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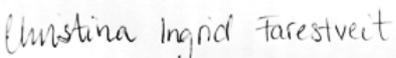
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The Illuminating Power of Fiction: A Reading of A.L. Kennedy's *Day*, Ian McEwan's *Atonement*, and Jonathan Safran Foer's *Everything is Illuminated*.

Abstract:

Can fiction contribute to history? Through a reading of A.L. Kennedy's *Day*, Ian McEwan's *Atonement*, and Jonathan Safran Foer's *Everything is Illuminated*, this thesis explores how three contemporary novels, written by authors who belong to the so-called *post-memorial generation*, provide perspectives that together form a significant contribution to the history of WWII. The thesis will look closer at scholars like Hayden White, Stephen Greenblatt and Michael Payne's thoughts on the important relationship between history and language. In the sub-chapters on the truth of fiction and narrative, the thesis makes use of H. Porter Abbott, Mieke Bal, Uri Margolin and Gerard Genette's thoughts and theories, to highlight and properly examine the literary tools used in the particular discourse of the novels in order to contribute with new perspectives on WWII. The thesis will also look closer at writings by Angus Calder and Paul Fussel to explain how war myths and post-war identities have been shaped by misrepresentation, and Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub's discussion on testimony has been included to address Holocaust's significant impact on trauma and testimony in the novels. Nicolas Abraham and Mária Török's definition of "trans-generational haunting" will also be discussed to further account for the effect the war has had, and continues to have, on the following generations.

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The Illuminating Power of Fiction: A Reading of A.L. Kennedy's *Day*, Ian McEwan's *Atonement*, and Jonathan Safran Foer's *Everything is Illuminated*.

Can fiction contribute to history? Through a reading of A.L. Kennedy's *Day*, Ian McEwan's *Atonement*, and Jonathan Safran Foer's *Everything is Illuminated*, this thesis explores how three contemporary novels, written by authors who belong to the so-called *post-memorial generation*, provide perspectives that together form a significant contribution to the history of WWII.

The authors of the three novels in question were all born after the end of the second world war. With this in common, they share the characteristics of the *post-memorial generation*, mentioned in Petra Rau's essay "The War in Contemporary Fiction" in the *Cambridge Companion to the Literature of World War II* (Rau:207). This concept is employed to describe the generation who did not experience the trauma of the war first hand, but have learned about it through the testimony of earlier generations, together with films, books, documentaries etc. In this same essay, Rau goes on to state that there is a sense in the writing of this post-memorial generation "that the official history is 'insufficient', and that the 'real' stories never surfaced" (213). As a consequence of this insight, contemporary WWII novels set out to debunk war myths, as well as investigate how they came into being and how they have shaped post-war identities (207-208).

With Petra Rau's essay as a point of departure, the thesis will comprise an analysis of the war myths addressed by A.L. Kennedy's *Day*, Ian McEwan's *Atonement*, and Jonathan Safran Foer's *Everything is Illuminated*. Assuming that the authors find history insufficient and lacking of "real" stories, the thesis aims to explore what new perspectives on the war these novels produce, in an attempt to see whether and how fiction can contribute to the general history of WWII. Illustrating the notion Rau finds in contemporary novels, and inspirational for the writing of this thesis, was a story told by a man of the war generation, and the way in which his wife responded to him telling it.

Background

On Liberation Day, May 8th 1945, my grandfather Fredrik Thorbjørn Torkelsen, was a young man of eighteen working on a freighter. The following day, the boat sailed into the port of Stavanger, and was met with joyous celebration in the streets. My grandfather said, however, that what he remembered most vividly about that day was the terrified girls with shaved heads being thrown up in the air by the crowds. As soon as he uttered this sentence, my grandmother, Hilda Ingrid Torkelsen, interrupted him and told him off. “What is the point of telling this story?”, was her response. When asked about this conversation at a later stage, my grandfather had to admit that the horror of the scene might not have hit him in the moment he witnessed it. It came to him later, when the joy of the war being over calmed down. When asked why she did not want my grandfather to tell this story, my grandmother said to me that she did not find it proper to dwell on the girls’ misfortunes. “Wasn’t the shame they experienced in those days enough? Why should we talk about this now, and bring further shame upon the children and families of these girls so many years later?”

The Norwegian resistance and spirit, in the form of our King and country standing up to the German invaders, is what dominates the public commemoration of the Second World War. The storyline of Norwegian WWII films is similarly often concerned with civilian heroes aided by the British against the ultimate antagonist – Nazism. My grandfather’s story exemplifies Norwegians’ horrible treatment of *tyskertøsene*, roughly translated to “the German sluts”, referring to Norwegian girls accused of having romantic relationships with German soldiers. In giving his testimony of the event that happened over seventy years ago, my grandfather provides a different side of the Norwegian WWII story, producing a nuance to the narrative which is not in the Norwegian people’s favor. In contrast to my grandfather, my grandmother lost two brothers who contributed to the Norwegian resistance in the war, and a third came back seventeen years later and refused to talk about his experiences. My grandmother’s traumatic war experience was therefore of a more personal character than that of my grandfather, which could again have contributed to her opinion that some things are better forgotten.

In public debate, there has been a gradual disclosure of aspects of the war fought by the Allies, showing that the general history agreed upon in the West has painted a glorified picture of their efforts. WWII is still a hot topic for discussion in documentaries and as a setting for contemporary films and novels. The magnitude of the horrors of Holocaust occur

regularly in the public debate, and the official history of the war is being revisited and investigated. As mentioned, Rau claims that contemporary writers seem to find official history insufficient, and adds that this attitude is shared by post-war generations that continue

some of the trends of wartime writing, which often set itself against myth-making, propaganda and monumentalist historiography (in the Nietzschean sense of the narrative of a glorified past)

(Rau:207)

Rau further states that this is the result of an “increasingly self-critical approach to the war” that “reflect contemporary agendas in the humanities” (209), which is indicative of the post-memorial generation’s notion that history is insufficient, leaving out important parts of the narrative, which again prohibits a disclosure of the “real” story of WWII. She also says that contemporary WWII novels debunk popular war myths and investigate how they came into being and shaped post-war identities (207-208). *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms & Literary Theory*, states that myth (originated from Greek “Múthos” meaning “anything uttered by word of mouth”) has been understood in many ways: some refer to it as an untrue story with magical elements, Homer meant narrative and conversation by it, while others use it as a synonym for fiction, or a “fiction which conveys a psychological truth” (Cuddon:453). *Oxford Learner’s Dictionary*, however, claims that it is either “a story from ancient times, especially one that was told to explain natural events or to describe the early history of a people” or “something that many people believe but that does not exist or is false” (Dictionaries) As the analysis will show, the novels uses myth in different ways.

What the thesis initially wanted to explore was how three of the novels Rau refers to in her essay write trauma and are able to debunk war myths, and also investigate how these myths shaped post-war identities. The thesis hopes to achieve a better understanding of why post-war generations are still debating WWII and why the topic becomes the setting of so many contemporary war novels, films and documentaries. The primary question raised in the thesis, is whether fiction can contribute to the general history of WWII. To answer this question, the thesis will discuss both the distinction and the common ground of history and fiction. The thesis’ hypothesis is that fiction can provide insights into how something felt or was experienced, which is something that the post-memorial generation lack. They were not there during the war and therefore long to understand what it was like for their parents or

grandparents. In an attempt to fill that hole in history, literature can give us a glimpse of their experiences. History aims to tell the truth, using objective language. Past events are in its focus. Fiction can take use of the language in a whole other way, to convey to the outsider what it was like to experience these events and how it felt. By that, the thesis argues that fiction is at liberty to say something about the “real” stories of history that never surfaced, which general history cannot as it has to be referential.

Thanks to the extensive work of Dori Laub and others, in collecting testimonies from Holocaust survivors on tape, some of those important evidence of Holocaust which was in danger of dying out, has now been accounted for. But inevitably, many testimonies of war experiences are lost forever. Is this a problem or are they, as my grandmother would say, best left in the past? In the foreword to their book *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History*, Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub challenge the idea that the Second World War necessarily is a thing of the past, seeing it as a historic trauma “which is essentially *not over*”, but whose traumatic consequences are still “actively *evolving*” in contemporary historical, political and artistic contexts (Felman and Laub: xiv). Felman and Laub claim that WWII is a collective trauma that has yet to end. The thesis agrees with Felman and Laub’s claim that the Second World War is an ongoing trauma, and contributes to the discussion by analyzing three contemporary WWII novels that provides new perspectives on the evolving trauma of the war, conveying that the past, present and future are symbiotically connected. In this respect, the thesis brings attention to how the post-memorial generation deals with the trauma, in a literary context. The thesis will in the following section introduce why WWII has had a continued traumatic affect into the twenty-first century.

Trauma: personal, collective and trans-generational

The word *trauma* originates in the Greek language and literally means “wound”. It is defined in the dictionary as “an injury” or “a mental condition caused by severe shock, especially when the harmful effects last for a long time” (OALD: 2/10 – 2016). According to Kai Erikson, in "Notes on Trauma and Community" in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, the term is not that easy to define, due to the excessive use in many different fields. He states that in the classic usage of the term, trauma is the *blow*, shock or force that inflicted *injury* (1995: 184). Post-traumatic stress disorder would be the *injury*, symptom or wound that the *blow* left.

The blow, cause or reason for the injury (PTSD) can be everything from a soldier's exposure to battle, to repeated abuse, as well as a sudden flash of fear (Erikson:185). The effects of trauma can have many different reasons, origins or blows. The common denominator lies in the similar effects that different traumas have.

In Klas-Göran Karlsson's chapter "Memory of Mass Murder – The Genocide in Armenian and Non Armenian Historical Consciousness" in *Collective Traumas: Memories of War and Conflict in 20th Century Europe*, he accounts for Jörn Rüsen's understanding of "collective trauma". He states that it can occur when an event is of such a catastrophic character that it becomes impossible to place it into a meaningful context, which means that it endangers the basic values of civilization (s19). Eriksson notes that a trauma can provide community when shared with others who have experienced the same (186), but believes that a collective trauma is also capable of destroying a sense of safety in a community, and in that, erasing a sense of self:

'I' continues to exist, though damaged and maybe even permanently changed. 'You' continues to exist, though distant and hard to relate to. But 'we' no longer exists as a connected pair or as linked cells in a larger communal body.

(Eriksson in Caruth:187)

In *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, Cathy Caruth says that the response to the trauma is often delayed, but when it comes it can take *possession* over the one who experiences it, through repeated nightmares, hallucinations and numbness (Caruth:4). Caruth further states that trauma brings us to the edge of our understanding, and that literature is called upon to explain it or disclose why we *can't* explain it (Caruth:4). In the search to understand the collective traumas of history, the literature in the aftermath of the trauma should be taken into account. Even though they are contemporary novel's written by authors who did not experience the trauma of WWII, the thesis hypothesizes that A.L. Kennedy's *Day*, Ian McEwan's *Atonement*, and Jonathan Safran Foer's *Everything is Illuminated* are capable of contributing to the understanding of the collective trauma of WWII, by providing insight into the minds of their traumatized characters. According to Whitehead, Caruth's view on trauma fiction is that it can serve as an important source to memory and history, although it might not be straightforwardly referential (Whitehead:13). Literary fiction can, in other words, contribute to important insight into historical events despite it being, well, fiction.

Anne Whitehead says that Caruth's notion of belatedness raises another question. Can its effect follow into the next generations? (Whitehead:14) She brings up the work of Nicolas Abraham and Mária Török on *trans-generational haunting*:

Should the child have parents "with secrets", ... he will receive from them a gap in the unconscious, an unknown, unrecognized knowledge – a nescience ...

The buried speech of the parent becomes (a) dead (gap), without a burial place, in the child. This unknown phantom comes back from the unconscious to haunt and leads to phobias, madness, and obsessions. Its effect can persist through several generations and determine the fate of an entire family line.

(qtd. in Rashkin:39)

Abraham and Torok's answer to Whitehead's question is yes. The effects of trauma can follow into the next generation. This is a concern that all the literary works chosen for analysis raise, both in the themes of the novels, and in that their authors are of the post-memorial generation. The idea of trans-generational trauma will therefore be explored further in the thesis.

Aims and scope

The thesis aims to investigate how A.L. Kennedy's *Day*, Ian McEwan's *Atonement* and Jonathan Safran Foer's *Everything is Illuminated* are able to contribute to the history of WWII. The thesis asks by which means do the novels contribute to history? Petra Rau claims that they do it by debunking war myths and focusing on different perspectives of the war narrative that general history has neglected. *Day* and *Atonement* are British novels, and the protagonists are Britons of the war generation. A soldier in the British Royal Air Force (RAF) in *Day*, and a British, female nurse and novelist in *Atonement*. *Everything is Illuminated* is written by Jewish American Jonathan Safran Foer, and has a character and narrator who shares his name and heritage. Foer's narrative is set in Ukraine, and is the only novel of out of the three that has main characters of the post-memorial generation, who furthermore seem to

suffer from *trans-generational trauma*. Nevertheless, all of the novels reflect the historical skepticism that Rau claims characterizes the contemporary agendas in humanities (Rau:209), by using various literary tools in their attempt to highlight different war experiences.

The analysis will also look at how these new perspectives are presented in the novels, investigating the literary tools employed to convey them to the reader. These tools could be elements such as narratorial voice, fragmented speech, discontinued time or space etc. The thesis defines the dominant use of literary tools to convey the new perspectives in each novel, as the particular discourse of the narrative. As part of this concern, the thesis will also discuss the importance of language in the writing of history, and examine the relationship between history and narrative. As part of this discussion, the theories of Hayden White, Stephen Greenblatt and Michael Payne and H. Porter Abbott will be employed, and these are all accounted for in the literary review. In order to define aspects of narratology that are relevant for the analysis of the novels, the theories of Gerard Genette, H. Porter Abbott, Mieke Bal and Uri Margolin are also incorporated in the next chapter. In order to explain some of the war myths and new perspectives regarding the war that the novel presents, the literary review also present Angus Calder and Paul Fussel's thoughts on traditional war writing, propaganda and war myths connected to WWII. Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub's discussion on and testimony has also been included in this chapter, in a discussion on Holocaust and *trans-generational trauma*.

2. *Literary Review*

Not only have we become highly skeptical about our ability to heed more imperatives and “learn from history”, but literary writers in particular are also suspicious of History itself – History as a discursive practice that turns the past into a readable narrative – while still committed to our responsibilities towards historical accuracy and moral accountability. (...) Not only does it [contemporary writing] debunk some of the popular myths about this war [WWII], it also examines why they came into being, how they shaped the legacies of war, and how they contributed to postwar identities.

(Rau:207-208)

In her essay “The War in Contemporary Fiction”, Petra Rau not only claims that WWII has been mythologized, but also that these myths have helped shape postwar identities. Even more importantly, Rau says that contemporary writing is responsible for addressing these issues, partly due to the increasing suspicion of history. This thesis would like to investigate how contemporary fiction writing has addressed war myths, and possibly contributed to postwar identities, through an analysis of three novels written by authors of the so called *post-memorial generation*. The term, coined by Petra Rau, refers to the generation who did not experience the trauma first hand, but have learned about it through the testimony of earlier generations, films, books, and documentaries etc. (Rau:207)

The novels chosen for analysis are A.L. Kennedy’s *Day*, Ian McEwan’s *Atonement* and Jonathan Safran Foer’s *Everything is Illuminated*, all of which are mentioned in Rau’s essay and considered contemporary WWII fiction. In these and other contemporary war novels, Rau finds that:

Despite these layers, repetitions, and echoes that remind us of suffering, there remains a sense that official history is insufficient. The many unofficial, hidden, buried documents in these novels suggest that the “real” stories of war never surface (...).

(Rau:213)

The unofficial, hidden and buried documents Rau mentions, together with the difficulty that the characters experience when attempting to speak of the war, are elements in these novels that emphasize the difficulty of testimony; what can be said and what is impossible to say. With this in mind, the novels have been chosen due to the different perspectives, or sides of the story they provide. With various voices and from various angles, the novels challenge different myths that have been associated with the war and reveal assorted postwar identities, thus making contributions to the official, and "insufficient", history of WWII.

Rau also refers to history as a discursive practice that turns past events into a readable narrative. This renders history a type of storytelling, aiming to make the past more accessible and comprehensible for its readers. Such a take on history is aligned with that of New Historicism, which finds the language of the historian to be formative of the event s/he describes, and takes this further by putting history in the category of narrative, where the use of language is of the greatest importance, in the sense that how a story is told will have a major impact on the readers' ability to remember it and evaluate the story's veracity. The following sub-chapter of the thesis will account for Rau's understanding of history by juxtaposing it with New Historicism's view on history and its connection to narrative.

If narrative is a story told, it must be told by someone. The storyteller or the narrator and his/her telling of the story, or particular discourse, will therefore be of interest for the thesis in order to examine possible unsurfaced, "real" stories and new perspectives on WWII in the novels. The chapter will also include a discussion on the significance of language in narrative, and the distinction between fictional and factual narrative.

The following sub-chapter, entitled "The Truth of History", will look closer at scholars like Hayden White, Stephen Greenblatt and Michael Payne's thoughts on the important relationship between history and language. In the sub-chapters on the truth of fiction and narrative, the thesis makes use of H. Porter Abbott, Mieke Bal, Uri Margolin and Gerard Genette's thoughts and theories, to highlight and properly examine the literary tools used in the particular discourse of the novels in order to contribute with new perspectives on WWII. "The Truth of the War" will look closer at writings by Angus Calder and Paul Fussel to explain how war myths and post-war identities have been shaped by misrepresentation, and Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub's discussion on testimony has been included to address Holocaust's significant impact on trauma and testimony in the novels. Nicolas Abraham and Mária Török's definition of "trans-generational haunting" has also been included in this

chapter, to further account for the effect the war has had, and continues to have, on the following generations.

