After bringing the example of widows who, one day, find themselves able to replace grief with a useful sadness, he finishes his point: *Every love is carved from loss. Mine was. Yours is. Your great- great- great-grandchildren's will be. But we learn to live in that loss* (pg. 265). As if predicting the future of the grandfather, who will inexorably lose everything on the next attack of the Shtetl and will have to learn how to live in the absence of family and homeplace, this passage concludes the Safrans' saga while giving hints on what is learned by Jonathan, the narrator who decides to face his own past – which remains projected in the encounter above depicted – in order to discover who he is and how much of this past is still a part of him.

5.2 Memory and Writing

In *Everything is Illuminated*, the fictional biographer Jonathan extensively addresses the issue of memory in his strand, just as if it were itself a haunting character. It must be pointed out that, in this work, memory and writing entwine in such a manner that it seems as if they were indistinguishable concepts, rather dependents of one another in order to exist. *Writing*, both as verb and noun, is going to be the main object through which the narrator will find himself able to explore, overcome and release his memorialistic past. Thus, this work, within its (fictional) biographic context, consists of a release of memory through writing.

5.2.1 The Haggadah

In 2012, Jonathan Safran Foer had an article published in the New York Times, where he explained and exposed his motivations for leaving his own writings aside in order to invest in another project. He was talking about a new, revisited version of the Haggadah, the Jewish guidebook “whose main core is the retelling of the Exodus from Egypt” (New York Times, 2012). While *Haggadah* means *the telling*, he explains that the book is read yearly during the Seder during the first night of Passover, as a ritualistic act of preserving the origins and the memory of the Jewish tradition. In his article, Foer

brings up a few statements that have sparked in me the idea for this work – due to the strong connection that one is able to find between these two texts.

At first, Jonathan’s strand holds similarity with the Haggadah in the sense that both aim at telling a story that helps to shape the identity consolidation of a group of people – in the Haggadah, the Jews; in Jonathan’s strand, the inhabitants of Trachimbrod.

As previously mentioned, the “baptism” of the Shtetl only happens after the incident in which a wagon – where the name *Trachim* could be read – sinks in the Brod river and a baby is found floating in its surface (arousing the natural allusion with Moses floating on the Nile in a basket). A few days after the episode, *an irascible magistrate in Lvov had demanded a name for the nameless shtetl (...) that would be used for new maps and census recordings* (pg. 50). The disgraced usurer Yankel D, who had been already chosen in a raffle which determined him to be the father of the baby, is again chosen in new raffle for the name of the shtetl. His suggestion, Trachimbrod (a combination between the name on the wagon and the name of the river), performs the consolidation of the identity of the Shtetl, not only for now having a name, but also for it being included in the maps, leaving behind a memory of political inexistence.

A second approximation that can be made between the Haggadah and this biographic strand is the festival that yearly takes place to celebrate memory. In the Jewish tradition, a celebration named *Passover* is held in the 15th day of Nisan (Jewish calendar) – which typically falls in March or April of the Gregorian calendar – to celebrate the liberation of the Jews from slavery in ancient Egypt. During the Seder – the ritual that opens the Passover holiday and which consists of the reading and discussing of some passages of the Haggadah –, is elicited the collective memory of the Jewish culture: it is a reflective moment in which every Jew should demonstrate concern with his/her origins and trajectory, in other words, as Foer quotes the Haggadah in his article, “in every generation a person is obligated to view himself as if he were the one who went out of Egypt”. Through a religious praxis, the Seder and the Passover encourage the Jewish individual to valorize its own, personal narrative.

The holiday, which in Jonathan’s narrative receives the name of *Trachimday*, has is similar in both structure and purpose: it is a festival and it celebrates a fundamental event within the context in which it is inserted. The dates also coincide, for it maintains the original date of the wagon sinking (March 18th 1791), and the festival is also kept annually until the destruction of the Shtetl, which happens on the very same day, in

1942, when the Nazi onslaught takes place in Trachimbrod. As can be seen, Jonathan's narrative projects Trachimday out of Passover, frankly differing on the actual facts that they celebrate, but nevertheless conserving its symbolic dimension, whose concern is centered in the memory of past and the importance that it holds on the reflection upon the present. In his article, the author explains that he has taken time away from his own writings because he intended to take a step towards a Judaism of question marks rather than quotation marks; towards the story of his people, his family and himself. Analogous to this disposition, the fictional narrator Jonathan demonstrates the same as he decides to investigate and, afterwards, tell his story; and when the real Jonathan Safran Foer informs, in his article that his answer for his 6-year-old child's question *was Moses a real person?* was *I don't know, but we're related to him*, Jonathan-the-narrator too demonstrates, through the encounter of his grandfather with the Kolker – through the name Safran that accompanies the evolution of the lineage, through the inclination for writing and how it can be ultimately connected to Yankel D's passion for books – that a person is always closely related to their past.

5.2.2 The Book of Antecedents

Also contending the strong Jewish presence in the book, the Haggadah itself seems to be represented there, though transmuted into a more simplistic version of the original guidebook.

In this narrative, *The book of antecedents* plays the role of historical document through which *every schoolboy has learned the story of Trachimbrod* (pg. 196). Although it started out as a record of historic events, the book has soon gotten the proportions of a diary in which all kind of information concerning the life in Trachimbrod could be found, especially because any inhabitant of the shtetl was able to add an entry of any sort – so that *any schoolboy could easily find out what his grandfather ate for breakfast on a given Thursday 50 years before* (and indeed Jonathan does describe what his grandfather ate in his first, nuptial breakfast, on page 262).

In fact, this small sample of the efficiency of the *book of antecedents* and its correlation with the episodes in the novel actually helps, for the present purposes, to illustrate how this guidebook serves the narrative in an encyclopedic manner.

Taking the form of an appendix, 35 of the innumerable entries are fully included in the strand during the narrative of Safran's (the grandfather) school life, appearing in the

book as a tool that helps to complement the narrative with collaborations of a second point of view (because the entries are anonymous). As will be seen, these entries serve in different levels of comprehension, since they deal with a variety of thematic spheres comprised by the novel.

Concerning the Safrans' saga, for example, more details of the main characters can be learned in entries such as *Yankel D shameful bead*; *The first rape of Brod D* and the genealogic exposition of *The five generations between Brod and Safran*. To what concerns the history of the shtetl, the strand brings entries on *The flour mill* and *The Dial*. Conceptualistic discussion on arts and literature can be seen in *The novel, when everyone was convinced he had one in him*, and also in *art*, as well as in its derivatives *artifact*, *artifice*, *ifact*, *ificie* and the inventive *ifactifice*, which are going to be reviewed in further discussion. Concerning Judaism, some critical thought is ironically addressed in sections like *Us, the Jews* and *Jews have six senses*, this last one providing useful insight to the actual discussion on memory. It says:

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

When a Jew encounters a pin, he asks: What does it remember like? (pg. 199)

While contrasting the use of memory made by Gentiles, the excerpt highlights the intimate relation that Jews hold towards their sense of collective memory. Through the metaphor of the pinprick, is again provided a notion that events of the present may not only be motivated, but also explained by past ones. In addition, the exclusivity that is given to the Jewish people upon the idea of memory as a vital sense only contributes to the specific role that is given to memory in this narrative. In effect, this vital property of memory is here illustrated by two episodes: the first related to Yankel's fear of dying; the second to the first bombing of Trachimbrod.