2.1 The Truth of History

In *The Historical Text as Literary Artifact*, Hayden White says that “[w]e do not *live* stories, even if we give our lives meaning by retrospectively casting them in the form of stories” (White:1544) What one experiences does not become a story until it is told, whether by oneself or someone else. According to Michael Payne, the editor of *The Greenblatt Reader*, New Historicism views history in a similar way, as a combination of a set of events and “an account of those events”, rendering it a type of discourse. (Greenblatt and Payne: 3) In the literary dictionary, the term *discourse* is explained as “a learned discussion, spoken or written, on a philosophical, political, literary or religious topic. (...) It can refer to the specific type of language and the set of problematics that define and delimit a given field” (Cuddon:207). In this context, history could be said to comprise a learned discussion or field with its own specific type of language and problems that define it. Such problems, I presume, are critical questions regarding method and theory that any given field would have to face. Payne brings to mind one of these problems for history as a discourse when he states that it is “no longer possible to think of the past as an object that is detachable from its textual reconstruction” (Greenblatt and Payne:3). In other words, history is never objective or absolutely truthful, but a re-constructed story not to be separated from the language utilized by its subjective author.

Interestingly, Payne suggests that “history and literature are mutually imbricated”, a view that is also to be found in the so-called "linguistic turn" that we see in 20th century Western philosophy (Greenblatt and Payne:3). Here, philosophers and hermeneuticists came to see the important influence of language in shaping reality, leading to important theoretical and critical movements such as structuralism and poststructuralism (Cuddon:399, 400). In this period, theorists recognized the restrictions and subjectivity of language and that we are all subjects of language, not the other way around. The limitations of language naturally also affect written history. When he/she is reconstructing events into a readable narrative, the historian is forced to work within the context of his/her language. This reconstruction is consequently fraught with danger. For instance, important nuances of the story are in danger

of being “lost in translation”, should the historian fail to convey them to the reader. White believes that historians would not like to admit that historical narratives really are

verbal fictions, the contents of which are as much *invented* as *found* and the forms of which have more in common with their counterparts in literature than they have with those in science.

(White:1537)

As we can see, White actually claims here that historical narratives are, to a certain degree, fictions, and that they have more in common with fictional narratives than their counterparts in science. H. Porter Abbott largely agrees with Hayden White and points out that historians mostly deal with incomplete records and that written history is therefore basically “speculations based upon known facts” (Abbott:146). Here, Abbott makes a comparison between historians and lawyers and states that in the same way as lawyers aim to find more witnesses supporting the same series of events, historians need to find supporting evidence to their suggested narrative or hypothesis. (Abbott:147) He furthermore points out that people are aware that history is falsifiable, and that they therefore accept it as an *intent* to tell the truth, and for this reason history needs to be revisited and altered regularly as new evidence or theories surface.

But even bearing in mind the insight that history is not objectively true, historical writings are not generally questioned by everyone who reads them. In a scientific perspective, they are certainly viewed as more reliable than fiction writing. White suggests that one used to make a distinction between “fiction and history, in which fiction is conceived as the representation of the imaginable and history as the representation of the actual” (White:1551). It is disputable whether this is an outdated distinction, or if this is how the genres are still generally received today. The separation of history and fiction in the aisles of the library or in a bookstore, is an example of this general distinction. The following sub-chapter will follow up on White's claim, exploring the relationship between history and fiction, and aim to find if their differences can supplement each other.

2.2 The Truth of Fiction

Many theorists see a link between history and fiction, but can fiction contribute to history? Unlike history, fiction, Abbott claims, is not falsifiable as its story is neither true nor false (Abbott:147). In his article, "Fictional Narrative, Factual Narrative", Gérard Genette raises important questions regarding the distinction between fiction and non-fiction, or "fictional narrative" and "factual narrative", in order to examine:

why factual narrative and fictional narrative behave differently towards the story they 'report' by the mere fact of this story's (supposedly) being in one case 'truthful' (as Lucian put it), in the other case fictional, that is, invented by someone, whether the present storyteller or someone from whom the latter has inherited the story

(Genette et al.:756-757)

Here, Genette claims that factual narratives should not be discarded from discussions within the field of narratology, since the two categories of narrative are not necessarily in contradiction. Fictional and factual narrative writing also has a lot in common, and Genette says that the two do not follow a strict set of rules which makes them easily distinguishable. Both fictional narrative and factual narrative writers can make use of literary tools and methods typically associated with the other (Genette et al.:770-773).

As history is usually considered non-fiction, it would fall under Genette's category of factual narrative, rendering the historian an author of factual narrative. Abbott states that the language of history is limited and that fiction can operate outside of these constrictions (Abbott:153). Even though Genette would avoid such a prompt distinction, he would have to agree that the author of fiction does not have to account for what actually happened in the real world. An historian, on the other hand, cannot freely provide insight into the inner life and thoughts of his subjects, because s/he cannot make things up (Abbott:148). The historian could make assumptions, but these assumptions would always have to be supported by sources. One can only know with certainty what someone else is thinking, if that someone was invented by oneself (Genette et al.:762). Abbott thinks that one would question the credibility of a non-fiction narrative with passages of indirect thought (thought report), interior monologue and free indirect thought (Abbott:149). Genette agrees, and adds 'external

focalization', where every action is described objectively with no attempt at explanation, as another typical mode of fiction. He claims that both the 'subjective' and 'objective' kind of focalization:

characterize fictional narrative, as opposed to the ordinary attitude of factual narrative. The latter does not a priori deny itself psychological explanation, but it does have to justify each explanation with some indication of source (...).

(Genette et al.:762)

A fictional author can be separated from the claims made by the narrator and/or characters in his/her text. An author of a factual, historical text, however, has to take responsibility for the claims made in the text. The author and the narrator will therefore be intertwined in a factual text. (Genette et al.:764) Genette says further that the relationship between author, narrator and character is one of the areas within narratology where one might find the clearest distinction between fiction and history. This distinction is one tested in Jonathan Safran Foer's novel, where a narrator and character share the author's name and traits. Like Foer, the character is of Jewish heritage and travelled to Ukraine in order to find answers about his grandfather's escape from Holocaust. Foer blurs the line between author narrator and character in this respect, but calling it novel, frees him from the responsibility of veracity. Even though we see fiction and history differently, moreover, fiction has many characteristics that enables it to contribute to history. Some of these characteristics can be found in *Day*, *Atonement* and *Everything Is Illuminated*, which will be discussed more closely in the following sub-section.

2.3 The Truth of Narrative

In the second edition of *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, H. Porter Abbott suggests that narratives indoctrinate our lives on a daily basis and help form our identity (Abbott:3). Our understanding of the world and ourselves are, in fact, built on narrative structure. Bearing this in mind, together with Rau's claim that the "official" WWII narrative shaped identities

after the war, a closer look on narrative is needed in order to be able to say something about issues of history and identity.

Stephen Greenblatt has said that his first recollection of “being a self” was revealed through narratives he told himself and was told by others (Greenblatt and Payne: 303). Telling stories of what had happened to him during the day, became important to form an understanding of who he was. As we can see from this, narrative is, in fact, identity forming and a tool to construct meaning. But what constitutes a narrative? In *Narratology – Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, Mieke Bal claims that “a narrative text is a text in which a narrative agent tells a story” (Bal: 15). “The narrative agent” can be understood as the narrator. Narrative is, in other words, a story told by someone. Without the telling, which must be done by someone (narrative agent/narrator), there is no story. The “teller” and the “telling”, the narrator and the narration, are therefore important elements in a narrative.

As the analysis will show, the novels to be investigated in this thesis utilize different types of narrators with varied approaches to storytelling, in order to unravel different stories and perspectives on WWII. A closer look on the role of the narrator, as the storyteller, and what the term entails will thereby be of interest. In a discussion aiming to define “narrator”, Mieke Bal specifies that the narrator and the (biographical) author are not the same, referring to Foucault’s *What is an Author?* But in contrast to Foucault, Bal wants some limits regarding the interpretation of authorship:

Foucault’s alternative is a radical proliferation of meaning, where the author/work becomes a fluctuating function always interacting with the other functions in the larger discursive field. (...) but is there a limit to these fluctuations? Or are we thus bound to an anything-goes attitude? (Bal:15,16).

Here, Bal is afraid that without any rules as to how to interpret the meaning of a text, the purpose of interpretation could vanish. At the same time, Bal does not want to confuse the narrator with the "implied author" in a narrative. "Implied author" is a term introduced by Wayne C. Booth “in order to discuss and analyze the ideological and moral stances of a narrative text without having to refer directly to a biographical author” (Bal:17). Bal, however, finds it to be a problematic term in a narrative context, as it can be applied to any text, and possibly undermine the reader’s interpretation (Bal:17).

But what is actually a narrator in her view? Bal’s working definition is “the agent which utters the (linguistic or other) signs which constitute the text” (Bal:18). Like Bal, Uri

Margolin also emphasize the importance of separating the author from the narrator, and defines the latter as

the inner-textual (textually encoded) speech position from which the current narrative discourse originates and from which references to the entities, actions and events that this discourse is about are being made. (...) the term narrator is then employed to designate a presumed textually projected occupant of this position, the hypothesized producer of the current discourse, the individual agent who serves as the answer to Genette's question *qui parle?*

(Margolin:351)

Based on the opinions of Bal and Margolin on what a narrator is, the definition which will be used in this thesis is that it is the storyteller, or the hypothesized, communicative agent producing the current discourse of the text. As the producer of the current discourse of the text, the role of the narrator appears to be crucial to the reader, as he, she or it will be leading the reader through the narrative and be in the position of having the power to decide what the reader will be exposed to at any given time within the narrative. Having established a working definition of the narrator, aspects of the narrator's role like types and styles will have to be explored, in order to account for how different narrators affect the narrative's they inhabit. One of these aspects, that become highly relevant in the novels for the analysis, especially in Ian McEwan's *Atonement*, is the narrator's credibility.

For the reader to be properly invested in the story of a novel, one might say that a certain trust in the narrator is expected. Not in the sense that the reader should expect the narrator to be a real person, telling a story which actually took place in the real world. But in a novel like *Atonement*, with its realistic approach to the events described, chronologically told and historically accurate story, one expects the narrative laid before the reader to be what actually happened within the context of the "storyworld" – "the 'reality' in which the events are presumed to take place (Abbott:75). McEwan takes advantage of this assumption in his choice to twist everything the reader thought he/she knew around at the end of the novel. It forces the reader to question everything they have just read, and recognize that they were fooled by the narrator's realistic discourse and their own assumptions based on traditional WWII narrative plot structure. The surprising effect that the seemingly reliable narrator admitting to be unreliable has on the reader, will be explored further in the analysis. Abbott says that there might not be a perfectly reliable narrator, as he/she is a constructed tool in

order to tell a story (Abbott:69), but there are factors like focalization, narrative voice and distance that can affect the reader's view on the credibility of the narrator, and which in turn can produce various effects.

Focalization can be confused with the term *point of view*, but Abbott finds the latter unprecise, and defines the former as the lens through which we see the characters and events in the narrative (Abbott:73). It's a matter of who sees, whilst voice is a matter of who speaks. The narrator can be the "focalizer", but not necessarily throughout the narrative. In *Atonement* for example, Briony is the narrator, but Robby acts as the "focalizer" when scenes from the battlefield are narrated. It is through his eye's these events are seen, even though Briony is telling the story.

Another important factor to consider when we discuss the role of the narrator, and one that becomes highly relevant in A.L. Kennedy's *Day* and Jonathan Safran Foer's *Everything is Illuminated*, is the question of who speaks? First-person, third-person or even second-person? External narrator vs character-bound narrator? Genette uses the term heterodiegetic to describe the first, a narrative in which the narrator does not take part in the action, and the second, homodiegetic, where the narrator is one of the characters within the narrative. He proposes that the level of voice is pertinent when trying to achieve verisimilitude in a narrative.(Genette et al.:764) In his discussion of voice, Genette refers to Philippe Lejeune's formula for the autobiography, which states that author = narrator = character, and spins further on the relationship between these three. Genette claims that factual narratives are defined by $A = N$ (Author equals narrator), as far as

the author assumes full responsibility for the assertions of his narrative, and consequently, does not grant autonomy to any narrator. Conversely, their dissociation ($A \neq N$) defines fiction, that is, a type of narrative for the veracity of which the author does not seriously vouch.

(Genette et al.:764)

Even though Genette claims that the distinctive relationships between author and narrator above define fictional and factual narratives, he also claims that the two genres can exchange methods in an effort to, for example, appear more veracious, like what Jonathan Safran Foer does in *Everything Is Illuminated*, giving one of the character's which also functions as the narrator in parts of the novel, his own name. Through utterings of character-bound narrators, Mieke Bal exemplifies a rhetoric of veracity as speech which sounds truthful. A character-

bound narrator telling a story in first-person can seem reliable, even though it is pure fiction (Bal:24). This is a matter of the narrator's distance to the story being told. In contrast to Bal's claim that character-bound narrators can seem reliable, one could feel at times that the narrator is too close to the characters and events in the story to provide the reader with a truthful representation. In some cases an external narrator overlooking the events with a greater distance could appear more reliable (Abbott:74,75). The question of reliability becomes relevant in Ian McEwan's novel. From the beginning in *Atonement*, the external narrator comes across as reliable. It is not until after her novel is finished that Briony begins to write in first-person, and she only reveals herself as the narrator in the final chapter of McEwan's book. An important factor, as to why the distance of an external narrator might come across as more reliable, is that it is likened to the distance traditionally seen in historical discourse, a type of factual narrative writing, according to Genette.

When trying to place a narrator on a scale of reliability one could make the distinction between unreliable narrators, that is, between those that can be trusted for their facts but not for their interpretation (discordant narrators) and those which cannot be trusted even for the facts (Abbott:77). The discordant narrator can tell their version of the story, while the reader detects another version, which could be that of the *implied author*. Abbott claims that "getting to this implied author is one of the central challenges of interpretations" (Abbott:77).

As the discussion has shown, narrative is important to us as it is a tool to construct meaning. As narratives are always a story told by someone, that someone – the narrator – has the important role of communicating the story to the reader, in both factual and fictional narratives. Depending on what effect the author of a narrative wants to achieve, there are considerations to take as to what distance the narrator should have to the events in the narrative, on account of his/her reliability. There are also narratives which have not been formed by a singular conscious writer, but have emerged out of a number of narratives told by reporters, politicians, nations and historians with their own agendas. Such are the origins of war myths, which the thesis will discuss in the following section.

2.4 The Truth of the War

If in France, Britain, and Germany the literary imagination responds readily to renewed preoccupation with the war, this is because war remains a cornerstone of these nations' identities at home and abroad.

(Rau:208)

As we can see from Rau's comment here, WWII still almost seems as an open wound and consequently comprises a chapter that Europe is not ready to close. Due to the incomprehensible magnitude of the war, with its devastating technological weapons, genocides and geographical range, it is understandable that it became important for the nations involved right after the war to look and move forward, and as part of this effort, chose to bury negative aspects of it in the past. This does not mean that they were able to close this chapter of history, however.

Angus Calder's *Disasters and Heroes: On War, Memory and Representation*, critically examines how wars are represented and remembered, and explains how war myths come into being and how nations' identities are shaped by them. The protagonists and narrators in *Day* and *Atonement* are British citizens who experienced WWII. The novels are therefore bound to deal with collective myths of the 'People's War' and the 'Good Fight' fought by the British. Calder points out that Britons thought exceedingly highly of themselves and their efforts in the war, due to "a shortage of honest representations of wartime experience in the media" (Calder:66). Literary historian, Paul Fussell, also claims in *The Great War in Modern Memory*, that the glorification of British military actions has a long tradition and that "the British tendency towards heroic grandiosity about all their wars" was an inhibition on the truth" (Fussell:175). Although Fussell's book initially deals with representations of the Great War, or WWI, his description of war writing tradition and trends among soldiers is also found to be applicable to the particular discourse of the narrator in A. L. Kennedy's *Day*, dealing with PTSD after his time as a soldier in WWII.

The difficulty of testimony is furthermore a recurring issue in all three novels, especially in *Atonement* and *Everything is Illuminated*. In McEwan's novel the protagonist's false testimony leads to tragedy, while in Foer's book a character's testimony of Holocaust comprises a significant event in the lives of several characters. According to *The Oxford Learner's Dictionary* the word "testimony" (which originates in the Latin word *testimonium*,

from “testis” meaning “a witness”) is either “a thing that shows that something else exists or is true” or “a formal written or spoken statement saying what you know to be true, usually in court a sworn testimony” (Dictionaries). In *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History*, Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub elaborate on the complexities of this term. Felman states that testimony is a solitary performance that can only come from an eyewitness, and not from a retelling of a person’s account of events. (Felman and Laub) She further states that testimonies of a great trauma like WWII and Holocaust significantly appear to consist of fragmented memories overwhelmed by occurrences that are difficult to understand (Felman and Laub:5). Both Kennedy’s *Day* and Jonathan Safran Foer’s *Everything is Illuminated* present characters that struggles with memories of the war. In *Day*, the the protagonist’s fragmented memories continuously interrupt his day. In *Everything is Illuminated*, the testimony of Holocaust witness is written two pages long without punctuation, demonstrating how overwhelmed by the experience the witness was. In that way, testimonies cannot offer a complete picture, a conclusion of events. Instead, Felman defines testimony as a speech act:

Testimony is, in other words, a discursive practice, as opposed to a pure *theory*. To testify – to *vow to tell*, to *promise* and *produce* one’s own speech as material evidence of truth – is to accomplish a *speech act*, rather than to simply formulate a statement.

(Felman and Laub:5)

Highly relevant for the conflict in Ian McEwan’s *Atonement*, is Felman’s concern that we are in danger of summoning a crisis of truth when relying too much on testimony for facts in contemporary society, referring to the restricted usage in the legal context where testimony is called upon when factual evidence are in doubt (Felman and Laub:6). There are two separate testimonies of the same event in *Atonement*, which the analysis will elaborate on. The testimony the young Briony gives to the police about seeing the rapist, is a crisis in the legal context, as she only *thought* she saw who it was. Due to earlier circumstances, she thought she *knew*, but she did not actually *see*. On this account, the rapist was free to go, while an innocent man was incarcerated. She also gives, however, a second written testimony as an older woman, in the form of a novel. But in the final pages of the book, Briony admits to have altered the truth in this testimony as well. She claims to have written what happened during her first testimony as it actually was, but altered the outcome of it, as a way to atone for the consequences caused by her false testimony. But in admitting to lying, can her account of

events even be called a testimony, and is it of any value?

Dori Laub states that even though a testimony is unable to determine every referential detail in a witnessed event, and might even produce historically fallible ‘facts’, the testimony is not without value (Felman and Laub:59-63). He brings up an example of a woman he interviewed in his work of collecting Holocaust testimonies on tape. While talking about her experience at Auschwitz, the woman said that four chimneys exploded. Historians watching the tape concluded that her testimony was invalid, as there was only referential evidence of one chimney exploding. Being a psychoanalyst and a Holocaust survivor himself, Laub was appalled by this notion, and claimed that the number of chimneys did not matter, as the women testified to something much more significant than the number of chimneys, that is, “the reality of an unimaginable occurrence (...). She testified to the breakage of framework. That was historical truth” (Felman and Laub:60). Laub says that many witnesses of Holocaust are unable to speak about their experience at all, or stay silent for decades about their trauma, due to the fear that of having to experience the trauma again if they speak about it, and the fear that they might not endure it the second time around (Felman and Laub:67). But in keeping their silence, their memory of the events become distorted, which in some cases can result in a sense of loss of human ‘relatedness’ (Felman and Laub:79). Laub exemplifies this with the story of a woman who felt so alienated from her children whom did not know of her trauma, that she felt that she never really loved them. Feeling that she could never love her children properly must of course have been hard for the women in question, but what about her children?

The consequences when parts of a collective trauma on the scale of WWII and Holocaust are silenced, are that the following generations are left in the dark when it comes to significant parts of their heritage. They are left with a need to discover the missing pieces of this unspeakable, collective trauma that happened before they were born, but without the means to uncover them. Nicolas Abraham and Mária Török refer to this *trans-generational haunting*:

Should the child have parents 'with secrets', ... he will receive from them a gap in the unconscious, an unknown, unrecognized knowledge – a nescience ...

The buried speech of the parent becomes (a) dead (gap), without a burial place, in the child. This unknown phantom comes back from the unconscious to haunt and leads to phobias, madness, and obsessions. Its effect can persist through several generations

and determine the fate of an entire family line.

(qtd. in Rashkin:39)

In other words, the child could experience an identity crisis as a result of its parents' silence. Sensing that there is something important unsaid between them alienates the child from his/her parents, which could lead to an unconscious phantom haunting the child with phobias an obsession. This lack of identity could characterize generations to come. The trans-generational trauma will be discussed further in the analysis, as the symptoms described by Abraham and Török is exactly what the character of the same name as the author suffers from, in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Everything is Illuminated*. When a collective trauma with the magnitude of WWII is hidden from the following generations, it is not surprising that the topic is still an important issue in contemporary writing,

2.5 The Truth of the Novels

The novels to be analyzed in this thesis are all written by authors of the post-memorial generation, but they are not unique in choice of narrative setting. WWII continues to be a highly popular theme for contemporary novels, films and documentaries. The horrors of Holocaust, and other less discussed aspects of the war, occur regularly in the public debate, and the official history is being revisited and investigated over and over again. It seems as if nations have to apologize for their faults almost on an annual basis, as new stories continue to rise to the surface.

Petra Rau proposes that by reading contemporary WWII novels, one gets insight into the contemporary agendas of humanities, especially as these function to expose popular war myths and help develop a better understanding of how postwar identities were shaped by them (Rau:207-209). Further, she says that:

There is also a clearer recognition of the psychological toll that waiting and lack of information take on those left on the 'home front', on women and parents, and of the utter bleakness of wartime life and the austerity years that followed it. It is the cost of war, its traumatic nature rather than its ideological significance or its victories, that is highlighted in these books.

(Rau:210)

Here, in my opinion, Rau is closing in on the core of what the post-memorial generation wants to know, which is not what it was like for Hitler, Churchill or Roosevelt to live through the war, but what the experience of WWII was like for ordinary people that these readers can actually relate to. And what better way to fill that hole in history than fiction? Fiction can give us a glimpse of the war generation's experiences and an insight into the "real" stories of history, meaning stories that never surfaced. And through an analysis of A.L. Kennedy's *Day* (2007), Ian McEwan's *Atonement* (2001), and Jonathan Safran Foyer's *Everything is Illuminated* (2002), this thesis aims find examples of how fiction is able to perform such a deed.

Apart from being mentioned in Petra Rau's essay on "The War in Contemporary Fiction", the novels were chosen due to their different narrative perspective and discourse, and the possibility of being able to say something about what it was like to experience the war for various types of people. They all tell stories of the war, but from very different angles. The narration of the novels invites the reader into the WWII experiences of a soldier in the RAF Bomber Command suffering from PTSD in *Day*. The psychological trauma women at home suffered during the war due to lack of information, and their war efforts as nurses in *Atonement*. And a witness of Holocaust forced into the role as a Nazi collaborator, and members of the post-memorial generation struggling with identity, in *Everything is Illuminated*. For some of the novels, what is most relevant for the thesis is the plot twist, while for others it is the particular discourse of the narrator, which the following introduction to the novels will reflect.

2.6 The Novels

Day was first published in 2007, written by female, Scottish author A.L. Kennedy. The novel recieved reviews like: "Day is more than a novel, it is an investigation into the difficulties of being alive" In the Irish times, and in the Guardian:

A woman born in 1965 who writes a novel about an RAF bomber in the second world war needs a gift for bringing history alive, as well as guts and true bravado. Her

picture of what war does to people burns saeva indignation ... her narrative gift is great

(qtd. In Foer: cover)

Atonement was first published in 2001, written by the British novelist Ian McEwan. It got starteling reviews: "He is the country's unrivalled literary giant... A fascinatingly strange, unique and gripping novel" in *Independent on Sunday* and in the *Observer* "McEwan's brilliance as a novelist lies in his ability to isolate discrete moments in life and invest them with incredible significance" (qtd. in Foer: cover)

Everything is Illuminated was first published in 2002, as the first novel of the then twenty-five-year-old Jonathan Safran Foer. It won several literary prizes and praised as: "A work of genius. A new kind of novel... After it Things will never be the same again. It will blow you away" in *The Times* and "A wonderful debut, whose startling originality and comedy never diminishes the tragedy of its story" in the *Observer* (qtd. in Foer: cover)

2.6.1 *Day*

"Heroism (...) is just another construction retrospectively imposed on events to give them meaning" (Rau:212). In *Day*, this quote becomes highly relevant, as the narrative is a story of a soldier who does not consider himself to be a hero of war. Especially so, considering that he was an RAF bomber in the war, which Day says many Britons had a problem with. He is dealing with PTSD and guilt, questioning whether he is a victim or a predator. Of particular interest for the thesis is mixture of narrative voice. To emphasize how the protagonist struggles with intervening thoughts of the war, Kennedy mixes first- second- and third-person. British WWII veteran, Day, finds thinking to be a hazard. He has to do it all the time, and his thoughts consume him. He feels he has to keep them in check to not lose control (Kennedy:2). The unsayable is explored through the protagonist's fragmented line of thoughts, neatly written in italics and a different font, interrupting the line of events in the story. A film set in Germany in 1949 is the setting of the novel, while haunting memories of the protagonist's past breaks up the the chronology, mixing the past and the present. In the

following citation, Day is thinking about a book he has been reading, and is suddenly interrupted by his own thoughts about the women he doubt's he will ever see again:

(...) the chatter between Holmes and his best friend and the hours you could spend constructing how they lived when you weren't there to see. Maybe not the best use of mental energy.

But stops you wondering if she ever constructed how they lived when she wasn't there to see.

Chop it.

(Kennedy:42)

Here, Day's mind wanders to the past, and as to protect himself from it, he tells himself to "chop it". The dialogue that he has with himself within his mind, provides the reader with explicit insight into the protagonist's struggles. In the beginning of the novel, what his past entails is unclear, but the further one gets, the more of his past is unraveled. His past and present can therefore be said to follow a parallel line within this narrative.

2.6.2 Atonement

The story in *Atonement* is about a female author, constructing an alternative happy ending to her sad story. The imagination of the protagonist in this novel is both what victimizes two important people in her life, and what is used to atone for it. Briony Tallis is a thirteen-year-old girl with a passion for writing and drama. The Tallis family lives in England during WWII. One day, she becomes the witness of an intimate encounter between her sister and their gardener. She misreads the situation, and cannot believe that her sister would do such a thing willingly. When later the rape of a young girl happens on their property, Briony puts two and two together, and comes to the conclusion that it must have been Robbie, the gardener. The lovers are ripped a part, and the gardener gets the choice of being sent to prison or the army. When Briony realize that she was wrong, it is already too late.

Perhaps the most interesting part of the novel is in the final pages when the narrative voice, which has been an omniscient, external narrator up until this point, changes to a character-bound narrator. A seventy-seven-year-old Briony, now writing in first-person, reveals that she is the author of the novel the reader has just read, and that the happy ending,

where the two lovers find each other after the war, is not true. That she made it up, because it is what should have happened. The deaths of Cecilia and Robbie would be impossible to write:

What sense of hope or satisfaction could a reader draw from such an account? Who would want to believe that that they never met again, never fulfilled their love? I couldn't do it to them.

(McEwan:371)

She further says that she understands now that she could never atone for her sin. She could only try, which is what she did when she wrote her novel and gave them a fictional happy ending. In this novel, the protagonist uses her imagination and writing skills to deal with trauma, by creating an alternative story. The 'real' story, or what really happened is not as important.

2.6.3 Everything Is Illuminated

Twenty-one-year-old, Jonathan Safran Foer (character sharing the name of the author) travels to Ukraine in an attempt to find answers to his questions of his grandfather's past. The humorous narrator of this narrative is Ukrainian Alex Perchov - a tour guide and party-boy with questionable English skills. In this novel, two young men leading different lives on each side of the Atlantic, learn more about their past and who they are. Alex thought he knew who he was before the journey with Foer, but is made aware of his family's connection to Holocaust for the first time. *Everything is Illuminated*, is a novel with a double narrative structure. Two narrator's writes every other chapter on two separate stories, that eventually merge into one. One of the narrative's is a mythical tale about the beginning and end of a Jewish village, while the other is an account of a journey taken by an American Jew, suffering from a lack of identity due to the black holes in his grandfather's history. This is the only novel out of the three containing characters of the post-memorial generation themselves, directly addressing trans-generational trauma and the issue of identity it can cause.

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

(Foer:260)

The trans-generational haunting is vividly illustrated in this quote by Safran, the grandfather of Jonathan Safran Foer (the character). Jonathan seems to be the narrator of chapters about his family history, all the way back to sixteenth century. Other chapters are letters written by Alex for Jonathan. The narration in the chapter where Alex retells his grandfather's testimony of the war is particularly interesting. For three pages, there is no punctuation and one gets the notion that the things explained makes such an impression on Alex, that he almost can't breathe.

2.7 Questions to be answered

The post-memorial generation that grew up after the war learned about the past events from the context of their contemporary society. From a present perspective, the cause and effects of the war might appear evident, and people's actions and reactions at the time could puzzle someone who learns about it today. This is also something that Rau comments on when she says that "[h]istoriography rationalizes retrospectively." (Rau:211) The chronological telling of historical events makes them seem inevitable, when they at the time were in the unforeseeable future. To be able to understand what happened, the post-memorial generation has to put themselves in the shoes of those who experienced the war, which can be difficult if one only reads factual narratives. The three novels are interesting because of the the broad specter of "real" stories they provide, written by post-memorial generational authors. The thesis claims that novels like these can provide additional and different perspective on WWII, and by that contribute something valuable to general history – the history that we all live in, which means our understanding of the world and of reality and of life itself. They can also be said to be testimonies of the post-memorial generation's relation to the war.

This thesis has found history to be a type of storytelling, which bears similar traits to that of fictional narratives. Yet, history writing is limited by its constant, restricting commitment to support any claim made by the author, with referential and convincing sources. The author and the narrator of a historical text is the same, in contrast to the fictional writer's opportunity to detach him/herself from the narrator in the fictional text. This gives the fictional writer an opportunity to provide insight into the thoughts and feelings of his/her characters, and in that, the ability to make the personal experience of war accessible to the reader. The thesis therefore claims that these new perspectives contemporary WWII novels contain, can contribute to general history, and thereby help the post-memorial generation on its way to a fuller understanding of the war that haunts them.

The following chapters will be an analysis of the three novels introduced here. The analysis will aim to find out what new perspectives on WWII the narrative in the novels provide, as well as how they are able to convey it, in other words, what are the characteristics of the particular discourse of the narrative? The thesis also aims to point out what the novels can reveal about the post-memorial generation, and finally, if the novels can contribute to the history of WWII.

3. *Day* by A.L. Kennedy

A.L. Kennedy's *Day* is a narrative about a British Royal Air Force (RAF) pilot in the Bomber Commandment, Alfred Day, who has served in WWII. After the war, he has taken it upon himself to be an extra in a film shot in Germany about the events of WWII. He does this in an attempt to find something to help him move on, since the memories of the war are very much present in his life. Day feels guilty about his past, the killings he had to commit, but also that he survived while friends and family died. It is not until he realizes that the 'good fight' he was part of, was not fought in a manner aligned with the glorious picture painted in general history, that he can start on his journey to recovery.

The following analysis of the novel will present the war myths that it addresses and what 'new' perspective on WWII it provides. In this, the thesis takes heed of Petra Rau's claim that contemporary writers challenge war myths. The account for war myths such as the idea of heroism and the 'Good Fight' will be presented, as well as the new perspective of the individual experience of war – which would prove difficult for a historian to account for, as s/he has to scientifically refer to every claim, while every emotion and thought is only available to the individual.

The analysis will additionally discuss how these war myths and new perspectives have been presented by the author, or in other words, how the narrative is presented. The objective of this examination of the 'how?' is to find what literary tools the author has used to provide a new perspective on WWII, and further what effects this new side of the story might have. Is Kennedy able to convey a new truth or make the experiences of WWII more accessible to a post-memorial audience? The thesis claims that novels, in contrast to history, are at liberty to provide insight into the thoughts and feelings of individuals and in that, make personal experiences of war more accessible to the reader. Kennedy does just that, by letting the reader into Alfred Day's mind, using several literary tools to tell his story. The reoccurring literary tools are identified as part of the particular discourse of the narrative in *Day*. Narrative voice, and especially second-person narration, is particularly significant in the novel. Additionally, in repeating the singing of the patriotic hymn "Jerusalem", which many Britons believe should be the national anthem of England (Ross), the novel's place in both collective and personal history is emphasized. Collective history, such as the hymn, is often associated with the war, in addition to the personal history of the individual who sings it, sergeant Alfred Day.

3.1 War myths and new perspective

It was perhaps the first time in history that official policy produced events so shocking, bizarre, and stomach-turning that the events had to be tidied up for presentation to a highly literate mass population.

(Fussell:178)

In *The Great War and Modern Memory*, Paul Fussell claims that the events of WWI, or The Great War, were so horrible that a large mass of euphemisms were found necessary to make the news of the battlefield digestible for the public. Although A.L. Kennedy's *Day* evolves around WWII, Fussell's claims are relevant in this discussion as well, as the heavy use of war euphemisms did by no means end after WWI. Both "heroism" and the "Good Fight" are examples of such euphemisms. These are also myths dismantled in *Day*, by bringing new sides of the story to the surface. By providing an intimately personal war experience, through a mixed use of narrative voice and an interesting approach to hymns, this novel reminds us that human beings are nuances rather than binary structures, and that in war, there is conflict between the individual "I" and the collective "we". As the analysis will show, this conflict is something that Kennedy particularly emphasizes through the use of the hymn "Jerusalem".