As Yankel was already 72 when he fathered Brod, his fear of dying went growing proportionally to the expanding love he felt for her. *Fearing his frequent deficiencies of memory, he began writing fragments of his life story on his bedroom ceiling with one of Brod's lipsticks (...). This way, his life would be the first thing he would see when he awoke each morning, and last thing before going to sleep each night* (pg. 83). Years later, when Brod arrives home after a Trachimday parade, she finds Yankel dead on the floor of his library, while *Yankel's lipstick autobiography came flaking off his bedroom ceiling, falling gently like blood-stained snow to his bed and floor* (pg. 97) . [emphasis added]

Generations had passed when, in June 18, 1941, *nine months before the shtetl was the focus of direct Nazi assault* (pg. 258), Trachimbrod would suffer a complete twist on what is referred to be the sense of memory, as a consequence of the mislead attack which was actually intended to a site in Rovno hills. In the chapter *The persnickitiness of memory, 1941*, which also brings the symbolic conversation between the grandfather and the Kolker, the narrator addresses to the shock suffered by the community of the shtetl, whose aftermath was involved in *strange inertness*.

Activity was replaced by thought. Memory. Everything reminded someone of something, which seemed winsome at first (...), but quickly became devitalizing. Memory begat memory begat memory.(pg. 258) [emphasis added]

Jonathan uses the term *devitalizing* to express the feeling shared by the shtetl, a particularly interesting choice when it is noticed the vital properties of memory as it is mentioned in the *book of antecedents*.

Both situations above mentioned demonstrate a strong correlation between memory and life. In the second episode, the notion of memory – and all the sense of time referentiality it provides – is shattered by the chance of imminent death. In reverse, as is depicted in the first one, the fall of the flakes of memory from the ceiling onto the dead body of Yankel D illustrate an idea that memory too is extinguished in the absence of life.

Memory is thus seen as an organizing force that orders the events of life in a rather different, perhaps more useful manner than time does. In conjunction with the Haggadah, this narrative conceives the experience of life in a broad perspective that

overcomes individuality in service of memory itself. In this sense, back to the NYT article, Foer addresses to the Haggadah as a “book of memory”, similarly to what his alter-ego does when exposing the *book of antecedents*:

The book of antecedents, once updated yearly, was now continually updated, and when there was nothing to report, the full-time committee would report its reporting, just to keep the book moving, expanding, becoming more like life: we are writing... we are writing... we are writing... (pg. 196)

5.3 Final Word

In the first strand of *Everything is Illuminated* is proposed a direct, consequential relation between life and the facts of memory. Sequential facts are here understood as elements of the same, collective memory that will refute the association of life with individuality or chronology in service of a broad, diffuse yet continuous understanding of life story whose beginning takes place before individual childbirth, and whose end surpasses the limits of individual death. It is perhaps for this reason that, structurally speaking, this biographic strand won't conform to chronological delimitation. If there is memory of the events, facts, things, people and beliefs, there will be presence and influence of them, and thus, through memory, their life will be kept.

Within such context, writing comes up as the necessary tool through which memory can be preserved in the haste of preserving life. Even though Trachimbrod has been devastated by Nazi assault, its memory and influence on the narrator's character will be preserved through writing much as the Haggadah does in spite of all odds that have always tried to destroy the Jewish culture, since, in Foer words, *in the absence of stable homeland, Jews have made their home in books* (Foer, 2012). Just like the words Foer addresses to the Haggadah when he defines it as *a book of living memory*, Jonathan's biographic strand plays the same role within a strict, personal context, providing a release of his past memory in order to make it too become more like life.

6. The second strand (and correlations with the first):

As mentioned before, I decided to refer to Alex's strand as "the second" strand, although the disposition of chapters shows that this strand is the one that effectively opens the book. Here, I intend to briefly clarify my choice.

The opening of the novel consists of a rather formal presentation of the narrator to its reader. When the novel is opened, the first thing that is read is *My legal name is Alexander Perchov (...)* (pg. 1). One page later, Alex says *This is why I was so efferecent to go to Lutsk and translate for Jonathan Safran Foer* (pg. 2). Here, the very name of the novel's author is evoked, providing the novel with a metafictional inversion in which the author becomes a third-person character. Meanwhile, the reader has not yet learned that the book is divided in two narrative voices.

On the second chapter a narrative voice is presented which noticeably differs from the first in many aspects, especially in tone and lexical choice, for it presents a refined vocabulary and an elaborate grammar. The visible contrast between this narrator's voice and Alex's, whose *second tongue* [sic] is not so *premium* (Alex words, pg. 23) - in spite of his role as "professional" translator -, combined with the new ambientation of the contents (the reader departs from Alex's "modern" hometown, Odessa, and is now transported to Trachimbrod's early foundation), allow the reader to understand that he is reading two different stories at the same time. Throughout the reading, it becomes clear that this "alternative" story is narrated by Jonathan Safran Foer, the American writer whose trip to Ukraine is reported in Alex strand.

So the first thing that made me trust Jonathan's strand as the main one (which led me to refer to it as being the first strand) was:

- a) the strand's authorship, in concomitance with the book's authorship;
- b) the fact that the novel suggests Jonathan's strand as being a result of his trip to Ukraine (narrated by Alex);
- c) its independence from the other strands (meaning it could have been published as a novel of its own, that is, without the addition of the other two strands).

Therefore, I decided to present Alex's strand as being the second one, not only because it functions as a "making of" of the literary enterprise of the *real writer* (Alex words, pg. 100) , but also because its existence consistently depends on the existence of Jonathan's work: it was encouraged, funded and advised by the character of Jonathan. In addition, through the comments addressed to Jonathan, this strand builds a metafictional experience which would become purposeless without Jonathan's strand.

Whether the reader is familiar or not with the contents of the book, Alex's narrative provoked in me an initial confusion between the levels of reality that compose the novel. Even if I was not expecting to find a narrator who borrows the author's name – Jonathan –, which would not consist of an unusual event in a fictional work, yet I was made aware of a displacement of point of view as soon as Alex explicitly addresses Jonathan in the body of his own work. The presence of Jonathan, evoked by Alex on his strand establishes a relation of hierarchical dependence of the latter on the former narrator, which allowed me to perceive Alex as a co-author of Jonathan's work, and not the opposite.

6.1 The Journey to Trachimbrod

The second strand of *Everything is Illuminated* features Jonathan, the narrator of the first strand, as a third-person character in his journey to Ukraine in search of Trachimbrod. Although sensibly shorter than the previous one – the 3-day trip took half of the length of Jonathan's work to be fully narrated –, this narrative also presents three generations, which again happen to be linked by the same name (in this case, Alex). Besides this, the present strand also mirrors Jonathan's narrative in other topics, such as memory and heritage, vital senses, World War II, similarities between the two narrators and, ultimately, Augustine. Furthermore, Alex's strand arouses the first metafictional incursions of the novel, which will achieve the completion of its role within the third strand.

This strand is narrated by Alexander Perchov, an Ukrainian boy who works for the Jewish-American writer Jonathan as his translator.

6.1.1 The Alexes

Alex was sired in 1977, the same year as the hero of this novel (pg. 1). As the statement shows, a few connections approximate the two narrators: they are the same age, and both are simultaneously writing a novel – even though the simultaneity of the facts is only clarified with the reading of the third strand where, through the aid of mailed letters, they send and comment on isolated sections of their works. The term *sired*, unusual to the purpose for which it is applied, is here useful to illustrate the language that is used by Alex in his narrative. In the effort of writing in English, the narrator reveals the difficulties he has in order to express in the language in such a

manner that his linguistic choice, in contrast with Jonathan's high standard writing, ends up providing a comic tone for the book.