3.1.1 The Good Fight

A war myth at the heart of Kennedy's novel, is the idealistic nationalism of the "Good Fight" fought by the British, considered to be on the right side of history, something also Gerd Bayer found in his essay entitled "World War II Fiction and the Ethics of Trauma", (Bayer:171). Paul Fussell claims that the glorification of British military actions has a long tradition and that "the British tendency towards heroic grandiosity about all their wars" was an inhibition on the truth (Fussell:175). He exemplifies this argument through American historian Barbara Tuchman's view on British accounts of their military performance in WWII. She claims that every mistake or failure either vanished or was transformed into something beautiful and glorious. Everything performed by the British military was heroic and progressive, losses and wins alike (qtd. in Fussell:175). An inhibition on truth rings like a euphemism for a lie, and

in an attempt to explain the British glorification of their efforts in WWII, one could assume that their national pride as an imperial super-power, the magnitude of loss in WWI and the British Phlegm were contributing factors. Phlegm is a calmness of temperament or a sort of overly politeness. Fussell describes the style of the British Phlegm to be speaking of the (Great) war as completely “normal and matter-of-fact” (Fussell:181). Fussell states that soldiers modified their experiences with magnitude in their letters home, and a historian could therefore not rely on letters “for factual testimony about the war” (Fussell:183). He exemplifies it with letters from the front with sayings like “On my usual afternoon walk today a shrapnel shell scattered a shower of bullets around me in an unpleasant manner” (qtd. in Fussell:181). A phrase embodying British Phlegm, now to be found on a number of items in British souvenir shops, is ‘Keep calm and carry on’, which came from a propaganda poster of WWII, pulled back as it could be perceived as patronizing (Thorpe). By this, it is clear that the British Phlegm continued into WWII, and was also a style of which journalists took to. The myth of British Phlegm was a big part of the glorification of the “Good Fight”.

An important perspective provided by this novel, is the questioning of the glorification of the “Good Fight” fought by the Allies. Petra Rau suggests that Alfred Day realizes that the 1947 film he is cast in, “invents digestible realities and acts of heroism for a postwar audience” (Rau: 209). In this manner, Rau confirms that the events of WWII were in need of the same tidying up as Fussell said the events of the Great War needed, before they could be presented to the public. She further states that propaganda and official war reportage have caused symptoms of a “war complex”, which can be seen in such films as Day was a part of, with clichés and myths “that overwrite repressed feelings about killing and mass death” (Rau: 209). One could read from Rau’s claims that propaganda has played an important part in creating war-myths, or digestible realities. These myths would accommodate a post-war audience, but from the looks of contemporary WWII novels, the following generations are not content with tidied up truths. The problem for the post-memorial generation, it seems, is that these war myths have come to dominate the way in which the war is remembered. The post-memorial generation is not buying mythical propaganda. They are trying to get to the parts of history that has been overlooked in the light of the myth, by challenging them with stories of imperfect stories with flawed heroes, like Alfred Day.

Contemporary war novels attempt to question their country’s glorified war effort. One example of the questioning of the glorification of the "Good Fight" can be found in a conversation between Day and Pluckrose by the fire when they are on leave after a bombing

mission went wrong. Pluckrose is questioning whether their actions are any better than that of the opposing side:

'When I'm on the ground, I can get a fix that's accurate to maybe five miles, possibly one or two.' He spoke softly towards the flames. 'A mile's a long way Alfred. And if I'm out by a mile, who else is out by a mile? What am I dropping my bombs on? Am I right? How often are we right? An if we're not right...?'

(Kennedy:116)

Here, Pluckrose is talking about how easily someone can become collateral damage (a commonly used war euphemism to hide the truth of what is actually going on), even by a good navigator like himself. Day affirms him by saying that they have God on their side, that the Nazis are the bastards and that they are all doing their best. Pluckrose's response is "I hope so, Alfie. I do very hope so." (Kennedy:117). The three phrases that Day brings up to ease Pluckrose, are all euphemism in the sense that they replace the meaninglessness of the war with more acceptable explanations. Alfred Day, fought for the British on the "winning team" and was considered to be on the right side of history. However, like Pluckrose, Day struggles with the same questions of right and wrong. The affirmations he uses to comfort Pluckrose sounds practiced – like something soldiers would be trained to think, in order to carry on with the difficult tasks ahead. Day is therefore not speaking his mind as an individual, but as a collective "we" when he says that they have God on their side, the Nazis are the bad guys and that they can only do their best. The individual voice is not allowed to be heard, because that would threaten the collective truth, which they all rely on to get the job done.

The collective patriotism after WWII, or what is termed "British pride", becomes a problematic issue for Alfred. Having seen the devastations brought upon Germany by RAF pilots like himself, he feels guilty. In an argument, Day is confronted with the horrible reality of his actions by Ivor Sands, Day's employer in a bookstore where he worked after the war. Ivor was not a soldier, but was both physically and psychologically harmed after living in fear of bombs, and picking up the pieces of the city after they fell:

'What did you do in the war? Because I was on the ground, cleaning up after bastards like you, putting out fires, lifting out bodies and the bits of bodies.' His hands shaking,

which you recognized, but ignored. ‘You ever carry someone melting? – They’ll drip like a candle sometimes, runs all over you.’

‘You were cleaning up after Germans, not bastards like me.’

‘And your bombings were different, were they? When they landed?’

(Kennedy:145)

Reconciling after a break from the quarrel, Day says to Ivor that none of them won the war: “Jerry didn’t win the war and we didn’t win the war. The spivs did (...) and the Whitehall Warriors” (Kennedy:148). Day is suggesting that none of the nations involved won the war. The only ones who benefited from the war were politicians and black-market traders. Bayer says, that it is not until Alfred acknowledges that “the war he participated in was not necessarily fought in a manner that agreed with its overall status as a highly justified intervention” (Bayer:172), that he can escape the traumatic guilt hanging over him.

According to Rau, the uncertainty or questioning of the justification of the actions of the Allies, is typical for contemporary novels on WWII, written by the post-memorial generation, because this self-critical approach reflects contemporary agendas in humanities (Rau:209). One could assume that the post-memorial generations need to unravel the hidden stories of their families’ and their nations' past, bringing to light things that the war generation might have wanted to or needed to keep in the shadows, in order to move on from the trauma of the war. The "war generation" here not only refers to individuals who experienced the war, but also governments and institutions, choosing to promote nationalistic stories of heroism and resistance towards the Nazis in order to unite their citizens in an effort to rebuild the country after the devastations of the war.

3.1.2 Heroism – ‘Dulce et decorum est Pro patri mori’

Is there any way of compromising between the reader’s expectations that written history ought to be interesting and meaningful and the cruel fact that much of what happens – all of what happens? – is inherently without “meaning”?

(Fussell:172)

Fussel raises this illuminating question in a discussion on why authors writing about the Great War have a problem with finding the correct style suitable for history. Angus Calder argues, in *Disasters and Heroes: on War, Memory and Representation*, that heroism is not a natural effect of war, but merely another construction imposed retrospectively on events in order to provide some sort of meaning (Calder:121-122). Similarly, Rau says that Kennedy's *Day*, with its allusions to Homer "dismisses the concept of heroism as a war myth" (Rau:212). Rau points out that Homer's heroes, are not only brave and righteous: "For every valiant act of selfless bravery or foolish recklessness are countless others of cowardice, ineptitude, carelessness, and betrayal" (Rau:212). Like Odysseus and Achilles, Day is also a flawed 'hero'. In revenge for his mother's murder, Day kills his father. He falls in love with a married woman, and engages in an affair with her while her husband is off to fight for his country. He is also a good soldier, however, fighting for his country and caring for his crew members. Day does put his life at risk for his country, but he is not a hero. He is merely a human being in all its simplistic complexity.

Being on the right side of general history, however, guilt emerges, and he struggles with the justification of his actions in the war. How can he be a hero, when he hurt and killed civilians? Thinking in binaries could be necessary in wartime. A soldier has to dehumanize his opponent in order to kill, but this binary thinking becomes problematic for Day until he comes to realize that the world is not black and white, and that people are nuanced. In a conversation with what he calls a "Good German" on the filmset, Day learns that they are much alike. They are around the same age, have both been soldiers and imprisoned by their opponents. It pains Day to hear that the German would not return to his home city of Hamburg, as everyone he knew had died in the bombing which Day participated in (Kennedy:162-165). Being constantly fed with the notion that he is fighting the good fight against pure evil, becomes problematic when he finds his own actions to be cruel, and sees the opponents for what they are – human beings like himself.

As a result of these recognitions, Day is conflicted. In one way, he enjoys the prestige of his uniform when he walks next to his girlfriend, as he assumes it makes her proud when by passers glance in his direction. At the same time, it symbolizes the actions he has to commit, which he is not proud of:

That's what you catch in the watching eyes: in the other people who don't know you, who just guess – that you're something to be proud of. Or else you're their anger, the way it will be expressed. You're going to take revenge for them – because of some

loss, or no loss, or nothing to do with the war, some personal hate. Or else you're meant to be their son, or their sweetheart, or their fear, or their dead.

(Kennedy:188)

The uniform also signifies the eradication of his individuality. He becomes what the collective "we" needs – a hero to be proud of, punishing the Germans on England's behalf. The problem of being seen as a hero arises when the person in question does not recognize himself in that role. Another aspect of Day's conflict of heroism is that he was a bomber: "Try telling them you flew in bombers. You won't be so popular then, either." (Kennedy:146). According to Calder, Bombers did Churchill's dirty work, from which a large number died and suffered great traumas:

Churchill insisted that Bomber Command hammered German cities nightly. It was the only form of direct attack available to Britain until D-Day. It was supposed to cripple German war industry which in fact increased production as the bombardment went on. Casualty rates among air crew were appallingly high. Those who survived have lived ever since with traumas impossible to submerge. However futile their effort, the sacrifice was magnificent (...).

(Calder:136)

Calder believes that Bombers were not treated with the same respect as other soldiers, due to the arbitrariness of their actions and considering that Britons at home had experienced the damage done by German Bombers. Moreover, Calder says:

The tragedy of the bomber crewman after the war is that nobody wanted to hear about what he had done, battering German cities and slaughtering children.

(Calder:107)

Attitude towards his kind probably contributed to Day's prohibition from sharing his guilt and inner conflict with anyone. He shares it neither with the woman he loves nor his dear friend Pluckrose, as exemplified previously in the analysis.

Fussel has an additional explanation as to the reasons for his silence. He says that soldiers of WWI rarely spoke of their experiences because they had "discovered that no one is very interested in the bad news they have to report. What listener wants to be torn and shaken

if he doesn't have to be? We have made *unspeakable* mean *indescribable*: it really means *nasty*." (Fussell:170). He says further that "whatever the cause, the presumed inadequacy of language itself to convey the facts about trench warfare is one of the motifs of all who wrote about the war". Day does not say much about his experiences, but at the same time he cannot avoid thinking about them. And it is through these thoughts that Kennedy manages to convey the personal war experience of a soldier, by utilizing the possibilities of narrative voice.

One of the ways Kennedy uses narrative voice is to present Day both as the protagonist and the antagonist of the narrative, something which more precisely refers to his memories – or thinking, as Alfred puts it – which is the enemy:

And thinking itself, that wasn't helpful and yet you had to do it all the time. It was there when you dreamed, when you spoke, when you carried out your very many other compulsory tasks. If you couldn't keep control and stay wary, you might think anything, which was exactly the one freedom you'd avoid. You could dodge certain thoughts, coriskscrew off and get yourself out of their way, but they'd still hunt you.

You have to watch

This morning he could feel them, inside and out, bad thoughts getting clever with him, sly.

(Kennedy:2)

The way in which Alfred describes his thoughts here is as if they have a will of their own, as if they are hunting him. This, moreover, gives them power over him. In the final sentence, the thoughts are described as almost physically attacking him. Since his greatest challenge is with himself, and his thoughts are what he has to fight of, one could say that Alfred Day is both the hero and the villain of the story. From Alfred's description of how his thoughts take control over him, bringing him back to memories of war, one could assume that he suffers from post-traumatic stress syndrome. The war fragments him because there are so many things that seem wrong that should be right, and so many things that he cannot say that should be said.

The way in which Alfred's inner war with himself is made accessible to the reader is through this interesting variation of narrative voice. As suggested above, the mixture of voice mirrors Day's fragmented mind and his struggle with identity after the war. His need to speak as an individual "I" is contrasted with the pressure to speak as a collective "we". In an analysis of *Day* in his essay, "World War II Fiction and the Ethics of Trauma", Gerd Bayer states that the dominant narrative point of view is a detached omniscience, combined with segments of

second-person narration (Bayer:168). This thesis, however, finds the narration in *Day* to be a combination of first-, second- and third-person, where the latter is dominant. The terms third-person and omniscient narration are often used interchangeably” (Abbott:73), but in the case of this novel, third-person narration would arguably be the better term. Bayer has probably chosen the term omniscient, as the narrator has complete access into Alfred Day’s thoughts, but the narrator does not have insight into the minds of any other character in the narrative. The Penguin *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, characterizes third person as the author choosing one character and relating the story “to that character in such a way that the field of vision is confined to him or her alone” (Cuddon:761). The thesis finds this definition to be more in line with the dominant narrative voice in the novel, than an omniscient narrative voice. Bayer provides an example for what he finds to be a statement of a “rather detached and authorial tone” (Bayer:168) in the novel, as an affirmation of the detached omniscient voice: “Alfred was growing a moustache” (Kennedy:1). One could agree with Bayer’s conclusion when only accounting for this single sentence. However, when reading the rest of the first page, one could argue that the narrative voice is far from detached from the character in question’s point of view:

His progress so far was quite impressive: a respectable growth which already suggested reliability and calm. There were disadvantages to him, certain defects: the shortness, inelegant hands, possible thinning at his crown, habit of swallowing words before they could leave him, habit of looking mainly at the ground – and those extra pounds at his waist, a lack of condition – but he wasn’t so terribly ugly, not such a bad lot. Mainly his problem was tiredness – or more an irritation with his tiredness – or more a tiredness that was caused by his irritation – or possibly both. He could no longer tell.

(Kennedy:1)

This description of Day’s moustache and looks in general, as well as his personality, does not seem objective. On the contrary, it sounds more like Alfred’s evaluation of himself. Bayer’s characterization of the novel's dominant narrative voice as "detached" omniscient, is in my opinion questionable, as the descriptions of Alfred, other characters and events in the narrative are not indifferent or impartial, but colored by Alfred’s feelings and opinions. Even though the third-person voice refers to the protagonist as Alfred, it is clear that the

descriptions of other characters and events in the story are focalized by Alfred himself:

Standing to the left in what looked like a proper Luftwaffe uniform was a genuine German – well spoken, quiet about his war, and playing the camp commandment. Oscar Vonsomething. Rumour suggested he'd been a navy boy, or an opera singer, or a political refugee, although Alfred didn't care much.

(Kennedy:119)

The German actor's name was most likely not "Vonsomething". One could assume that the nickname is a result of Alfred not remembering his actual surname, and therefore replacing 'something' with the part he cannot recall.

There are also elements of first-person narration:

Maybe that's what I wanted to talk to him about – maybe it's nothing to do with the war, only that I'd like him to know he should fall in love. Then he'll be humiliated soon enough.

(Kennedy:119)

The segment is italicized to convey to the reader that the statement is one of Alfred Day's thoughts. Second-person is the use of the word "you" when telling the story, either to refer to a character or the audience, as opposed to "he/she" in third-person and "I" in first-person (Abbott:70,71). Abbott suggests that the use of second-person narration is rare and seems strange, as stories are usually told in third- or first-person. It works well in this novel, however, as the second-person voice is used when Day is thinking. The use of "you" emphasizes that he is talking to himself, and in that, alienating himself from his surroundings:

They're ringing the bell for lunch and someone runs past you, and someone else laughs, but after that there is more and more quiet and you're left to yourself, as far as you can tell, and so you close your eyes and lie out flat, the ground rushing beneath you. Your spine tingles and you wonder if this isn't an echo you're reading, if so many bombs haven't changed the earth, haven't left it always shivering and taken away its rest.

(Kennedy:79)

Here, when Day is left alone without distractions, his mind wanders back to his war days. Addressing himself as "you" functions as a tool to alienate Day from his surroundings. Which is fitting, as Alfred bears his cross alone. Another possible effect of using second-person narration in this way, is that the reader gets a more intimate understanding of the scene described. In my experience, "you" is used in oral narration in an effort to make the audience picture themselves in the situation experienced by the person telling the story. This way of conveying an experience, could make the emotional aspect of the event more accessible to the receiver, as he/she has to put themselves into the equation.

Alfred Day's thoughts brings him back and forth between present and past, with the third-person narrative voice in the background. Through this combination, one is granted access into Day's inner thoughts and struggles, gradually unpacking events in his past affecting his present. Using this technique, Kennedy is able to provide an individual perspective on the otherwise very collective WWII narrative. What *Day* shows us is a hero and a villain incorporated in the same person, as opposed to the traditional WWII narrative, where the Allies are portrayed as the heroes and the Nazis are the villains. Even though the physical war has ended, moreover, Alfred is still fighting. Day's battle is with himself, and he needs to recognize the duality of his own humanity, and of the British warfare in order to move on. Calder says about heroism in modern warfare that:

The 'knights of the air' in the 1940 Battle of Britain in fact had no time for knightly challenges or courtesies. The modern soldier is meant to be a man with mechanical weapons, who is part of an overall killing machine. He may have to be braver than soldiers have ever been before, but his heroism will hardly approximate to that of Arthurian knights or the figures of ancient epic."

(Calder:117)

Day had to be brave to keep on living after experiencing the constant fear of death, as his crew members died around him, and struggling with guilt for all the destruction he caused. But as previously mentioned, the Bomber's efforts were frowned upon by the collective, and thereby not honorable enough gain heroic status. He finally accepts that like himself, the Allies were capable of both good and bad, and that he therefore does not have to bear the blame alone. By unifying the hero and the villain of the narrative, this novel debunks the myth of heroism, and further, as the protagonist is a soldier in the British Royal Air Force,

questions the side on which he fought. Alfred is stuck in the past, up until the turning point of the novel, where he experiences a revelation from singing the patriotic hymn “Jerusalem”.

3.1.3 “Jerusalem” - The Individual ‘I’ VS. the Collective ‘We’

‘We were all supposed to be civilized together (...) We are not all the same, we should not all have to be together, we are not we’.

(Kennedy:146)

Here, Kennedy problematizes the collective "we" in a conversation between Alfred and Ivor. Ivor's mother had preached that the war would change the country and its rigid class system, and that equality was next. Angus Calder says, in *Disasters and Heroes: on War, Memory and Representation*, that “The phrase ‘People’s War’ became current early on, defining the sense that rich and poor, civilian and fighters, were ‘all in it together’” and that “[v]ictory would be followed by social justice” (Calder:61). Like many others, Ivor's mother was positively hoping that the single pronouns would be collected into a unified "we", brought together by the shared enemy. Ivor does not see any proof of his mother's prediction, however. On the contrary, he says that “[t]hey never learn, the people in charge – as soon as they get in charge they forget what people are...” (Kennedy:275), suggesting that there will always be a clear distinction between the politicians and those that they supposedly represent. Calder points out that British politicians during the war were not representing the people, and that it took four decades for a debate on constitutional reform to emerge, which he sees as a token of how Britons bought their own propaganda of being a superior democracy, not in need of change (Calder:65). Even though he admits to many improvements on account of the "Welfare state", Calder suggests that the process of self-improvement after the war was exceedingly slow compared to that of states on the Continent, due to Britain's complacency (Calder:62-63). “Complacency was sustained for so long partly because of the shortage of honest representations of wartime experience in the media”, Calder writes (Calder:66). The whole concept of war is based upon the notion that the individual is worth sacrificing for the greater good. For the purpose of motivating soldiers to enlist and fight in WWII, it was found necessary to boost moral, upheave nationalism, and use euphemisms to downsize the horror

of war. An affect of this, is that the individual's needs and experiences are suppressed, and can vanish in the the big scheme of things when history is written. What the nation needs, must come first, and inevitably is what endures over time. In this we see that the story served to the public might differ greatly from the experience of the individual and that the trauma of the individual is silenced in order to uphold the collective need for the war to be meaningful. For Day, this creates a conflict between the need to speak as and individual and the voice of the collective.

The literary tool which manifests the conflict of speaking as an individual "I" versus speaking as a collective "we" is Kennedy's use of the hymn. Words and phrases from hymns and other songs are repeated throughout the novel and can therefore be said to be a part of its particular discourse. Beside the dramatic effect this creates, the reference to music is connected to Day's trauma. When a tune crosses his mind, the music activates his memory. Lyrics are reoccurringly interrupting Day's train of thought, leading him to think of other events in his past. Additionally, it has a screenplay-like effect, in that if one knows the melody, it creates a dramatic imagery, almost like music playing in the background whilst the action in the scene is played out before the reader. This dramatic effect is especially emphasized when the lyrics originate from hymns:

I feel the life His wound impart

He wondered why he'd ever thought that he could touch her.

I feel the Savior in my heart.

He wondered where he could go now when the day came and he had to leave camp.

My chains fell off, my heart was free,

He wondered about the gun there in his hands.

I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.

The gun was watching, asking.

All kinds of being free, our kid, all kinds of escaping.

But what difference would it make. My heart's not free.

(Kennedy:57)

Here, Day is sitting on his bed on the film set, alone in silence, which is when his mind usually wanders to the past. The first four sentences in italics are from a hymn, "And Can It Be That I Should Gain?" In between are his thoughts on his past, future and present. The final two paragraphs are also in italics, but these are not from the hymn like the former four

italicized sentences. They are Day's own thoughts. One could read this interior monologue as if Day was considering shooting himself, thinking of mistakes in his past, not seeing a future for himself and finally having a 'watching' and 'asking' gun in his hands. Having a hymn "playing in the background" makes the scene all the more dramatic. Additionally, switching from Day's thoughts to hymn lyrics in every other sentence, mixes individual speech with collective speech. It is a reminder that the collective experience and the individual experience of war can differ greatly, and that difference could be fatal in the case of the individual.

"Hymn" originates from Greek and is a "song in praise of a god or a hero" (Cuddon:345). Singing hymns is usually a collective act, sung by a congregation to God, but it is also a prayer through which God is addressed by the individual. A hymn is therefore spoken as a collective "we" and an individual "I" at the same time. It is no wonder why Day is reminded of his dead crew members when singing the patriotic hymn, "Jerusalem", which is both a song he used to sing with a friend and a hymn usually sung collectively by a congregation.

One day on the film set, Day experiences something like a panic attack. He feels dizzy, has trouble breathing and questions whether he is alive or dead. Day recognizes the sensation from when he had landed after a bombing, and that sometimes the only thing that helped was to sing:

You'd have to sleep and wake again before you believed in yourself. Or sometimes there'd be nothing for it but to sing.

'And did those feet in ancient time'

Pluckrose peering round at you that morning.

'Walk upon England's mountains green'

Balancing the whole of yourself as you push on, drifting up when you step while the words are shaking out of you, so loud that you can hear, and he's nodding, and you can see the way his mouth is yelling, must be braying out the next line with you. Tone deaf, Pluckrose, but it doesn't bother you.

'And was the holy lamb of God'

'On England's pleasant pasture seen'

The pair of you bellowing, looking for pastures and Pluckrose bolting into a run, you following, airborne in spasms, but sinking, settling, and the last of the Benzedrine burning out through your legs.

'Bring me my spears, oh clouds unfold'

Bring me my chariot of fire'

(...) Feeling ashamed of something, of all of the breaking you have done – it must prove you're alive. And singing 'Jerusalem' weighed you down like armor plate. So Alfred stretched his spine against the bared ground of the phony camp and yelled out the old words, the imagined country. (...) He shouted it up, over and over: the bow, the arrows, the chariot, all of the kit: he repeated it word for word, for comfort, for steel in his bones. (...) Alfred aware of small sounds around him, of men coming back from their meal, hearing him, pausing, men being near.

'I will not cease from mental fight

Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand'.

(Kennedy:80-81)

This extensive citation is included, as it demonstrates both how Kennedy is able to create a vivid scene, with the music playing in the background, and how it functions to pull Day out his traumatized state. Additionally, it provides lyrics from the hymn "Jerusalem", which will be discussed further down. This hymn was sung by Day and one of his crew members to ground them after bombing targets. When his PTSD kicks in, he recognizes that singing the hymn helped when he was shaken after a bombing, and sings it again to get himself out of his current state of mind. Importantly, the act of singing this particular hymn alone in front of an audience emphasizes his loss of community. The 19th century poem by William Blake, accompanied by Sir Huber Parry's music from 1916, had by WWII become quite popular among politicians, patriots and sports fans (Montefiore). It has become so much associated with patriotism that a clergy man found it too nationalistic to be sung in church (Borland), calling for the people of England to stay united and fight for their Jerusalem, emphasizes how alone Day feels with his struggles. Kennedy's use of "Jerusalem" also functions to further highlight the relationship between Day's alienation and nationalistic propaganda. The purpose of the war seemed crystal clear, the Nazis had to be stopped, which also means that when the Allies won everyone should be triumphant. Day's experiences as a soldier during WWII were probably shared by many. Still, he struggles in silence, alienating himself from his surroundings, as the use of second-person "you" highlights. In problematizing the use of pronouns, like "I", "you" and "we", the novel emphasizes the sense of alienation that haunts Day. He questions who he is, what he has done and who is to blame. In parts of the novel, it seems as if he is close to giving up and end his life.

Only after an epiphany of sorts, which comes to Day while he sings “Jerusalem” in front of an audience at his last day on the film set, Day can start to wiggle himself out of PTSD’s grasp on him:

Alfred standing and the sound like a love in him now and round him, tilting his head and wrapping him with a light he only touches, cannot see. And he can believe that he hears Pluckrose singing, that lovely awful voice, and they are here together again and yelling the England that will never be.

(...) And he can believe that he is forgiven.

He can believe so much, the truth of it makes him weep.

(Kennedy:268)

This is the turning point of the novel. Singing “Jerusalem” helped Day and his friend Pluckrose when they came down from the air, after bombing. It was a tool to ground them, and wash away the air and the guilt. It was comforting then, and it is comforting now. But the singing also brings Day’s mind back to his childhood, when he was punished for singing in school. He is reminded of this as he sings the hymn, and the audience joins him. And as they join him, he is not alone in his guilt and suffering anymore and realizes that he can stop punishing himself. ‘The England that will never be’ is referring to the portrayal of England as the chosen land of God in the hymn, hence the title “Jerusalem” which is also a metaphor for paradise. But Day says that England will never become Paradise, because he and his friends has ‘put their swords to sleep’. The war is over. And finally, Day can ‘cease his mental fight’. It is paradoxical that Jerusalem represents the propaganda and the problematic "we" of the war, at the same time as it also saves Day by creating a "we" in the singing, showing that there is a sense of community after all. Through this, Kennedy explores the complexity of the "we" and shows us that like everything else, this cannot be easily divided into something that is just "good" or just "bad".

3.2 Conclusion

A.L. Kennedy’s *Day* contributes to the general story of WWII by providing the experience of an individual soldier. A person who experienced the war can provide testimony, but memory is flawed, and one might leave out details that make oneself or one’s nation look bad. A

WWII novelist of the post-memorial generation could provide insight into an individual's thoughts and experienced reality, which in *Day* gives a more nuanced war story including the good and the bad, emphasizing that nothing is clearly good or bad, and provides a more complex narrative than what an historian could tell. A novel by such a writer also reflects the post-memorial generations thoughts and concerns regarding the war that their parents and grandparents experienced. By repeating the patriotic hymn 'Jerusalem', both sung by the protagonist himself, and later in unison with other veterans, Kennedy symbolically emphasizes the conflict between collective speech and personal speech that will also naturally dominate any situation of war. The collective voices agreed that the British were saviors of the world after WWII, but the individual story of war paints another – and more complex – picture. The individual story of the struggling soldier therefore provides a new, other or multifaceted perspective on WWII than that of general history.

4. *Atonement* by Ian McEwan

Ian McEwan's novel *Atonement* is a bildungsroman of a young British girl and the assumption she makes on behalf of a crime she witnesses, resulting in catastrophe for loved ones. The imagination of the protagonist in this novel is both what victimizes two important people in her life, and what is used to atone for it. Briony Tallis is a thirteen-year-old girl with a passion for writing and drama. On a hot summer day, a few years prior to WWII, she stumbles over an intimate encounter between her older sister Cecilia and their gardener and family friend, Robbie Turner. She misreads the situation, finding it unbelievable that her sister would do such a thing willingly. When later that evening, the rape of her cousin takes place on their property, Briony puts two and two together, and comes to the conclusion that it must have been Robbie, the gardener. Due to her false testimony, the lovers are ripped apart. And after three years in captivity, Robbie gets the choice of staying in prison or join the army. When Briony realize that she was wrong, it is already too late. She spends the rest of her life attempting to atone for what she did wrong as a child.

The new perspective *Atonement* has on WWII, is that of women at home and how the war effected them as well. McEwan highlights the feeling of lack of control, the women at home must have felt, by taking away the readers' supposed control of the narrative. Interestingly, however, this recognition does not hit the reader until the end, when McEwan reveals that much of what has been narrated never happened. As novels are considered fiction, one might not be surprised to hear that the story presented was not true, but as the analysis will show, McEwan makes use of narrative expectation in order to generate this emotion in the reader. In doing so, he emphasizes the arbitrariness of war, which again is another perspective set in motion by Briony's false testimony.

4.1 New Perspective

There is also a clearer recognition of the psychological toll that waiting and lack of information take on those left on the "home front", on women and parents, and of the utter bleakness of wartime life and the austerity years that followed it. It is the cost of

war, its traumatic nature rather than its ideological significance or its victories, that is highlighted in these books.

(Rau:210)

A new perspective provided by the novel is, as Rau states in the citation above, the psychological toll that the waiting and lack of information took on people at home, the civilians, the women. In the novel, this side of the story is set in motion by the false testimony given by Briony, which she, amongst other things, tries to atone for by becoming a nurse. The female protagonist becoming a nurse is also a way in which the novel adopts the female perspective on the war, as this was probably the most relevant occupation connected to the war, available to women.

Atonement also accounts for the arbitrariness of war by writing a novel within the novel, challenging the readers' need for closure and truth. The novel does not provide closure, because the reader is led to believe that the lovers reunited. The reader is not made aware that this is a novel written by Briony until final chapter in McEwan's novel. This chapter is about the old lady and writer, who thinks about her novel and why she wrote it as she did. The same is to say for truth, in that one would expect the events presented in the narrative to be true to what actually happened in the storyworld or 'diegesis', which Abbott refers to as "the world of the story – that 'reality' in which the events are presumed to take place" (Abbott:75). The expectation for truth is not met in *Atonement*, which makes the reader question how much truth can be expected of fiction, and what the point of such an expectation might be? Briony has constructed her own truth in her novel, both as a way to atone for her sin, but also to take back control over what she set in motion. Similar to what the thesis found in *Day, Atonement* highlights that like a lie, truth is constructed as well. Briony is attempting to create a sort of order in the chaos created by the war and her false testimony. Through this twist of reality, McEwan highlights the lack of control. The lack of control of the narrative which the reader experiences when he/she realizes that the ending was false, mirroring the lack of control over their own lives and futures that the women at home must have felt during the war.

4.1.1 Women at War

In her novel *Day*, Kennedy provided the personal war experience of a soldier, and how it affected him psychologically. McEwan presents a different side of the war narrative by focusing on the experience of women at home. From the very beginning of the novel, McEwan draws subtle links between civilian life and warfare. When Briony mentions the arrival of her cousins Lola, Jackson and Pierrot Quincey, she thinks of them as “refugees from a bitter domestic civil war” due to their parent’s divorce (McEwan:8). This comparison is quite accurate, as two parents in a bitter conflict with angered arguments using strategies to hurt one another can make what once was a safe home for the children into a divided war zone. The Quincey children are being sent off to their aunt in an effort to give them refuge from the war zone their parents created. In this, McEwan is doing the opposite of what Fussell claimed was a typical style of war writing. Instead of downplaying the horrors of war with a heavy use of euphemisms, McEwan’s metaphor foregrounds the horrors of being in the middle of a home being torn apart.

Another likening of domestic, or women’s, experiences to war is when Cecilia is later working as a nurse at the maternity ward, and describes the moment after birth as “the moment when the battle was over” (McEwan:207). McEwan again compares the ultimate female experience of giving birth to that of warfare, and accurately so, as they were both dangerous at the time and could lead to death.

Further, he mirrors Robbie’s service as a foot soldier in that of Cecilia’s as a nurse. Cecilia had abandoned her parents and siblings after they supported Briony’s claim that Robbie was a rapist, in favor of serving as a nurse in London. Though forced to do so, Robbie has left his mother and studies behind as well, to serve his country. While she is working at the maternity ward, Robbie is in training. In their letters to each other they describe their daily routines:

(...) every day brought commonplace miracles, as well as moments of drama and hilarity. There were tragedies too, against which their own troubles faded to nothing: stillborn babies, mothers who died, young men weeping in the corridors, dazed mothers in their teens discarded by their families, infant deformities that evoked shame and love in confusing measure.

(McEwan:207)

Cecilia's experiences of death, deformities and young lives ruined are not unlike what Robbie as a foot soldier experiences, seeing dead bodies all over, including children and mothers, and severe injuries, both physical and psychological, as a result of German warfare. But before he sees these things with his own eyes, Robbie and Cecilia share anxiety for the unforeseeable future as the country prepares for war:

After Munich last year, he was certain, like everyone else, that there would be a war. Their training was being streamlined and accelerated, a new camp was being enlarged to take more recruits. (...) She mirrored his fears with descriptions of contingency arrangements at the hospital – more beds, special courses, emergency drills. But for both of them there was also something fantastical about it all, remote even though likely. Surely not again, was what many people were saying. And so they continued to cling to their hope.

(McEwan:208)

Due to their country's preparations, Robbie and Cecilia fears the war to come and the prolonging of their separation by it. Still, the idea of another "Great War", with the horrors that entailed, seems to fantastical to be true. But as foreseen, WWII came to Britain. And as the narrator reveals in the final pages of the book, it took them both:

Robbie Turner died of septicemia at Bray Dunes on 1 June 1940, (...) Cecilia was killed in September of the same year by the bomb that destroyed Balham Underground station.

(McEwan:370)

Cecilia was not a soldier fighting overseas. Nevertheless, she died at cost of war, like Robbie the soldier. With Cecilia's war effort as a nurse and her death, McEwan shows us that during the second world war, women made a large contribution and sacrifice at home. Constituting

the arbitrariness of war, Robbie and Cecilia were both at the wrong place at the wrong time, due to Briony's testimony.

4.1.2 Testimony

One does not have to *possess* or *own* the truth, in order to effectively *bear witness* to it; that speech as such is unwittingly testimonial; and that the speaking subject constantly bears witness to a truth that nonetheless continues to escape him, a truth that is, essentially, *not available* to its own speaker.