Alex is son and grandson of two other important characters who are also named Alexander, a matter that holds similarity with the first strand, in which all male protagonists shared the same name. The three Alexes work in the Heritage Tour, a travel agency which, lacking adequate infrastructure and professionalism, only operates due to the family's necessity of money. When Alex learns that he is going to translate for the Jewish-American writer, he becomes overwhelmed by culture shock and suffers a complete twist in the account of his own origins, his interests, his reality and therefore, his own, personal narrative. Reproducing – through an exhibitionistic yet broken English – an extensive repertoire of canonic clichés of Miami lifestyle, Alex promotes himself in order to get inserted in an imaginary of expensive cars, beautiful girls, intense sexuality and infinite money. In effect, his writing is always trying to convince the reader of his good appearance, his success with women and his busy and extroverted personality in the glamorous and expensive nightlife of Odessa, his hometown – a large amount of information that will later be admitted deceitful, in the third strand. However, when Jonathan finally arrives, Alex – *who would be electrical to meet an American* (pg. 27) – has his idealization of the foreigner completely deconstructed. *He did not appear like either the Americans I had witnessed in magazines, with yellow hairs and muscles, or the Jews of the historic books, with no hairs and prominent bones. (...) I was underwhelmed to the maximum* (pg. 32).

The other Alexes that compose this narrator's lineage will demonstrate strong differences in character: while in Jonathan's narrative pictures men of useful hands and loving hearts, here two authoritarian and hostile men are portrayed, assigning, in terms of family structure, a noticeable contrast between the two narratives that run in parallel.

Alex's father is described by his son as a shameful, non-rare violent being who will beat him every time he lacks conversation skills. While idealizing the American lifestyle, Alex decides that he wants to make his living in America. When communicating this intention to his father – clearly inspired by the arrival of the "hero" (a word choice that denotes his admiration towards the American) –, the father denies the permission, unreasonably explaining that *great-grand-father was from Odessa, and grandfather was from Odessa, and Father, me was from Odessa, and your boys will be from Odessa* (pg. 28). In the end of this episode, after some enquiries of the son about

the father's position despite his desires for his own future, the father punches him, and *this was the end of the conversation* (pg. 29).

The father works as some kind of manager of the family business, and he accepts the work of guiding his client through Ukraine even though he has no clue about the route for their final destination, Trachimbrod. For this, he relies on the knowledge of his father – Alex's grandfather –, an elderly man who has been claiming to be blind ever since he lost his wife, 2 years before the time of the narration (at this point, another dichotomy is assigned, specifically on the account of the vital senses: that between memory, as a vital sense – as exposed in the previous section –, and its relation to writing, and sight, and its relation with empirical experience. Such discussion will be presented in a further moment of this section).

Alex's grandfather demonstrates no interest in going on this trip, and his reluctance increases as he goes being informed of the details – that they are going to drive to Lutsk (and then Trachimbrod) and that they are going to drive for a Jew. He promises it is his last trip with the Heritage Tour, and his discomfort gradually starts to become more and more explicit, resulting in a mysterious behavior that will only be explained in the very last episode of the strand.

6.1.2 The Trip

During the trip, Jonathan shows the picture of Augustine with his grandfather to Alex, explaining to him that this is the girl who saved his grandfather, she being the one they're looking for. Alex addresses to the girl in a romantic tone, as in a strong effort to provide the reader with empathy towards her. As they go driving, Alex's grandfather faces the picture, demonstrating interest in the girl. In the end, it is as if all characters in the car had fallen in love with Augustine, turning them all obsessed with the possibility of finding her.

As they don't know the route to the lost town of Trachimbrod, they need to ask strangers for information. However, the erratic men who wandered on the road were not able to inform the location of the place. Nevertheless, chance has led them through the right path, which made them find someone who had lots to say about the shtetl during the war time. Not Augustine, but Lista: not the savior of the hero's grandfather, but one of his innumerable lovers.

6.1.3 Lista

In the obsolete scenery of the rural country of Ukraine, they found a house with clothes hang to dry on its front, which *appeared like the clothes of invisible dead bodies* (pg. 116), anticipating the idea that the house could be surrounded by useful memory in spite of physical absences.

On the inside, an elderly woman invited Alex in. He inquired her about Trachimbrod, but she answered she had never heard of such a place. Alex showed her the picture of Augustine and Safran. *Have you ever witnessed anyone in this picture?, he asked* (pg. 117), but again he got a negative response. For some reason, the boy insisted on the question for several times. As he went insisting, the white haired lady gradually demonstrated more and more affection to the item, until the moment she admitted.

“I have been waiting for you for so long.” I (Alex) pointed to the car.

“We are searching for Trachimbrod”.

“Oh”, she said, and she released a river of tears.

“You are here. I am it”.

Although it is later clarified that the lady’s name is Lista – a name that appears in the first strand, when Jonathan narrates his grandfather’s affairs –, Alex and his grandfather keep referring to her as Augustine. Alex’s grandfather, who had felt highly attached to the figure of the girl (even replacing his dead wife for her in his hallucinatory naps during the trip), addresses to the lady with devotional kindness – until the moment she starts to speak about the past.

Lista starts remembering Trachimbrod, telling stories about its inhabitants much in the manner Jonathan (and those of Bendavid-Val’s interviews) do, that is to say, linking their names to their occupations as if to convince how well established the structure of the community was before the Nazis came. As she goes telling, Alex’s (self-claimed blind) grandfather becomes very aggressive towards her.

6.1.4 The Sense of Sight

The two rooms of the house had *many things from the floor to the ceiling, including piles of more clothes and hundreds of shoes of different sizes and fashions,*

which led Alex to think that *there must have at least one hundred people living in that room* (pg. 147). In the same paragraph, the reader learns about the boxes.

There were many boxes, which were overflowing with items. These had writings on the sides. A white cloth was overwhelming from the box marked WEDDINGS AND OTHER CELEBRATIONS. The box marked PRIVATES: JOURNALS/DIARIES/SKETCHBOOKS/UNDERWEAR was so full that it appeared prepared to rupture. There was another box, marked SILVER/PERFUME/PINWHEELS, and one marked WATCHES/WINTER and one marled HYGIENE/SPOOLS/CANDLES, and one marked FIGURINES/SPECTACLES. [sic] (pg. 147)

As it turns out, all these boxes had kept belongings from people who had lived in Trachimbrod. After the war, Lista, the only survivor who stayed in the area went back to the shtetl to collect all she could find among the ruins left, transforming her small house into some kind of memorialistic museum, and herself into a living (spoken) book of memory. Still thinking that the lady was Augustine, Alex reasons *how the days connected the girl in the photograph to the woman who was in the room (...). Each day was like another photograph. Her life was a book of photographs* (pg. 145). As for his grandfather, who was also convinced that she was Augustine, he elicited his desire of bringing her to Odessa with them, his words concealing the growing affection that he started to feel when he first saw the photograph. *“We will give you a new life” (...). “We can save you from all of this”. He pointed to her house again, and he pointed to the boxes.* (pg. 150)

However, his attitude towards the woman changes drastically when she starts remembering some facts and people of the shtetl. *“Here is Herschel”, she said, holding a photograph up to the light of the window. “We [the visitors] will go. Tell him [Jonathan, who doesn’t speak Ukrainian] we are leaving.” “Do not go”, she said. “Shut up”, he said (...).* (pg. 152) She goes on telling that Herschel had been shot by his best friend Eli in order not to be killed by the Nazi. The grandfather’s reaction worsen, reaching a high level of aggressiveness: *“Shut up”, “You are lying about it all”, “You can keep your non-truths to yourself”, “She’s not from Trachimbrod”* (pg. 153), and ultimately, *“You should have died with the others.”*

In effect, the boxes constitute in the narration the physical presence of memory, all of them serving as visual stimuli used to trigger Alex’s grandfather’s discomfort

within his own past, while providing the first hints that might clear his so far obscure relations with the tragic episodes of War in the region. Here is created a crucial opposition between the two strands, through which the author articulates a second perspective of the war events, this time from the point of view of the so-called Gentiles, or non-Jews.