(Felman and Laub:15)

The citation above is from Shoshana Felman's discussion on psychoanalysis' contribution to testimony in *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, psychoanalysis, and History*. Testimony is, as mentioned in the literary review of the thesis, a speech act performed by a witness to an audience, in which the witness vows to produce their own speech as material evidence of truth. Felman claims that psychoanalysis "radically renews the very concept of testimony" by recognizing that there exists an unconscious testimony, meaning that one can bear witness without being consciously aware of it (Felman and Laub:15). Further, Felman states that testimony is not the account of truth, but rather the way in which one can access it: "The witness is able to beget or create truth, through the speech act of testimony" (Felman and Laub:16). This definition of testimony as a speech act enabling the witness to create truth, could turn problematic if one in the process of begetting are influenced by assumptions and exterior circumstances. Briony is influenced by several things the day of the rape.

First, she witnesses an encounter from her bedroom window, between Cecilia and Robbie by the fountain in front of their house. What actually happens, is that Cecilia goes out to get water for her flower arrangement in an expensive vase. Instead of going to the kitchen, she goes outside to the fountain, as she knows that she will pass by Robbie. Robbie and Cecilia has been studying at the same University, but they avoided each other in school. Cecilia senses that there is something strange between them. She is annoyed with Robbie when he says that he would like to study medicine when he finishes his degree in literature, because she thinks he acts indifferent to the fact that her father is paying for his education. Robbie is well aware of this, but comes across as indifferent because he is trying not to show

that he is in love with Cecilia. He insists on helping her with the vase, which she resists, ending with them breaking a piece of it between them. The piece of the expensive vase drops into the fountain. Robbie is ready to jump in the water, but Cecilia is one step ahead, taking her dress off and jumping in. From where Briony is sitting, it looks like Robbie is ordering Cecilia to undress as he watches her.

The second factor contributing to Briony's assumption, is a letter with an obscene message that was not meant for her eye's. In an attempt to apologize for their quarrel, Robbie is struggling with finding the right words to write to Cecilia. At one point, as more of a joke to himself, he writes: "In my dreams I kiss your cunt, your sweet wet cunt. In my thoughts I make love to you all day long" (McEwan:86). This was of course not a letter he intended to send, but the correct letter with the obscene one, and gave it to Briony to hand to Cecilia, so that she could read it before he arrived at the house for dinner. Before Robbie realizes that he gave Briony the wrong letter, she is long gone. Briony opens the letter before she gives it to Cecilia. The words at the page opens up a door to a part of adult life that she had not encountered before – sexuality. Briony is now convinced that Robbie is a "sex maniac", a notion only made stronger by the next encounter between Robbie and Cecilia that she witnesses. When Cecilia receives the letter, she understands instantly that Robbie never intended to send it. When he arrives at the house he has to explain himself. During their conversation in the house library, it becomes clear to them both that the tension between them is due to their love for one another. As they make love against a bookshelf, Briony steps into the room, and is convinced that Robbie "the sex maniac" has forced himself on her dear sister. The lovers leave the room in embarrassment, not explaining to Briony what just happened. With these three events in mind, there is no wonder why Briony jumped to conclusions later that night when her cousin is raped on their property. The problem was that she did not say that she thought she knew who the rapist was, she said that she saw him.

Testimony is at the heart of *Atonement*, as Briony becomes the key witness in a rape trial. What Briony actually sees with her own eyes, is a tall dark creature running away from her in the night. However, due to the events from earlier that day and her need to be taken seriously by the adults, she convinces herself and Lola that she saw the rapist clearly. As Briony believes she possess the truth – her urged testimony, affected by many factors outside of the event itself, reinstates what she, from her previous knowledge, thought must be the truth. If one tells a lie many times over, eventually one will believe it. Which is exactly what Briony has to do – she has to account for what she saw to her mother, the police and

courtroom. She has moments of doubt, but these are brushed away by the need to be taken seriously:

It was not simply her eyes that told her the truth. It was too dark for that. (...) Her eyes confirmed the sum of all she knew and had recently experienced. The truth was in the symmetry, which was to say, it was founded in common sense. The truth instructed her eyes. So when she said, over and again, I saw him, she meant it, and was perfectly honest, as well as passionate. (...) She was asked again and again, and as she repeated herself, the burden of consistency was pressed upon her. What she had said she must say again. Minor deviations earned her little frowns on wise brows, or a degree of frostiness and withdrawal of sympathy. She became anxious to please, and learned quickly that the minor qualifications she might have added would disrupt the process that she herself had set in train.

(McEwan:169)

In McEwan's vivid depictions, Briony feels obligated to be consistent in her explanation, as to avoid "frostiness and withdrawal of sympathy" from the adults. She feels that she has to stick to her original claims, and exclude any nuance that could make the police question the reliability of her testimony. She simply has to. Otherwise, she is convinced that the rapist would go free.

Of course, Robbie was not the rapist. But he was imprisoned due to Briony's undoubted testimony. As a result, Cecilia alienates herself from her family trains to become a nurse, as Robbie is sent to war in France. Robbie returns traumatized from the war, but comes back to Cecilia. Briony, who has become a nurse as well to atone for her sin, seeks the them out to say that she will go to the police and change her testimony, so that Robbie could be exonerated from his charges. As Lola had married the rapist, he could not be charged, but Briony assured them that she would do anything in her power to clear his name. Leaving their apartment, Briony is relieved to see that neither she "nor the war had destroyed" their love, and feeling content thinking that she would begin in the afternoon on, "not simply a letter, but a new draft, an atonement" and send it to the police and her parents (McEwan:349).

After this page, the novel seemingly ends, and a new chapter begins with a different kind of narrator, and a new type of testimony. Up until this point, the novel has had an external narratorial voice overlooking the events, with access to the minds of every character. The external narratorial voice together with the historically accurate descriptions of events,

gives no reason for the reader to suspect the narrator of being unfaithful to truth of events in the storyworld. In the final section of the book, however, the narrative voice changes to a character-bound narrator from the perspective of a seventy-seven-year-old Briony, revealing herself as the author of the novel the reader has just finished. Perhaps the most interesting part of the novel is in the final pages, where Briony admits that the happy ending, where the two lovers reunite after the war, is not true. That she made it up, because it is what should have happened, not what actually happened. She has just finished her novel, which she in truth has spent the majority of her life to write, doing thorough research of accounts of the war, changing the ending many times. But she lands on the happy ending, to give the lovers the life they should have had together had it not been for her false testimony and the war.

Bearing in mind Laub's claim that a testimony can be valuable, even when fallible, Briony's second testimony is a kind of speech act through which she is actually able to atone, even though she admits that all of it is not true. Her testimony is not without value (in the storyworld), as she accounts truthfully for the events that happened before the war, and that she was wrong. Through her testimonial novel, the story of Robbie and Cecilia and the betrayal they suffered, is saved for the record. In that way, Briony is able to atone.

4.1.3 Atoning

Atonement is, according to the *Oxford Learner's Dictionary*, "the act of showing you are sorry for doing something wrong in the past"

(<http://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/atonement?q=atonement>). As the title suggests, the novel within the novel is Briony's attempt to atone for her false testimony, and what it caused. In her own opinion, however, she could never fully atone for her sin. She could only try, which is what she did when she wrote her novel and gave them a fictional happy ending. In Ian McEwan's novel, the protagonist uses her imagination and writing skills to deal with trauma, by creating an alternative story. The "real" story, or what really happened is too hard to write – In fact, she says that the deaths of Cecilia and Robbie would be impossible to write because

what sense of hope or satisfaction could a reader draw from such an account? Who would want to believe that that they never met again, never fulfilled their love? I couldn't do it to them.

(McEwan:371)

Here, the narrator claims that the reader would not be satisfied with the actual truth. In that way, the fictional author thinks like the soldier in A.L. Kennedy's *Day*, who the few times he actually talks about his experiences, uses euphemism and understatements when talking about the horrors of war. And as mentioned in chapter 2, Fussell believes the reason for this, is that the soldier knows that there is no point in explaining the horrible truth because "what listener wants to be torn and shaken if he doesn't have to be" (Fussell:170). In the case of the truth in *Atonement*, Briony believes that the death of Robbie and Cecilia, and the arbitrariness of it, will not provide the reader with the closure they expect in a war novel. Instead, the narrator provides her audience with a sort of "novelistic propaganda". What I mean by this, is that she gives the reader the traditional love story, where struggles are rewarded. Instead of writing the truth, which would be disappointing for the reader expecting the lovers struggle to be together to have a purpose, she provides them with hope and comfort in that, even though they were treated unfairly and had to fight for their love, they got each other in the end. Otherwise, their struggle would have been for nothing. The heroes of the story died anonymous deaths, while the villain got away with his crime, and got rich due to the war the heroes died as a result of. This illustrates how war myths are created in the first place. Briony constructs a truth in order to live with herself. Here, McEwan shows an example of how fiction can be a necessity. Briony's attempt to atone for her sin, gives us the answer as to why war myths are constructed in the first place – the need for the horrors of war to have some sort of meaning or happy ending.

The novel mirrors the attempts of atonement that nations do when they give medals and retributions 70 years after the war. Are contemporary WWII novels a way to atone for old sins – by telling the stories that were not told, but should have been? It could be the post-memorial generation's contribution to the atonement of their flawed nations. Are they atoning for the misrepresented history, by writing what about stories that history did not account for?) Focus on narrative also – on how we as readers are denied the truth that we thought we were witnessing. Control.

Aspects of this (The good fight in ch.3) passage could also be incorporated in the Atonement chapter. On the constructedness of truth and British Phlegm as a story that we tell in order to go on living (in the same way that Briony tells a story to go on living).

Day kjenner seg ikke igjen I filmen – me har ein forventning I filmen av å bli fortalt sannheten, så vi tar det bare som en sannhet.

Also – could Briony's tale also be seen as a kind of novelistic propaganda? Our expectations of being told a tale that is "true" on some level? Cf. Rau and the war movie.

Briony puts the whole blame on herself. Yes, her wrongful testimony spun out of control, but the war came, regardless of her testimony. Robbie might have had to enlist anyway, and Cecilia could have taken up a job in London and died in the Blitz. Briony takes all of the blame, leaving little to the two most significant contributors to the tragedy – the rapist and the war.

4.1.4 The Arbitrariness of War

Petra Rau says that the middle part of the book, describing Robbie's experience of the Dunkirk evacuation of 1940, "offer a corrective to the finest hour version of the 'Dunkirk spirit'" which was a narrative portrayed by the media at the time as the perfect example of the unified British spirit of resilience (Rau:214-215). In Briony's novel, Robbie fights his way to Dunkirk, in order to come home to his Cecilia, and he survives. The scene that meets him in Dunkirk, however, is men dying of wounds and thirst as they are waiting in vain to be shipped home:

It was obvious enough now they saw it – this was what happened when a chaotic retreat could go no further. It only took a moment to adjust. He saw thousands of men, ten, twenty thousand, perhaps more, spread across the vastness of the beach. In the distance they were like grains of black sand. But there were no boats, apart from one upturned whaler rolling in the distant surf. (...) They waited, but there was nothing in

sight, unless you counted in those smudges on the horizon – boats burning after an air attack.

(McEwan:247-248)

Without medical attention, food or water men are dying while they are waiting to be shipped home. It is later revealed that Robbie was one of them. Dying due to septicemia on a beach, arbitrarily due to a lack of organization.

Another arbitrariness that is hard to accept for the reader, is that the rapist profited from the war on behalf of his chocolate factory, and got away with his crime. He even married Lola, which in turn meant that she could never testify against him if she ever was to accept the truth. Robbie on the other hand, was described as a good man punished for a crime he did not commit. He takes the rapists place in jail, and later as a foot soldier in the war. He dies serving his country as an anonym soldier, while the rapist never had to fight and also got rich because of the war. This is likened to what Day says about the only ones who benefited from the war were politicians and black-market traders. It seems awfully out of order when good men die so that criminals can benefit.

4.2 Lack of Control

By assigning the profession of nursing to the narrative's main female characters, McEwan provides a new perspective on the women at home's effort in the war. Their experiences as nurses are linked to that of a soldier's experiences. In an attempt to take control in the chaos of war, these women of high status seek something practical to do, breaking with their family's high hopes for them.

The novel challenges the reader's expectations to narrative the traditional war love story. One expects the story told in the novel, not to be true *per se*, but to stay true to events in the story world. And one expects the rapist to be caught. When Robbie is blamed for his sin, one expects the truth to be revealed at a later stage. When this doesn't happen either, the reader takes comfort in the fact that Cecilia and Robbie at least got to be together in the end. The ultimate twist is that the ending was not true. Robbie and Cecilia died before they could be together. And the rapist was never held accountable for his sins. Robbie's memory remained tainted. The lack of justice and the coincidental catastrophes mirrors the arbitrariness of war.

Briony experiences that the situation of which she felt so sure of, has spun out of her control. The reader experiences a lack of control as well, when the expectations to the narrative is not met. One could presume that this feeling is what McEwan wants to portray to the reader; the lack of control, and arbitrariness of war, felt by women at home. The reader's experience mirrors the women at home's alternations of hope and despair.

The novel is titled *Atonement*, and the novel within the novel is an attempt at atonement for Briony's sins. In my opinion, Ian McEwan's *Atonement* exemplifies how the post-memorial generation is attempting to atone for the damage done by general history, by writing the stories that were outshined by war myths. This is the novelists' contribution, as politicians and states publicly apologize and hands out medals and retributions several decades after the war.

5. *Everything is Illuminated* by Jonathan Safran Foer

In Jonathan Safran Foer's *Everything is Illuminated*, one of the narrators, who is also a character in the novel and shares the author's name, travels from USA to Ukraine on a quest to fill in the gaps of his dead grandfather Safran's story. The other narrator is Jonathan's tour guide and translator, Alex, who accompanies him on his journey, together with his allegedly blind grandfather as the driver, and his 'seeing-eye-bitch' Sammy Davis Jr. Jr.. They are looking for Trachimbrod, the village from which Jonathan's grandfather originally came, and for the women that Jonathan believes saved him when the Nazis came for the Jews. On their journey, and through various forms of testimony and writing, the lives of Jonathan, Alex and his grandfather are turned upside down.

This is the only novel out of the three dealt with in this thesis containing characters of the post-memorial generation themselves, dealing with trans-generational trauma. The novel works with this issue on many different levels at once, showing us how the present carries both the past and the future on its shoulders. Jonathan, though he has no personal experience of the war, is still marked with a form of survivor's guilt as can be seen in his obsession with his dead grandfather. The novel also reveals Alex's connection to Holocaust, through his grandfather's testimony, who show us that he is traumatized for involuntarily becoming a Nazi collaborator. Alex has to deal with the guilt of his grandfather's actions. Thereby, the novel deals with the trauma of the post-memorial generation whether on the side of the victim or the perpetrator.

Through Foer's use of two different, but also similar narrators, and two merging tales, one fantastical, the other seemingly more realistic, moreover, the novel manages to illuminate overlooked truths in the history of Holocaust. Further, the narrative forces the reader to acknowledge the connection between the passivity of a world that allowed Holocaust to happen and our corresponding passivity towards contemporary conflicts.

5.1 New perspective

Three things this section will account for is first, how the novel mediates the new perspective of the post-memorial generation on WWII and the trans-generational trauma that haunts them. Secondly, the novel deals with testimony, which ends in Alex's grandfather's suicide, as the grandfather believes the following generation needs to cut the bonds to the traumas of the past in order to create a new identity for themselves. Another new perspective here is that of a Nazi collaborator, because the guilt Alex's grandfather carries with him is due to him giving up his Jewish friend to the Nazis to save himself and his family.

Everything is Illuminated also contains a different perspective on the relationship between fiction and truth, as Jonathan's writing is of a fantastical and mythological style, whilst Alex's writing has a more traditional, realistic approach. In turn, the mythological complements the realistic account of events with its symbolic truths. Through the novel's complex merging of narratives of the past and present, Foer demonstrates the illuminating power of fiction, with its ability to reveal deeper truths of our past, present and future.

5.1.1. Trans-generational haunting

But children had it worst of all, for although it would seem that they had fewer memories to haunt them, they still had the itch of memory as strong as the elders of the shtetl. Their strings were not even their own, but tied up around them by parents and grandparents – strings not fastened to anything, but hanging loosely from the darkness.

(Foer:260)

The *trans-generational haunting* is vividly illustrated in this quote by the young Safran, Jonathan's grandfather, from the novel Jonathan writes about his ancestors.¹ Abraham and Torok's understanding of this term, as mentioned previously in the thesis, is that it refers to a state that can occur when parents have experienced a trauma that they keep from the child. When the child experiences alienation from their parents due to this secret, the child can be overwhelmed by a lack of closeness and sense of self. This lack of identity can haunt the child and lead to madness and obsessions, which, moreover, can continue to pervade following

¹ For reasons of clarity, the thesis will refer to the character/narrator as Jonathan and the author as Foer.

generations (qtd. in Rashkin:39). This haunting is something that both Jonathan and Alex experience.

The Jewish American twenty-one-year-old Jonathan is suffering from a lack of identity due to the black holes in his grandfather's story. He carries with him one of the symptoms of trans-generational haunting manifested in an obsession with collecting artifacts that has a connection with his family. Rau points out that this comprises an attempt to fill the "narrative gap in their history", making the artifacts "custodians of lost identities" (Rau:216). He is particularly interested in his grandfather Safran, because he resembles him in appearance and was named after him. Safran did not share much of his life before the war with anyone and he died shortly thereafter. Jonathan becomes obsessed with his grandfather's story, and travels to Ukraine with a photograph of Safran and a woman named Augustine, who allegedly helped him escape when the Nazis came to his village. He books a tour with a local travel agency specializing in tours for Jewish descendants looking for family history. He is greeted at the train station by Alex Perchov, a young man who is supposed to be his translator but has poor English skills, an older, angry man, and a barking dog with a T-shirt with the inscription "seeing-eye-bitch".