In the first strand is conceived a notion of memory as a vital sense, creating the assumption that memory is a primordial condition in order to constitute life in a broader, abstract sense. Attributed solely to Jews, the notion provided in the fictional *Book of Antecedents* - which says *Gentiles experience and process the world through the traditional senses* (pg. 199) – not only excludes the Gentiles from this capability, but also composes a dichotomy expressed through the opposition between memory (as a vital sense) and the other, traditional senses.

In Alex's strand, this dichotomy becomes evident in the character of his Grandfather, who claims himself to be blind, in other words, voluntarily refuses to perceive reality of facts through the sense of sight. As is going to be elicited, this character has had an active role within the tragic circumstances of war. In order to overcome such trauma, he counted on the support of his late wife until the day she died. After that, the character adopted this new, "blind" condition as a manner to admit himself oblivious to facts of past, refusing to actively take part in society. Nevertheless, his fake blindness is proved useless in face of the visual memorabilia brought by Lista. In reaction to the uneasy feeling of taking sight of items and photographs of a place which he helplessly contributed to devastate, his last alternative – before facing his cruelty, and therefore, guilt, as a part of his own reality – is once again permeated by a nature of resistance. Instead of refusing to see, he now refuses to believe (the words of Lista) and to stay (in this symbolic house, which is a recollection of Trachimbrod's memory).

Despite Alex's grandfather harsh words, the lady kept on telling how she met Safran, showing a picture of them two. "*This is his house, we're in front of it.*" (pg. 154). Alex asks her to take them there, but she answers that nothing can be found there anymore. "*It used to be four km from here, but everything that exists from Trachimbrod is in this house.*" At this moment, it is his grandfather who demonstrates interest to conceal with his own, mysterious past: "*Take us there (...), we have come to see Trachimbrod and you will take us there.*" As can be perceived, once the reports made by Lista have forced Alex's grandfather to "open his eyes" to his own role within the

devastation of the shtetl, his sense of sight operates the reactivation of memories which he had kept asleep for more than 40 years.

The disclosure of such memories partially takes place when they finally arrive in the place which had been the central point of Trachimbrod. There, despite the fact that night had already approached, turning sight into a physically useless sense, the symbolic dimension of this rather *traditional* sense reaches its climate.

“They burned the synagogue”(…)“It was in the middle of the town. There”, and she pointed her finger into the darkness. (...) “They unrolled the Torah in front of them” (...) “The first man was Yosef” (...) “The man said spit, and held a gun to Rebecca’s head. She was his daughter (...). We used to play cards over there”, she said, and pointed her finger into the darkness. (...) (pg. 186)

Although in complete darkness, the description of the massacre conducted by Lista still makes it possible for the group to effectively take sights of the dramatic events that took place in the region – not only for the pragmatic veracity implied in the words of her empiric testimony, but also for the seeming precision used by the woman in pointing the location where the isolated events occurred. In this case, it may be pertinent to pose questioning onto the ability of an old and traumatized lady on remembering the locations. Nevertheless, the matter in question here is not the accuracy of her memory, but rather the hints that the text provides the reader concerning the role of the sense of sight.

The conclusion of what had been earlier referred as a memory disclosure enabled by the act of sighting reaches its completion at the end of the strand, when the group finally leaves the house of Lista with one of her boxes, named IN CASE. She also gives Jonathan the wedding ring of Rivka, a girl who had buried the item inside a jar when she noticed that the Nazis were approaching Trachimbrod. When she gives the ring to Jonathan, she enquires him about her friend’s attitude.

“I didn’t understand why Rivka hid her wedding ring in a jar, and why she said to me, Just in case. Just in case and then what? What?” “Just in case she was killed”, I [Alex] said. “Yes, and then what? Why should the ring be any different?” “I do not know”, I said. “Ask him [Jonathan]”, she said. “She wants to know why her friend saved her wedding ring when she thought she would be killed”. “So there would be proof that she existed”, the hero said.

“What?” “Evidence.Documentation.Testimony”. I told this to Augustine. “But a ring is not needed for this. People can remember without the ring. And when those people forget, or die, then no one will know about the ring.” I told this to the hero. “But the ring could be a reminder”, he said. “Everytime you see it, you think of her. I told Augustine what the hero said. “No”, she said. “I think it was In case of this. In case someone should come searching one day”. I could not perceive if she was speaking to me or to the hero. “So that we would have something to find”, I said. “No,” she said. “The ring does not exist for you. You exist for the ring. The ring is not in case of you. You are in case of the ring”. (pg. 193)

As can be noticed, what remains of this conversation is an open, mysterious statement: “The ring is not in case of you. You are in case of the ring”. One possible explanation for the lady’s words in consonance with the present discussion is, again, another allusive episode in which a narrative episode is shaped in order to mirror the topics which permeate the story, in this case, memory as an extension of the sense of sight. When Alex’s grandfather voluntarily refuses to make use of the sense of sight, his choice diffracts into a refusal of perceiving reality as it is, of taking it into account as a permanent part of his life, of holding responsibility onto the consequences of his past attitudes. Nevertheless, his relations with the accounts of war, however neglected by himself, are not neglected by the historical narrative of the Holocaust, and the urge of judgment of those who killed – or helped to kill, which is his case – will not be denied. In this sense, the image of the buried ring can be interpreted as a factual memory that will lay in a jar, which can be accessed in case someone comes to find it, but which will ultimately exist even when there is no one to recall it. The ring is not a reminder in case one comes in need to remember what the Holocaust was like. Instead, the ring - and the undeniable memory that it evokes – exists as a solid register of a historically overwhelming experience, which transformed every individual who came to live during or after war time.

This view is accentuated when, late that night, in a hotel, the characters gather around the box named *In case*, given to Jonathan as a gift. They start exploring it, learning that it basically contains maps, objects and pictures. In a moment, they notice a picture in which Herschel appears with a young couple whose man physically resembles Alex. As it turns out, the person happens to be Alex’s grandfather, who finally decides to reveal his secret:

“The woman in the photograph is your [Alex’s] grandmother. She is holding your father. The man standing next to me was our best friend, Herschel”.

“Herschel is wearing a skull cap in the photograph because he is a Jew”.

“And he was my best friend”.

“And I killed him”. (pg. 228)

The photographic evidence of the presence of this man uncovers his role within the Nazi operation. Unable to omit his hideous situation anymore, Alex’s grandfather started his morbid report, bringing rich details of the Nazi operation, in which all citizens were put in line and had to name and point to a Jew among the group. Before closing the strand, the report gets dramatically intense while addressing to a reflexive thought which poses an ethical questioning on who, in such a situation, is to blame. The grandfather ends up justifying his attitude saying that he had done so in order to protect his own family, an act that finds its double on Jonathan’s strand, when Safran demonstrates concern on the perpetuation of his lineage. Another approximation appears concerning the presence of past in present, when the grandfather says

(... I knew that I could never allow him [Alex’s father] to learn of who I was or what I did because it was for him that I did what I did it was for him that I pointed and for him that Herschel was murdered that I murdered Herschel and this is why he is how he is he is how is he because a father is always responsible for his son and I am I and I am responsible not for Herschel but for my son...)[sic] (pg. 251)

Here, the grandfather alludes to the violent behavior of his son (*how he is*), justifying it with his own attitude as if it had brought a direct impact in his life. In a moment, Alex too is led to believe that he also takes part in this irreversible collective memory, getting caught frightened when realizing that he would have probably done the same:

(... the truth is that I [Alex] also pointed at Herschel and I also said he is a Jew and I will tell you that you also pointed at Herschel and you also said he is a Jew and more than that Grandfather also pointed at me and said he is a Jew and you also pointed at him and said he is a Jew and your grandmother and Little Igor and we all pointed at each other so what is it he should have done he would have been a fool to do anything else but is it forgivable what he did

canheeverbeforgiven for his finger for whathisfingerdid for whathepointedto
and didnotpointto for whathetouchedinhislife and hathedidnottouch he is
stillguilty I am I am IamIamI?...)[sic] (pg. 252)

In the end, the blindness of Alex's grandfather appears as a device for representing the refusal of taking part of collective guilt. In contrast with all the physical memories exposed in Lista's house, it is discovered that the negation of such memories is not enough for nullifying their existence. On the other hand, accepting a past imbued with so much guilty can be a difficult task – as is presented in the third strand, Alex's grandfather commits suicide.

6.2 The uses and effects of metafiction in the strand

(At the time when he said this, it seemed like a very reasonable thing to say.
But how does this make you feel, Jonathan, in the luminescence of
everything that occurred?) (pg. 6)

In this second strand, the presence of metafictional incursions is latent. They can be found throughout the whole scope of Alex's narrative – in the form of commentaries on the text he is producing –, often occurring in parenthesis, as demonstrated in the example above. The first thing that can be understood through the comments of Alex is that the sections of his work, or divisions – as he calls them – are directly addressed to Jonathan, who in this case seems to act as his editor, reviser and technical adviser in the business of writing craft.

During the first part of the narration, Alex strives to recreate the journey in a literary mode. Encouraged by the embellished divisions that he receives from Jonathan of his work – which compose the first strand of *Everything is Illuminated* -, it becomes clear that he intends to make it faithful to the facts and yet inventive, following the path of his hero.

Nevertheless, his report is contained with a variety of fragments that escape the linearity of the plot, providing the text with personal impressions of its fictional author, Alex, which help the reader to understand the manner in which he perceives his own writing. They appear at least once in every chapter of his strand, but as the report moves towards its end, these metafictional occurrences increase in quantity and density. At the very end of the strand, when the narrative reaches its climactic point in the last chapter,

the proportion becomes explicitly inverted. The conclusion, when Alex's grandfather finally informs his personal relations with the Holocaust, is then wholly brought inside a heavily anguished 6-page parenthesis.

When Alex first receives Jonathan, he feels overwhelmed by having an American writer under his geographic guidance. Inspired by the novelty, he starts his own work, comprising the experience of sharing moments with such illustrious personality. In the course of his narrative, while reporting moments of personal interaction between them, he feels flattered when *the hero* demonstrates identification with him, like when he says *We must think alike*, followed by Alex enthusiastic demonstration of satisfaction, (*thank you, Jonathan*) (pg. 60).

During the trip, in the second chapter, Alex commits a mistake concerning the directions on the map. Possessed by anger, the father inquires the son if he had asked him to drive the car – as in an attempt to diminish his responsibility of checking the map –, to which he responds *I don't have a driver's license*. In parenthesis, out of the plotline, he adds, (*keep this a secret, Jonathan*) (pg. 30)

Alex finds in Jonathan a friend and a confidant, trusting that he has finally found someone who is able to accept his “defects” and understand his way of being without judging. In this sense, his trip report gains a new layer – that of textual self-awareness. Through writing, Alex discovers himself able to open up his mind, for he now has an interlocutor who, acting like an editor, will help him to shape his own personality and reconsider his convictions.

As the narrative follows, his interventions grow in psychological depth. While witnessing his younger brother crying one night, Alex bursts out laughing. The event embarrassed him, but still he included it in his section, adding two separate commentaries: (*Please Jonathan, I implore you never to exhibit this to one soul. I do not know why I am writing this here*) and (*I ask leniency for writing this. Perhaps I will remove it before I post it to you. I am sorry*) (pgs. 68-69). Here, Alex makes explicit the confessional tone of his note, making it noticeable that sharing his secrets has become a necessity for him. Meanwhile, the note mentions his intention of removing his embarrassing revelation from the chapter, what he clearly doesn't. This attitude demonstrates that, in his literary exchange with Jonathan, Alex finds an opportunity to expose his feelings and, therefore, discover himself.

After the characters find Lista, the old lady who kept the memorabilia of Trachimbrod in her house, the meta-comments of Alex start to reflect even more the

impact that his grandfather's hostile attitudes have had on him. Alex now expresses confusion, for he is now discovering a side of his grandfather's life which he had never heard about. So when his grandfather tells Lista *You should have died with the others*, Alex adds: *(I will never allow that to remain in the story)* (pg. 153). The confusion appears as a consequence of a moral paradox within his role of co-writer of Jonathan's book: in spite of the necessity of painting a faithful portrait of his grandfather's anger, he doesn't feel comfortable about degrading his image.

Later on, the notes start to comprise a series of self-reflective questions, through which Alex is able to enquire about real reasons of their journey as well as the purpose of his writing. The former appears when Lista informs them that her sister went back to Trachimbrod after the Nazi assault. Alex asks *Why did she go back?*, and she answers *Because she was young and very stupid*. Here, Alex asks in parenthesis *(Is this why we went back, Jonathan?)*(pg. 188). At this point, the amount of information that has been revealed to Alex leads him to make such enquiry in order to better understand the succession of events he witnessed. The latter question, on the purpose of his writing, appears when he says *(I am not writing this for you, Jonathan. This is truly what it was like for me)* (pg. 190), referring to the way he felt when they were under the dark, starred sky of Trachimbrod. The episode evokes a passage where Jonathan shares a childhood memory with Alex, in which he would spend moments under his grandmother's dress. But more than that, the sentence assigns Alex's realization to what concerns the function of his writings, which will be further discussed.

In the end, when it is time for Alex to narrate the report of his grandfather on his participation on the slaughter of Trachimbrod, Alex admits frustration at trying to come up with the words which incriminate his own grandfather. For this, he delegates the task for Jonathan himself.

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

What follows next is Alex's grandfather confession of murdering under the perspective of Alex as an individual who is personally affected by the events he is about to describe. From this point on, all contents are narrated within parenthesis, a device

that promotes a high level of self-awareness of the text itself, interfering directly in the flow of narration.