Parts of the narrative is told from the perspective of, Alex who shares his first name with his father and grandfather, but who does not have a good relationship with any of them. He describes his abusive father as a "first-rate puncher" (Foer:6), and his grandfather has been angry and yelling at him since Alex's grandmother died. The difficult relationship with his father and grandfather is rooted in the secret trauma of his grandfather, which affects the grandfather's relationship with his son, which again affects Alex. He has, however, a very close bond with his younger brother Igor. Alex's dream is to earn enough money to go to America, as he loves everything about American culture. He also brags about all the clubbing he is doing and all the girls he is getting, when he introduces himself at the beginning of the novel:

I have many girls, believe me, and they all have a different name for me. One dubs me Baby, not because I am a baby, but because she attends to me. Another dubs me All Night. Do you want to know why? I have a girl who dubs me Currency, because I disseminate so much currency around her. She licks my chops for it.

(Foer:1)

He is clearly lying or, at best, being hyperbolic. This makes him seem like a shallow and careless character, but as the novel unfolds deeper sides to him appear. He later reveals to Jonathan that he is a virgin, and, towards the end of the novel, admits to being gay: “There is such a thing as love that cannot be, for certain. If I were to inform Father, for example, about how I comprehend love, and who I desire to love, he would kill me, and this is no idiom” (Foer:241). As Jonathan’s tour was booked in the middle of a Ukrainian holiday, he is out of a translator and chauffeur. Alex and his grandfather are forced to step in. What initially was a burden forced upon them, turns out to be a life changing experience for them both.

5.1.2 Narrative structure

Everything is Illuminated is a novel with a complex narrative structure. The novel is parted into three literary forms, which consist of Jonathan’s novel about his forefathers’ life in the Jewish shtetl (village) of Trachimbrod, Alex’s narration of their trip together, and Alex’s letters to Jonathan, where he comments on his own and Jonathan’s writing, as well as on what is going on in his life. In Alex’s letters, he responds to comments that Jonathan has made on his text, but Jonathan’s letters are not included in the novel. At the same time, the novel also has a double narrative structure, with paralleled and contrasting narratorial voices that eventually merge together. These two narratives are presented in every other chapter.

The first consists of Jonathan’s writings of his ancestors, which belongs to the genre of fantasy and is characterized by mythical symbolism and a cyclic time span. The first chapter in his novel is entitled “The beginning of the world often comes, 1791”, and comprises an account of the mysterious birth of his great-great-great-great-grandmother, named “Brod” after the river she was found in. Jonathan explains that it was believed that her father was a man called “Trachim”, whose wagon had descended into the river. A baby was found in the reed of the river, and the parents assumed dead (similarly to Moses in the bible). After this incident, the village is named Trachimbrod, and each year there is ceremonial festival in its honor. This ritual can be seen in relation to what Laurence Coupe describes in *Myth*, as “[t]he myth of the dying god”, or the fertility myth of “the Golden Bough”, that Frazer saw as a universal myth of death and regeneration that several cultures of different ages have celebrated through rituals (Coupe:17-21). Significantly, then, Jonathan’s narration starts with a mythical birth and ends with the foreseen destruction of the village, which signifies that

something has to die in order for something new to be born, as the villagers believed that Brod's parents drowned in the river.

In this, the novel seems to be framed by a temporal frame that is circular rather than linear, something that is also pointed out in Francisco Collado-Rodriguez' essay, "Ethics in the Second Degree: Trauma and Dual Narratives in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Everything is Illuminated*" published in the *Journal of Modern Literature*, where he points out that the notion of time in Jonathan's narrative is based on Mircea Eliade's theory of the "eternal return", stating that "ancient civilizations experienced time as a cyclical process", where a golden age marks the beginning and deterioration the end of a cycle (Collado-Rodriguez:58). Like Frazer, Eliade claims that this mythical notion of time was replaced by "the Judaic historical interpretation of life, in which events followed a linear development marked by specific human actions in time" (58). According to Coupe, the Age of Enlightenment marked the beginning of "a story of progress via rationality", which he calls the "the myth of mythlessness" (Coupe:19), implying that myth is a part of our culture which we cannot progress away from. In *The Great War in Modern Memory*, Fussell comments on how the 19th century was overly concerned with progress, believing that we are all governed by reason, and that the world was moving forward. He called this the Meliorist myth, which the First World War proved wrong as it "reversed the Idea of Progress" (Fussell:8). He exemplifies this with an excerpt from a letter written by Henry James, the day that Britain entered the Great War:

The plunge of civilization into the abyss of blood and darkness ... is a thing that so gives away the whole long age during which we have supposed the world to be, with whatever abatement, gradually bettering, that to have to take it all now for what the treacherous years were all the while really making for and meaning is too tragic for any words.

(qtd in Fussell:8)

The recognition that came out of the two world wars is that there is no progress. So, the idea of cyclical time works on many levels. It is both a reminder that we do not necessarily learn from the mistakes made in the past and that the past is with us in a way that we do not understand or clearly recognize. Jonathan's last chapter is entitled "The beginning of the world often comes, 1942-1791", ending the cycle with the Nazi's killing every remaining inhabitant and destroying the village. Foer's closing paragraph emphasizes the ending of the

cycle with a written account of a dream Brod had over a hundred years before the day in question occurred. A Nazi soldier was burning books, but accidentally ripped out a page of “The Book of Recurrent Dreams”, in which the people in the village for generations had written down their dreams. Jonathan’s great-great-great-great-grandmother turned out to be a psychic, as a dream titled “9:613 – The dream of the end of the world” foresees the death of Safran’s wife and unborn child, the death of the villagers and the destruction of Trachimbrod (Foer:272-273). This exemplifies how Foer, instead of debunking myths like the other novels, deploys myth to make sense of his lost past, and also to give a sense of meaning to the horrible fact that a whole village of people with a long history of their own, and the memory of them was erased in one day.

In contrast to Jonathan’s novel, Alex’s writing has a seemingly more realistic approach to the way in which events progress in a linear time movement. He narrates Jonathan’s journey for identity and refers to him as the hero of the story. Even though Alex has a tendency to exaggerate his better traits, and go wild with a thesaurus resulting in humorously inaccurate phrases, his narrative at first appears realistic both due to the lack of fantastical elements and because Foer actually made a journey in 1997 to Ukraine with a photograph and came back emptyhanded (although the reader might not know this). He also met a Ukrainian named Alex, although he was nothing like the character in the novel (Mullan). What is more, every event in Alex’s story takes place in the present. At the same time, Alex’s narrative works its way backwards to the same moment that Jonathan’s narrative is moving towards, that is, the day the Nazis came to Trachimbrod in 1942. Even while Alex’s story originally starts when he is assigned the task to be Jonathan’s translator, and Jonathan’s starts at the beginning of Trachimbrod in 1791. As they get closer to Trachimbrod geographically, they get closer to the past, as they meet Augustine, a woman who collected artifacts from the villagers and gives them a box containing maps, books and photographs. In one of these photographs, Jonathan notes that the man in the picture has a striking resemblance to Alex. At this point, his grandfather has to explain himself. It is through the testimonies of Alex’s grandfather and the women they find where Trachimbrod once was, that the narrative moves towards Jonathan’s story.

Alex is trying to be realistic, as he is writing as a witness of their journey. In attempting to write exactly what happened on their trip, and reading Jonathan’s novel simultaneously, Alex understands that it is not possible to understand their present without considering the unattainable past of their ancestors. He observes that Jonathan’s fiction filled in the gaps, and illuminated his own story of the present, which in turn made accessible to

him a truth of self. Through their journey and their writing, Alex gets a better understanding of his own identity. He realizes that he needs to take care of his family, get his father out of their life.

A recurrent message in *Everything is Illuminated* is that we are all connected to those who came before us. They did what they did, so that we, the following generations can be. Both Jonathan and Alex are named after their grandfathers, and find that they resemble them in appearance when they were young. For Jonathan, this notion strengthens the emptiness he feels due to the black hole in his grandfather's past. This is what their journey illuminates, emphasized through Jonathan's novel of how his grandfather came to be who he was, based on who his ancestors were and their actions. In this novel within the novel, the inhabitants of Trachimbrod, as mentioned above, write down their dreams in "The book of recurrent dreams 1791" and read them out loud to each other to remember:

4:525 – *The dream that we are our fathers.* I walked to the Brod, without knowing why, and looked into my reflection in the water. I couldn't look away. What was the image that pulled me in after it? What was it that I loved? And then I recognized it. So simple. In the water I saw my father's face, and that face saw the face of its father, and so on, and so on, reflecting backward to the beginning of time, to the face of God, in whose image we were created. We burned with love for ourselves, all of us, starters of the fire we suffered – our love was the affliction for which only our love was the cure...

(Foer:41)

The reflection in the water signifies how we are our ancestors, and how they are a part of us. In his novel, Jonathan's grandfather Safran, also has a magical conversation with his great-great-great-grandfather through a Sun dial in the village square, the day after his wedding:

The others are being pulled back, and you're being pulled forward.

In both directions! He said, seeing the wagon's refuse, the words on Brod's body, the pogroms, the weddings, the suicides, the makeshift cribs, the parades, and seeing also his possible futures: life with the Gypsy girl, life alone, life with Zosha and the child who would fulfill him, the end of life. The imaged of his infinite pasts and his infinite futures washed over him as he waited, paralyzed, in the present. He Safran, marked the division between what was and what would be.

(Foer:264)

The words in italic are uttered by Kolker's phantom from the past, mirroring the merging of the the two narratives. The narrative of which Safran is part of is being pulled forward towards the end of Trachimbrod, while Alex's story is being pulled back to that very same day. And for Jonathan, his grandfather is what marks the division between the unknown past and his own existence. The past, present and future are connected. You are connected to your forefathers and your descendants. Alex confirms this connection, and takes it further – we are not only connected to our relatives, but all people:

We are talking now, Jonathan, together, and not apart. We are with each other, working on the same story, and I am certain that you can also feel it. Do you know that I am the Gypsy girl and you are Safran, and that I am Kolker and you are Brod, and that I am your grandmother you are Grandfather, and that I am Alex and you are you, and that I am you and you are me? Do you comprehend that we bring each other safety and peace? When we were under the stars in Trachimbrod, did you not feel it then? Do not present not-truths to me. Not to me.

(Foer:214)

Like Kennedy, Foer talks of a “we” here, but it is different from the collective “we” in *Day*, because that was an attempt to create a “we” that would be able to carry the weight of the war, but cannot, because it is fragmented, disrupted and wounded due to its artificiality. It existed because it was constructed, but for the very same reason, it did not truly exist. It was a national “we”, and in being just that, it made an artificial division between “us” and “them”, and in that, was able to push the blame over to “them” and away from “us”. The nationalistic “we” problematized in *Day*, allowed the Britons to blind themselves and avoid confronting their own sins, much like Alex's grandfather, which stands in conflict with Day's individual experience. The “we” that Foer presents through the unity of Jonathan and Alex's writing, is a universal “we” that safeguards the truth of the individual. Foer's “we” also includes that which is excluded in *Day* (a “we” constructed for propaganda reasons). It includes the individual, and confronts it with responsibility, not leaving room for a simple passing of blame. However – the collective “we” in Foer also doesn't exist in a sense, because his ancestors are dead. And the missing “we”, which is achingly present in its absence, creates a black hole in Foer which mirrors the black hole in his grandfather's history. So the “we” is

both a “we” that makes sense (in the fact that “I” belongs to a “we”) and which is totally meaningless (because all those that made up the “we” were killed and eradicated). With Holocaust at the center of this discussion, Foer highlights the individual trauma’s place in the collective trauma of WWII, and emphasizes the importance of the individual story in the larger context. The collective trauma is but the sum of numerous individual traumatic experiences.

To further emphasize how we are all connected and the same, Jonathan writes in his novel that the inhabitants of Trachimbrod were too occupied with their memories of the past to prepare for the war. He wrote that “they waited around to die like fools, and we cannot blame them because we would do the same, and we *do* do the same!” (Foer:262). Foer suggests by this statement, that we are currently too tangled up in our past and present, to do what is necessary to avoid disaster in the future. Is it a warning about an up-coming third world war? Additionally, it functions as a corrective to the post-memorial generations self-conscious questioning of their nations, and their ancestors’ actions and reactions during the Second World War. As mentioned previously in the thesis, Petra Rau states the reverse chronology employed to account of historical events makes them seem inevitable, when they at the time were in the unforeseeable future (Rau:211). It is easy to point fingers when knowing the outcome. Foer forces the reader to acknowledge that given the post-memorial generation found themselves in shoes of the war-generation, nothing would have been different, because would not have had access to the information about the War and Holocaust, that we have now.

The mixture of narrative voices is something that *Everything is Illuminated* has in common with *Day*. In Kennedy’s novel, this is an instrument that emphasize the divided personality of the protagonist, and how he feels alienated from society, due to his PTSD and also how he does not recognize the picture painted of Britain’s war effort by the media. In Foer’s novel, the number of narrators is an emphasize on how we are made up of so many stories. The stories of our forefathers are a part of us and we are all connected. Additionally, the contrast in the narrative voices, one eloquent and poetic with mythical imagery, the other is trying to stay factual, but as the narrator is not in possession of the words he needs to convey his message, it comes out completely wrong at times. This could be seen in connection to fictional and factual narratives, and fictions contribution to history. When history comes short, fiction can illuminate the truth. The fact that Jonathan’s writing changes Alex’s life emphasize the value of literature, showing us that fiction can illuminate history.

5.1.2 The Testimony of an unwilling collaborator (Alex's grandfather)

I am not a bad person. (...) I am a good person who has lived in a bad time.

(Foer:227)

This is what Alex's grandfather says before he gives his testimony. He goes on to say that he was not a hero, but not a bad person either, and he only did what he thought was the right thing to do at the time. This stands in contrast to Alfred Day in Kennedy's novel, who was considered to be on the right side of history, but felt like a bad person. The understanding of who was on the right and wrong side of history, is not always agreed upon, which is something Foer exemplifies in the beginning of the novel when Jonathan points out to Alex that the Ukrainians were known for being terrible to Jews. Alex is offended, and says that he has never heard of such a thing. Jonathan goes on to say that it is a fact, "Look it up in the history books", whereof Alex replies "It does not say this in the history books" (Foer:62). The fact that the history books Jonathan had read focused on things that the history books Alex had read avoided, constitutes that, as the war myths accounted for in the other novels imply, different nations have their own constructed story befitting of their identity.

The Ukrainian grandfather in the novel, however, had a close relationship with a Jew named Herschel. On their journey, the three of them get hold of a box with artifacts from the Jewish villages destroyed by the Nazis. Jonathan finds a picture of the grandfather and his family standing next to Herschel. Confronted by his grandsons questions the grandfather tells Alex and Jonathan that: "He was my best friend. And I murdered him" (Foer:228). When the Nazis came to his grandfather's village, they ordered all of the Jews into the synagogue and killed them. A Nazi soldier asks the villagers one by one to point at a Jew. If they refused or said "you have them all", they were shot. When every Jew but Herschel is killed, the soldier asks Alex's grandfather to point at a Jew. There is only one left. His best friend.

As stated previously in the thesis, testimony is the speech act of bearing witness, which requires a witness and a listener (57). The act of testimony proved especially difficult when the unspeakable trauma of Holocaust was what was witnessed. Psychoanalyst and Holocaust survivor, Dori Laub, interviewed survivors and found that for many it was the first time that they had talked about their experience, forty years after the event (Felman and Laub:79). A woman who had witnessed unspeakable acts, like a baby being choked to death

and close relatives being burnt alive, felt like she never loved her children because they could never understand her. She felt like an outsider in her own family due to the trauma she suffered (79-80). Laub claims that the woman's silence functioned to distort her memory of the events, leading her to believe that the pain and suffering of the people she failed to help was her fault, instead of viewing her effort and wish to help as a trait of kindness and compassion, which again made her think that she was incapable of love (79-80).

In his testimony to Alex, his grandfather admits to experience the same feeling of not being capable of love:

And I knew that I could never allow him 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 he is because a father is responsible for his son and I am I and I am responsible not for Herschel but for my son because I held him with so much force that he cried because I loved him so much that I made love impossible.

(Foer:251)

As a result of the trauma of having to point at his best friend to save himself and his family, and in doing so causing his death, Alex's grandfather was never able to love and raise his son like he wanted to. He explained to Alex that he was not a good father to his son, and never told him about what he did to Herschel, his Jewish friend. He kept his silence, so that his son could live in peace, unaware of his father's sin. This led, however, to an alienation between the two, and the grandfather therefore felt responsible for his son being violent towards his wife and children. The trans-generational trauma was set in motion. Laub claims that survivors of Holocaust experience new tragedies in life as a second Holocaust, because it is a reminder that they failed to turn around their lives after the great trauma, so the tragedy, like a family member dying for instance, makes them feel defeated in their attempt to survive and rebuild (Felman and Laub:65). It is possible that Alex's grandfather experience something similar. When his wife dies, the only one in his life who was there when the traumatic event happened, he becomes, in Alex's words, melancholy. His personality changes, in that the cries when he's alone, yells at his grandchildren and resides to himself. He also claims to have lost his sight, which he clearly has not since he can drive a car. His assurance of his blindness is symbolic, in the sense that he refuses to open his eyes and confront what he did to his Jewish

friend when the Nazi's came to their village. He blinds himself, by refusing to look directly at his sin.

Staying silent for decades can imprison the mind and twist the story, in such a way that one blames oneself instead of those who actually committed the acts. But why would someone stay silenced for so many years, letting the trauma affect the relationship with one's children? This is something that Felman and Laub comment on in *Testimony*, where they state that

the fear that fate will strike again is crucial to the memory of trauma, and to the inability to talk about it. On breaking the internal silence, the Holocaust from which one had been hiding, may come to life and once more be relived; only this time around, one might not be spared nor have the power to endure. The act of telling might itself become severely traumatizing, if the price of speaking is *re-living*.

(Felman and Laub:67)

As we can see here, Laub states that fear of having to re-live the trauma and the fear of not being able to endure it, are crucial to why many kept silent about their experiences. And for many, he states, it was, in fact, too much to endure; their testimony resulted in suicide (67). To Alex's grandfather, testifying is both a relief and too much to bear, and he ends up committing suicide. In his suicide letter, however, the grandfather claims that it is not for himself that he commits this act, but for the sake of the future for his grandchildren. He says that every bond to the past must be cut, in order for them to put the past behind them. Now that Alex has become a man he can be proud of, in kicking out his abusive father and taking care of the family, the grandfather feels that he is the last string of the past holding Alex back.

It is possible that the grandfather, like the women Laub interviewed, had suffered a distortion of memory due to his decades of silence, leading him to believe that his acts were so horrible, that he needed to die for his grandson to move on, when in fact, what he did was to save himself, his wife and baby from being killed. Yet, Alex's grandfather and his family were not hunted down due to their ethnicity. They had been bystanders in a society that had looked down on Jews for a long time, even though they had a close relationship with one Jew. His finger pointing at Herschel is symbolic in the sense that it emphasizes that even though they were not the ones pulling the trigger, bystanders contributed to Holocaust by doing nothing. Augustine and the Grandfather allegedly finds the Nazis to be the villains, to blame for Holocaust (traditional historical view). When they are forced to look at their own passivity

in the past, they understand that the passivity of Ukrainian bystanders was also contributing to the extermination of the Jews. When considering how long it took the Americans to engage in WWII, Foer, as an American of Jewish heritage, is then simultaneously both the victim and the bystander/contributor to Holocaust. Alex's grandfather had planned to bring his guilt and shame to the grave, but when Jonathan and Alex find a photograph of Alex's grandfather and Jonathan's in the box of Jewish artifacts Alex's questioning makes him talk.

Laub says that "it is the encounter and the coming together between survivor and the listener, which makes possible something like a repossession of the act of witnessing. This joint responsibility is the source of reemerging truth" (Caruth:69). He also points out that it is very important for the traumatized to be truly heard by an empathic listener (Felman and Laub 68). But where can a listener who understands and knows you and asks the right questions be found? Laub thinks that the post-memorial generation can be of service: "As is the story of 'The Emperor's New Clothes', it has taken a new generation of 'innocent children' removed enough from the experience, to be in a position to ask questions" (83). The audience in the fairy tale, were afraid to step out from the crowd and point out that the emperor was not wearing clothes. Laub compares the upholding of that delusion, with ignoring of the upcoming genocide before the war, and that the silence about the Holocaust in the aftermath of WWII is just an extension of that. He thinks that children who are not so close to the event, will be able, like the child in the fairy tale, to ask the questions that needs asking.

Significantly, Alex is these things to his grandfather. He is far enough from the event and its effects to ask the right questions, and he becomes an empathic listener who actually knows and truly hears his grandfather:

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

'Tell me more', I said.

'More?'

'Herschel.'

'It was as if he was in our family.'

‘Tell me what happened. What happened to him?’

‘To him? To him and me. It happened to everybody, do not make any mistake. Just because I was not a Jew, it does not mean that it did not happen to me.’

‘What is it?’

‘You had to choose, and I hope to choose the smaller evil.’

(Foer:245-246)

This is yet another way that everything is illuminated in the novel. The post-memorial generation is actually part of a process to illuminate the war, because they can receive the words of those who experienced the war in a non-biased way. In an open way that lets them actually speak.

The narration in the chapter where Alex retells his grandfather’s testimony of the war is particularly interesting. It seems as if it is so necessary for the grandfather to finally get this off his chest, that he cannot even pause to distinguish between the words. For three pages, there is no punctuation and one gets the notion that the things explained and uttered make such an impression on Alex that he too almost can’t breathe. Towards the end of the chapter, sentences are carried out without spaces between words: Alex is a witness to his grandfather’s testimony, and is by that, sucked into the trauma itself. Laub confirms that the act of wholeheartedly listening to a traumatic testimony can be a traumatic experience in itself, as the listener has to emerge him-/herself into the trauma (Felman and Laub). Alex and his grandfather connects through this experience. The grandfather needs to testify and is met Alex’s need to hear it.

The illuminating power of fiction

In this novel, fiction is used by Jonathan as a tool to work through trauma. It functions as a substitution for the lost history of his grandfather. Like Briony in *Atonement*, Jonathan constructs a truth, and in that, provides meaning to an individually experienced trauma that affects multiple generations both on the side of the "victim" and the "collaborator". Alex and Jonathan confront instances of trauma across multiple generations, and Foer shows us that the overcoming of trauma, to the extent that this is possible, is posited as a process of re-narrativization of that which resists representation and temporalization.

A part from Augustine, there are no one left from Trachimbrod, no one to remember their lives and tradition, as the Nazi's burnt everything to ground. Like Briony, Jonathan makes up an alternative history. Briony, knowing the truth, does it to atone, and to write the story as should have been. Jonathan replaces the holes in his family history with fantastical, and deeply mythical, events. When he fails in his quest for his ancestors' history, he turns to fiction. Briony does the same, when she finds the outcome of reality to be unfair. Fiction functions as healing for the the two narrators, one from their sins and one from the trans-generational haunting. By replacing what he does not know with myth, Jonathan honors their memory and heals his trans-generational trauma in the process. His narrative also sheds light on Alex's trauma.

Alex, even though he admits to be exceedingly hyperbolic about e.g. his own appearance, is concerned with telling the truth in his story. He disagrees with Jonathan's proposal of spicing up the text for artistic reasons. But Jonathan's fantastical writing sheds light on Alex's writing to the extent that Alex at a point exclaims that the two of them are writing on the same story. This epiphany, or illumination, emphasizes that to really understand history and its significance for our lives, merely writing down factual events in a linear matter is not enough. Fiction contributes to history and, by pointing out that verisimilitude is fleeting, makes us question what's real and what a concepts such as the "real" means. The novel also points out why we need myth. Like heroism and the "good fight" in *Day*, myths are created to apply meaning to something that is difficult to explain. Jonathan's myth of his grandfather's life and the life of his ancestors illuminated Alex's. It is an explanation that gives meaning to something that appears coincidental and meaningless. Sometimes, that is necessary to move on.

Everything is Illuminated challenges and deflates the war myth that many nations clung too, that the Nazi's were solely responsible for Holocaust. The novel highlights that the whole world was, in fact, complicit and that doing nothing is also an action.

Ukrainians were known for being terrible to the Jews", Alex is offended "Listen, I don't mean to offend you. It's got nothing to do with you. We're talking about fifty years ago.

(Foer:62)

This is something Jonathan says to Alex when they first meet. But it is, however, something Jonathan learns is completely false. They are all connected by the events that happened in

Ukraine over fifty years ago, when the Nazi's came and killed every Jew in both Alex's grandfather's village and in Jonathan's grandfather's shtetl. The circular in Foer prevents Jonathan from being free – but even though the fiction is not true, saying the myth can be freeing. Trauma is also circular and these stories help us to open up to the future.

6. Conclusion

The main question asked in the introduction of the thesis was whether fiction, in the form of three contemporary WWII novels, could contribute to history. The hypothesis was that A.L. Kennedy's *Day*, Ian McEwan's *Atonement*, and Jonathan Safran Foer's *Everything is Illuminated* would be able to do so, through the use of literary tools like narrative voice, fragmented speech and discontinued time and space, and by providing the reader with access to personal experiences of war that history, due to its need to be strictly referential, cannot. There was also the expectation that the novels would debunk war myths, as stated by Petra Rau in her essay "The War in Contemporary Fiction". The thesis also aimed to explain the war myths deflated by the novels, through their new and varied perspectives and ability to go beyond the boundaries of veracity placed upon the author of factual narratives.

The novels did indeed challenge war myths and provide new perspectives. However, the thesis expected the trauma of the war generation to be the focus in the novels. And while it also found this, the analysis discovered that what these novels do in a much higher degree than expected is address the transgenerational trauma of the post memorial generation, and make the reader question not only the war myths of WWII, but the post-memorial generation's attitude towards and continued experience of the war in the past and contemporary perception of ourselves.

6.1 The New Perspectives and Debunked Myths

6.1.1 *Day*

A.L. Kennedy's *Day* questioned the myth of the "Good Fight" fought by the British and the concept of Heroism through the perspective of a traumatized soldier of the British Royal Air Force's Bomber Command. Rau has pointed out that significantly this is only the second novel to deal with the the trauma of the Bomber Command. Calder has an explanation as to why, since the Bomber Command has been in a difficult position compared to that of other branches of the army, as the bombing was of little purpose but to kill civilians and erase cities

from the face of the earth. Britons at home had felt the terror of German bombing raids, so the bombers were to a degree looked down upon even by the people they were fighting for.

Kennedy conveys Alfred Day's inner struggle through a mixed use of narrative voice. The narration switches from third-person to first-person, and, significantly, to second-person when Day talks to himself. The latter constitutes Day's alienation from his surroundings. Through Day's interior battle with himself, Kennedy assigns him the role of both the protagonist and antagonist, signaling that what he has to overcome to survive is the struggle he has with himself and the haunting memories of the war. It is not until he finally accepts that he is not a hero, but merely a human being who followed orders to do the nation's dirty work, and that this fight was by far as glorious and just as the politicians and media reported, that Day can begin his road to recovery. This final epiphany is accessed through the singing of the patriotic hymn "Jerusalem". Through a hymn, which is both a prayer from an individual to God and collective act usually sung by a congregation, Kennedy exemplifies the struggle in war of how the individual's need to speak as an "I" is sacrificed for the nation's need for a unified collective speech. An also, interestingly, the individual's need to be a part of a collective "we". Through this, the novel demonstrates that myths like the good fight and heroism are retrospectively applied to war, in the need for the sacrifice to be meaningful, and that they are both false and true at the same time and that they are both damaging and meaningful at the same time.

6.1.2 Atonement

Ian McEwan's *Atonement* gives a new perspective on women's war effort at home in the form of the protagonist and her sister serving as nurses. He compares the nurses' experience to that of the soldiers', and similarly compares domestic conflicts with warfare. By writing a novel within the novel, the thesis found that McEwan problematizes "novelistic propaganda", criticizing contemporary representations of the war narrative by taking advantage of the reader's assumption of a traditional war love story and our need for closure in the form of a happy ending. He is able to do this, as the former and major part of the novel is written by an omniscient narrator describing events in a realistic and seemingly historically accurate manner. When the lovers are ripped a part, due to a false testimony and a war which they have no control over, the reader has no reason to believe anything other than that they do, in fact,

reunite as the novel states. After all, it seems only fair, considering that the rapist was free to go due to a misunderstanding. In the latter part of the novel, however, when the narrative voice changes to first-person, Briony reveals herself as the author of the novel the reader has just finished. She admits that the lovers died before they could be together, but states that she gave them a happy ending in her novel for two reasons: The first one being that she was trying to atone for the pain her false testimony caused, the other being that the reader would not be satisfied with the truth. In that, McEwan can be seen to subtly confirm Fussel's theory that the arbitrariness of war is too much for the audience – they do not want the truth. The reader of a war narrative expects the sacrifice to have a purpose. This is an expectation formed by war myths constructed by nations to justify their actions and the great sacrifice of the lives of its citizens.

6.1.3 Everything is Illuminated

Jonathan Safran Foer's *Everything is Illuminated* provides the new perspective of the post-memorial generation's trans-generational haunting due to the Holocaust of WWII. It also criticizes the myth other nations has relied on that the Nazi's were solemnly responsible for the extermination of the Jews. Through a dual narrative structure, Foer tells the story of Jonathan's ancestors and his quest for identity. Additionally, it highlights another aspect of trans-generational haunting through Alex's inherited trauma due to his grandfather's sins of the past. By merging one fantastical narrative with cyclic movement with another traditional and seemingly more realistic story with a linear time span, Foer demonstrates how fiction can contribute to history and heal the wounds of the past. Jonathan's fiction illuminates Alex's account of their journey, making Alex understand that his past is an important part of who he is. Through Jonathan's writing, Alex sees what kind of a man he wants to be, and what he has to do to get there. He wants to break out of the trans-generational trauma and make a better future for his family.

The narratives also emphasize that there is a collective "we" in another manner than the artificial "we" Alfred struggles with in *Day*. Foer's "we" suggests that we are all connected, and all co-responsible. Through the novel, we realize that one cannot simply pass over the blame of Holocaust to the Germans alone, and that standing by and doing nothing is also a contribution. The "we" is also a critique to the post-memorial generation's retrospective

comprehension of the war. Foer's cyclical time movement signals a suspicion that we would most probably do the same as the war generation, and that we in fact are doing it right now. This could also be read as an attempt to make us see that we are blinding ourselves to the conflicts in our own time, just like the Ukrainians and Americans turned a blind eye to Holocaust for too long.

6.2 What the combination of novels illuminated

The thesis hypothesized that the novels would be able to contribute to the history of WWII, by debunking war myths and making unsurfaced stories of war trauma accessible to the post-memorial generation. It was assumed that thesis would find the fictional descriptions of trauma experienced by the war generation to be their most important contribution. What the analysis found, however, was that these novels do not only show us characters who experienced the war in different ways, but they are in a sense writing trans-generational trauma. If one compares the parents with the secret, in Abraham and Török's definition of trans-generational trauma, with our nations and their flawed historical accounts of the war, and the haunted child with the post-memorial generation who senses that there is something important in their history unattainable to them, the "obsession" with finding the unsurfaced stories and creating fictions to replace the holes in their identity, explains why WWII continues to be such a popular setting for films, documentaries and novels today. Taking this comparison even further, one could view contemporary WWII novels as an attempt to atone for the insufficient history provided by the war generation. Like Jonathan in *Everything is Illuminated*, the post-memorial generation fills the holes in history with fiction.

The novels also emphasize that the post-memorial generation might have different needs than that of the war generation, due to the distance they have to the events in the past. By the testimony of Alex's grandfather in *Everything is Illuminated*, Foer confirms Laubs notion that the post-memorial generation might be of assistance to the war generation, in that they are able to ask the right question to get them to talk. Alex's grandfather needed to talk and Alex became the perfect listener for him in that situation.

Through their questioning of war myths, A.L. Kennedy's *Day*, Ian McEwan's *Atonement*, and Jonathan Safran Foer's *Everything is Illuminated* has constituted that those belonging to the post-memorial generation are skeptical of their nations' and ancestors' war

efforts, and of historiography. But contradicting the hypothesis made in the introduction, all of the novel's in question also recognize the need for myth, when reality is too sad or horrible to accept, or unattainable. Kennedy, McEwan and Foer suggest that myths can be damaging and misleading, but at the same time they can be a necessity to move on from a trauma, and most importantly, in a metaphorical way they can make truths accessible that otherwise would have been undetected. A reoccurring notion in all three novels, is that nothing is black and white. There is always a different side to the story, and nothing, and no one is purely good or evil. Jonathan's grandfather was a good man living in bad times. Briony, only meaning well, set a tragedy in motion, and Alfred Day, especially, is a complex and nuanced person, capable of good and bad.

A topic especially emphasized in *Day* and *Everything is Illuminated* is the relation between the individual "I" and the collective "we", suggesting a longing for community, but also a need for individuality. In A.L Kennedy's *Day*, this is exemplified through the singing of the patriotic hymn Jerusalem, which is paradoxical, as Day struggles with the overbearing and artificially constructed "we" that the war myth of the "good fight" had created, preventing him in speaking as an individual "I". But singing the hymn that glorifies his country, is also of a personal significance to him, as he used to sing it with his crewmembers. Day alienated himself from his surroundings, but when he is joined in by other veterans when he sings Jerusalem, he embraces the collective "we", and is finally able to move forward with his life.

Furthermore, Foer points at how we are all connected to the people in our past, present and future, and that we are therefore within a cycle rather than a linear progression. This is a critique of the post-memorial generations questioning of the war generation's actions and reactions in the past, as Foer states that we are all the same. We would have done the same if we were in their position, and in fact, we are doing it right now. The novel indicate that we are blinded by the contemporary lens in we are looking at the past with, so that we cannot see that we are doing the same thing in our own time. The novels who are seemingly about a former generation's war experiences, contribute to a deeper understanding of the present generation.

If the scope of the thesis had been broader, a comparative study of war fiction produced by authors of the war generation and WWII novels written by post-memorial generational authors could have been interesting. Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub mentions a few Holocaust writers for example. I think it would have been interesting to pair some of those with Jonathan Safran Foer's novel, to investigate how the authors of the generation who

experienced the trauma wrote about it, compared to the writing of those who suffer from the consequences of the former generations trauma.

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