The use of parenthesis adds to Alex's strand a new level of reality, which consists of a personal (self-)evaluation of Alex comprising his own writing. This new level demands of the reader a new suspension of disbelief: while Alex narrates his report outside the parenthesis, the reader is led to believe his writing as a fictional account, that is, a fictional work which aims at reporting his and Jonathan's experience on their trip to Trachimbrod. However, when the narration appears in parenthesis, a new suspension of disbelief is required, for there is a shift, within the novel, in the parameter of reality: it is the moment when Alex should be regarded as a real writer facing the anguish of the writing task, rather than a fictional double of himself acting as a character in his own work (in this case imitating what Foer does with his own double in his novel).

On my reading, the use of parenthesis (which distinguishes Alex-writer/individual from Alex-character/narrator) brings Alex-individual, writer of fiction, to the same level of reality of my own, as a reader of fiction: in contrast to the fictionality of his work, both my level of reality and Alex's are able to meet in an illusory space which can only be provided by a crisis of referentiality circumscribed in a metafictional game. In effect, my reading of Trachimbrod's tragedy ends up being much more realistic than it would be if it were narrated within the flow of his fictional work (that is, outside the parenthesis) due to my inclination, as a reader, to regard his reports in parenthesis as non-fictional or, at least, less fictional than otherwise described. In essence, Alex fictional flow is broken to give room to his personal anguish a writer, a level which is, by all means, closer to my reality than his admittedly fictional work could possibly be.

6.2.1 The illusory effect of metafiction within the strand

In his *Book of Metafiction*, Gustavo Bernardo analyses one of Cortázar's short-story *Continuidad de los parques* in order to explain one of the illusory effects of metafictional writing. In this short-story, a reader A sits in his armchair and starts reading a novel, whose content is about an adulterous couple (B=woman and C=her lover) who decide to kill B's husband in order to freely enjoy their love. What happens next is that, when the reader A reaches the climax of his novel – the murdering –, the path followed by the murderer C is similar to the house of the reader A. When the murderer C opens the door of a room where B's husband is supposed to be, he indeed

finds him: a man reading a novel in his armchair. At this moment, it is revealed that C's target is in fact the reader A, who regarded this small narrative as fictional but still ends up killed by one of its characters.

The analyses done by Bernardo assigns a communication between two levels of fiction (which strongly differ from Calvino's nomenclature "levels of reality", but ends up meaning the same thing, that is, two independent diegetic levels within a literary work which effect and, eventually, may even overlap each other):

We can say that the [real reader's] reading of the reading that the character does in his armchair establishes a communication (which should not be possible) between fiction and reality. Nevertheless, if the reality comprised in the short-story is the reality of this character, this reality also is fictional. Therefore, if there is a communication, it happens between different levels of fiction. The bridge between these two levels of fiction receives the name of "metafiction". It is an internal bridge, through which one is able to conceive fiction within fiction. (Bernardo, 2010, pg. 10)

In Alex's strand, something similar happens, arousing a communication between two different levels of fiction. When handling Alex's manuscript, the reader at first takes sight of his trip report, a product of his own effort and imagination. However, as the meta-comments appear, the reader learns that he is rather reading a draft meant to be analyzed by its editor, Jonathan. The reader is forced to adopt the perspective of Jonathan, receiver of this material. Meanwhile, Alex's narrative remains published on the way it is presented, in other words, unedited, allowing the reader to enter the fictional imaginary of confessional beliefs of this co-writer. In effect, the reading of Alex's strand means, in fact, the overlapping of two different levels: that of his strand published as a final literary work, and that of the work as a draft, sent to Jonathan in order to be revised. Such structural maze implies the *duplication* mentioned by Bernardo in his definition of metafiction: it is not only a fictional report as a final literary product, but also a fictional report in need to be evaluated by a fictional editor, that is, under construction.

This narrative problem illustrates one of the many crises of referentiality that are present in *Everything is Illuminated* and can be experienced by its reader. When regarded from different perspectives, Jonathan consists in either a fictional or a real character: in spite of the coinciding names of *Jonathan-hero-american-jew-writer-*

editor and *Jonathan-Safran-Foer-the-real-author*, this character is (or should be) considered to be fictional, rather being a projection of its author, as posed by Calvino in his essay;

(...) the successive layers of subjectivity and feigning that we can discern underneath the author's name, and the various "I"s that go to make up the "I" who is writing. The preliminary condition of any work of literature is that the person who is writing has to invent that first character, who is the author of the work. That a person puts his whole self into the work he is writing is something we often hear said, but it is never true. It is always only a projection of himself that an author calls into play while he is writing; it may be a projection of a real part of himself or the projection of a fictitious "I" – a mask, in short. (Calvino, 1978, pg. 111)

However, the same character assumes a realistic status from the perspective of Alex – Jonathan doesn't belong to the realm of his [Alex's] literary work, but rather to the outside of it, consolidating Alex's referent for reality, which clearly differs from the reader's.

This reading encompasses Linda Hutcheon's view of the metafictional novel as a mimesis of process, rather than of product, where "the reader or the act of reading itself often become thematized parts of the narrative situation, *acknowledged* as having a co-producing function" (Hutcheon, p. 37). In Foer's work, the act of reading appears as a "thematized part" at the moment when Alex addresses to Jonathan during his writing, highlighting that his "divisions" have a specific reader who ends up meeting the empiric level of the actual reader. At a subjective level, Jonathan and I did not share the same level of reality, but we did share the same task, that is, reading Alex's manuscript.

In this strand (together with the third one), the reader has access not only to Alex's literary product – that is, his verbal representation of a trip undergone by a cast of characters –, but also to his means of composition of this work, in other words, mimesis of process. Nevertheless, it should be remarked that Alex – while being a fictitious character and not the factual author of *Everything is Illuminated* – configures through his strand the construction of a heterocosm, an aid with which fictional creations gain the same validity of the empirical objects of our physical world (Hutcheon, p. 42). In bringing a fictitious character as a co-writer, Foer builds a realistic heterocosm whose core is centered in the illusory sensation that his work was truly

composed through a means of partnership, and whose sense of reality is obtained by the movement of leveling – undertaken by the reader – of himself with the one addressed by Alex's text.

7. Third Strand: Alex Letters

In this last diegetic level, Jonathan Safran Foer presents a space where the previous strands can be weighted and discussed by their authors, bringing into the reading the ultimate movement of self-reflectiveness comprised by the novel and, thus, formally establishing its metafictional status. In addition, this narrative level is also the place where the figure of Alex completes both sides of its foundation, that is, his psychological process of maturation and his formal constitution as *character-cum-writer*.

This strand is developed through the form of letters, from Alex to Jonathan, and its writing is presented in italics, as a manner to visually hold distinction from the other, “literary” ones, while also coinciding with the manner in which Alex’s personal comments appear in his fictional strand. Chronologically speaking, these letters occur after the 3-days period in which the actions of the previous strand (the journey to Trachimbrod) take place. They receive dates, starting on July 20th 1997 and ending on January 22nd 1998. With the aid of the letters, the reader is inducted to realize the process of composition of the full work which he is handling: after arriving in the US, Jonathan starts communicating with Alex through letters, where they exchange the literary material that compose the book. In such a manner, every “division”, or chapter written by Alex is preceded by one letter (except for the first one, which opens the book). However, Jonathan’s letters do not appear, and the reader only acknowledges their “existence” through Alex’s responses.

In my case, I felt the reading of Alex’s two strands as forming a balance which comprised the complexity of his work’s contents in opposition to his inability to get them properly expressed. The more Alex tried to cover his trip with the hero, the harder it was for him to feel confident of his own writing. During the first part of the novel, his second strand is pervaded with humor and literary clichés. In parallel, his letters describe him as a hopeful being, with dreams of living in America and providing his younger brother a more interesting lifestyle than his own. However, as the plotline runs toward its tragic ending – when Alex is about to discover that his grandfather was responsible for killing his best friend in order to survive the Nazi operation -, both strands suffer a gradual change in tone and style. The second strand starts losing its humorous inventions, while the third keeps getting farther from the literary focus, under which Alex had previously found space to comment his and Jonathan’s work. Now, the second strand has its flow frequently broken by Alex notes, as he reaches the point

where he should depict the moral degradation of his grandfather. Meanwhile, the letters grow in psychological depth, with Alex reporting the worsening of his grandfather's health condition, noticeably affected by the events of the trip. In the end, the anguish that Alex reports in his letters seemed to me as a necessary ground for legitimating his frank inability to cope with his literary task (which is represented by the profuse inversion of fictional/non-fictional voices, as seen in the previous section).

Except by the last one, the same topics can be found in all letters. They can be divided in: Alex informing of his ongoing life, comprising his admiration and hope for his younger brother Igor, his discomfort within his relationship with his father, his love for his mother and the hopeless depression on which his grandfather has fallen after meeting Lista; Alex "criticizing" Jonathan's divisions, bringing questions, suggestions and overall comments; Alex commenting on Jonathan's editing notes on his own divisions, sent in a previous mailing.

8. The final analysis

Once we have finished the business of learning the contents of the three narrative strands that compose *Everything Is Illuminated*, it is time to see how the disposition of the chapters, in concomitance to its metafictional incursions, affects the reading experience. As the strands belong to different levels of reality which borrow references from one another, the reader is attributed with the decisive role of decoding the written material, acting, simultaneously, as a reader, a writer and a critic, as put by Hutcheon in a chapter dedicated to what she defines as “Composite Identity”:

The reader must work to decipher the text as hard as the writer did to cipher it, with the result that the stress of the word is displaced from the communicating of a message to the inciting to produce meaning, as well as order. (...) When the consciousness of its own form is incorporated in the dynamic structure of the text, theory can once again become part of the story rather than about it”. (Hutcheon apud Sukenick, p. 144)

The book brings a discussion on the presence of the memory of the Holocaust in the present, contemporary time. In order to undertake this task, Jonathan Safran Foer uses the artifice of two narrators who share a set of common characteristics: both are the same age, both have a lineage composed by masculine figures who share the same name, and both have a grandfather who has the past crucially related to the Holocaust, as well as the present permanently changed by it. This was a manner found by the author for problematizing the narration of the Holocaust from the two sides of the coin – the Jewish, embodied in Jonathan, and the gentile, incorporated by Alex. Since the historical narrative of the Holocaust is ultimately a story constructed upon two perspectives – that of the victim and of the victimizer –, and therefore cannot conform to the single-stranded, “omniscient” strategy proposed by the aesthetics of literary realism, the book ends up being a mimesis of narrating process rather than of product (WAUGH), in other words, a representation of the conflicting process of narrating what it intends (here in case the slaughter and devastation of Trochenbrod) instead of a pretentious representation of a supposed ‘real’, ‘faithful’ story. By providing two narrators with different relations to the war events narrated, this reading experience made me feel like a witness of the massacre of Trachimbrod able to perceive the Nazi operation from two distinct yet simultaneous points of view – gentile and Jew.

8.1 The times of narration

Chronologically speaking, the time of the narrating acts takes place after the trip undergone by the narrators. The trip takes place on July 2nd 1997, according to Alex's register. In the trip, Jonathan goes in a search for his roots in an obsolete location in the countryside of Ukraine. There used to be a shtetl, called Trachimbrod, which was devastated by the Nazis and which left only a few survivors, among them his grandfather. A victim.

Jonathan is an American writer who intends to write something related to the place.

Alex is his translator, and Alex's grandfather is their driver. Once they get to where Trachimbrod used to be, they all discover that Alex's grandfather sent a Jew to death in order to save his own family. A culprit.

Alex is a young, working-class boy with an alcoholic father and a grandfather who claims to be blind in a corrupted country. Overwhelmed by the opportunity of interacting with an American (inserted in his imaginary in many aspects as a superior person), he sees in Jonathan a model of success and in the US a salvation.

After the trip, they go back home, but apparently, it remains agreed between Jonathan and Alex that they are both going to start writing and sending each other something related to the trip. The moment of such agreement is not depicted in the book, but it can be inferred, or "decoded" by the reader in need of putting the pieces together in order to bring logic for the book. In the end, the final product handled by the reader is a result of the narrators' act of mailing their divisions, with chapters obeying the order as they go being sent and received by Alex.

8.2 How metafiction operates the narrative axis of the book

Everything is Illuminated conducts the reader into a constant crisis of referentiality concerning the relationship between fiction and reality. At first, the misleading composition of the first strand brings the reader into taking Jonathan as a referent to stand upon fictionality. In spite of the fact that the book contains fictional information, the bridge between factual and fictional becomes blurred as the reader learns that the real author, Jonathan Safran Foer, has indeed taken a trip to Ukraine in search of knowledge of his own past. So far, the opposition reality/fiction is well

delimited: the writer decided to write not about his factual experience, but *from* it, allowing himself to recreate his past out of the absence of consistent information about it (and even if he *had* found something he could faithfully report, he would still be free to do it otherwise). Moreover, he chooses to keep his own name, which can be seen as a mere double of himself, disregarding the chance of confusion and establishing a simple mode of metafiction. At this point, the disbelief that should be suspended consists of the fact that his narration conceals the truth of its writer: the reader “disbelieves” that, puts that aside and goes forth on his reading.

The appearance of Alex as a co-narrator who is able to establish communication, through letters as well as the notes in his own work, with the author of the first strand assigns the main crisis of referentiality in *Everything is Illuminated*, for it embodies an illusion of two sides: with whom does Alex communicate? With the fictional Jonathan, who shares with him the same level of fictionality, or with the real Foer, his own creator? Whatever may be the answer, Alex’s second strand reformulates the paradigm of reality and, therefore, the reader’s sense of referentiality: if Gustavo Bernardo is correct when affirming that “reality is necessary for fiction to be constructed from it or against it” (2010), then Alex’s comments addressed to Jonathan circumscribe him the status of real while being a writer able to intervene in the flow of his own, fictional work. Bearing that in mind, it becomes possible to conclude that *Everything Is Illuminated* consists of a fictional construction which admits different levels of reality within itself.

In effect, the third, epistolary strand contributes to this understanding, for it now shows Alex not only as a writer of fiction, but also as an individual who is able to make comments regarding his and Jonathan’s work, and to express how his reality was permanently affected by the travel experience and its consequent findings. When Alex enquires Jonathan whether they are making one story, the word “story” finds its reference outside the realm of the third strand, in the form of the book that is being read, as if the letters were not part of this story and thus, as if they were not part of the fictional world.

As mentioned before, the construction of a fictional world that implies different levels of reality consists of a heterocosm which, while bringing the opposition between reality/fiction within the literary work, results in a more realistic experience of the narration.

Throughout my reading, the heterocosmic framework of the novel (which brings within itself the opposition fiction/reality, see 7.3) combined with the multiple disbelief suspensions (required in order to compose Alex as a character who is part-narrator, part-real, see 5.2) allowed me, at a subjective level, to intuitively identify with the character of Alex. When the narration of the Nazi operation appears between parentheses, the effect it had on me brought in a realistic quality for the text. As a reader, every time Alex parentheses appeared, I recollected that he was a fictional representation of reality (circumscribed in his ability of reading someone's fiction as well as writing his own): it seemed that the gap between me as a reader and Alex as a construction was erased by his lapses of consciousness. Like me, Alex was able to read and write over the written material. In this sense, it felt as if I was able to share my reality with the character, uncertain of the right hierarchic position of my level of reality in relation to his. In effect, the events that took place in his personal narrative (between parentheses) conceived the illusion of being happening in my own.

In the present case, the status of *fictional* or *real* flexibly adheres to the characters of Jonathan and Alex, depending on the perspective that is taken, that is, on the referential upon which reality stands: Jonathan becomes a real entity when regarded as a receiver of Alex's comments and letter's – and in case the Jonathan to which Alex refers is the one contained in his own, biographical strand (and not the one who writes it), therefore his first strand also assumes a status of real. In addition, Alex becomes a real entity when contrasted to his double, which appears as a character in his own work, assigning the objective opposition fiction/reality. Nevertheless, both are admittedly taken for fictional when considered from the empiric perspective (the one from outside the book), which can be Foer's – the man who handles the pen – or even the reader's, who handles the book. Thanks to the mixed disposition of chapters, this notion of referentiality never settles, rather fluctuating in a frantic, instable dynamics. Now, the question that remains comprises the function of such narratological gear in *Everything is Illuminated*.

8.3 The metafictional attribution in *Everything is Illuminated*

A metafictional heterocosm is a space where the writer is able to represent the opposition reality/fiction present in physical, factual level of reality shared between reader and writer. By doing so, the writer is able to conduct the reader along with an

illusion through which an imitation of reality can be experienced as a result of the denial of its own fictionality:

Although the intrusive commentary (...) may at times be metalingual (referring to fictional codes themselves), it functions mainly to aid the readerly concretization of the world of the book by forming a bridge between the historical and the fictional worlds. (Waugh, p. 32)

In such a manner, the reader is able to establish an illusory link between his own reality and the feigned one constructed in the book.

Everything Is Illuminated enables the experience of the Holocaust effect in the two sides of its narrative. By having its narration split in two voices, the novel brings manifestation of the past events in the present of its characters in a co-related manner. This co-relation is effectively bridged through a passage constructed by Jonathan and perceived by Alex. In the first strand, the Book of Recurrent Dreams is also presented to the reader, consisting of a volume whose entries contain the depiction of thoughtful situations dreamed by the citizens of the shtetl. In one of them, named 4:525 *The Dream that we are our fathers*, a dream is narrated, in which the anonymous dreamer goes to the Brod river and takes a look at his own image on the water. What he sees there is the image of his own father.

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... (p. 41)

In his second letter, Alex demonstrates his appreciation of the passage, telling it made him *very melancholy* [sic] (pg. 54). Since Alex is already conscious of his grandfather's relation to the war at the moment of his writing, his reaction to Jonathan's passage demonstrates discomfort in relation to his familiar past in spite of his need for identification with it. *Of course that I'm not Father (...). When I look in the reflection, what I see is not father, but a negative of Father.* (p. 54) The structural arrangement of the chapters, which offers a means of how the book is gradually composed of reading

and writing acts, ends up demonstrating how different levels of narration are simultaneously and consequently implicated in each other.

Foer establishes an opposition between victim and victimizer, addressing specifically the effect of the memory of the Holocaust in the lives of two characters who could not and did not take part on the war events, notwithstanding their consequential relation to them. For this, with the aid of the acts of reading and writing, the author creates the ideal possibility for Alex to reflect upon his historical relation with the massacre of Trachimbrod.

In the first strand, Jonathan constructs a narrative which comprises the construction and destruction of Trachimbrod, recreating the historical tragedy that affects him at a personal level. As if the embellished words and the dramatic proportion of such narrative were not enough to make the reader sensibly touched, Professor Amy Hungerford (YaleCourses, 2012) reminds us of the role of the novel's third strand of teaching the reader how to feel moved by Jonathan's narrative. As a result, the impact on Alex of the acknowledgement of Trachimbrod massacre – provided by his reading of Jonathan's strand – together with the discovery of his personal relation with it ends up pervading his own literary product, exposed in his inability to cope with his role as a narrator in the second strand. His intention of depicting the events that took place in the trip – his grandfather's revelation included – is ruined by the impossibility of getting properly distant from his narrative voice, as the reality of facts keeps intruding in his writing effort. In fact, Alex confess the immense difficulty of reproducing the events described by Lista when saying *You cannot know how difficult 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.* (pg. 185) Nevertheless, he persists as much as he can, until the moment when he feels incapable of incriminating his own grandfather. When this happens, he delegates the task of finishing his strand to Jonathan. Indeed he sends a draft of his grandfather's confession to his "editor". However, the reader is able to perceive that this final narration comes all between parentheses, a feature that is used to distinguish his literary effort from his factual reality.

The opposition reality/fiction imbued in the novel effectively acts as a representation of the same opposition outside of it, regarding the relation between reader and literary work. While Alex considers the narrating act of slaughter occurred in Trachimbrod a manner of *making it new again*, the narration of this tragic episode remains present between parentheses, that is, outside the level of fictionality of his

production, rather standing within Alex's level of reality, which mirrors the reader's own level of reality. Subjectively speaking, Alex's meta-commentaries on his own work appear as a metafictional device which serves to remind me, as a reader, that the massacre belongs to the realm of my own, objective reality, and not to that of allusive, distant fiction. In providing a character with whom I am able to establish identification (thanks to a structure in which the character, like the reader, can discern his reality taking text fictionality as referential for real), *Everything is Illuminated* provides a realistic enactment not only of the facts of war, but also of the way it is perceived by its reader.

9. Final Thought

Jonathan Safran Foer has developed a multi-task work: it comprises multiple narrators, voices, settings, tones, realities. Throughout this paper, I exposed the structural strategies used by the author in order to problematize the narration of the Holocaust. I called into attention the manners how he introduced a crisis of referentiality in order to entangle the reader within the contents of its narrative, diminishing the distance between the reader and text by proposing and then eliminating the status of fictionality, something that can be acknowledged through his representation of the opposition real/fiction inside the novel.

Everything Is Illuminated provides an ideal setting in order to demonstrate the possible role of writing in the construction of one's identity based on his experience of memory. For this, he constructs a symbolic imagery full of elements which denote memory in distinct manners – the Dial, the boxes, the dream that we are our fathers, the ring, the biography, the Book of Antecedents, and so on. All of this supports a view in which one can perceive the effective presence of past in the present, as well as the full acceptance of facts of present in order to better understand the past.

Writing has always been a space of reasoning of the factual experience, which always take place in the past tense, that is, in a tense prior to the moment of its reasoning. Nevertheless, the continuity of experience is something that the act of writing is able to cope with. In his book, Foer brings two characters who exchange the roles of writer and reader, an operation whose representation (that of process) makes it possible for his actual reader to also find a means to take part.

In this sense, the crisis of referentiality which is experienced through this reading holds responsibility on the illusory account of bringing the reader into the heterocosmic foundation of the book. The reader's narrative, just as Alex's – who rather became a writer on occasion of chance – is also present there, as a constitutive part of the narration.

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