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„Postmodern Storytelling in the Novels of
Jonathan Safran Foer“

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1. Introduction

When *Everything Is Illuminated* (*EI*) was published in 2002, it was an immediate success and the author, at the age of twenty-five, was celebrated as “one of the most exciting writers of his generation” (Gibbons para 6). Born in Washington DC in 1977, Jonathan Safran Foer studied philosophy and literature at Princeton University, and today lives in Brooklyn, NY, with his wife, the writer Nicole Krauss, and his little son Sasha, who was born in 2006.¹

As Foer pointed out in a number of interviews², his first novel is partly based on autobiographical facts. Thus, “Foer’s [...] maternal grandfather, Louis Safran, [was] a Polish Jew who lived through the Holocaust and the extermination of his first wife and young daughter” (Solomon para 31) and “met his second wife, [...] Foer’s grandmother, in a Polish camp for displaced persons after the war and then went to America” (Mackenzie para 17). At the age of twenty, Jonathan Safran Foer traveled to Ukraine, “[a]rmed with a photograph of the woman who [...] had saved ... [his] grandfather from the Nazis ... [to find] Trachimbrod, the shtetl of ... [his] family’s origins” (*Interview with JS Foer* para 18) but did not find anything, because the shtetl had been completely destroyed (see also Bendavid-Val para 6).

Everything Is Illuminated marked the author’s international breakthrough as a young Jewish-American writer and was awarded several literary prizes, like the Guardian First Book Award and the National Jewish Book Award.³ In 2005, the novel’s film adaptation came out, the script for which was written by Liev Schreiber, who was also the director of the movie (see *Jonathan Safran Foer* on Literature Resource Center). At the beginning of the film the author himself, although very shortly and scarcely recognizable, appears in the small part of a “leaf blower” (see credits of the movie *Everything Is Illuminated*). In addition to the film adaptation, Simon Block wrote a drama which is based on the novel (see Billington para 1; Marlowe para 1). Foer’s second novel, *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* (*ELIC*), was published three years after his first one, i.e. in 2005, and although it was also a great success, the critics’ reactions to it were clearly more controversial.

¹ See the personal information about the author, i.e. *Jonathan Safran Foer* on Literature Resource Center and Meyers Lexikon Online.

² See Mackenzie, Solomon, *Interview with JS Foer*.

³ See Gibbons; *Jonathan Safran Foer* on Literature Resource Center.

The thematic focus in both novels lies on the portrayal of traumatic historical events, i.e. on the Holocaust in *Everything Is Illuminated* and on the terrorist attacks of 9/11 in *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*. Although the Holocaust certainly cannot be compared to the terrorist attacks in terms of its unimaginable cruelty and devastating extent, both are historically significant events, especially in the United States, because they mark the beginning of a “new era” (Hoth 283): “When an event is declared to be historical, it gains the quality of a caesura which divides the world into a ‘before’ and an ‘after’” (Hoth 286). Moreover, Rothberg points out that “after the entry of genocide onto the world stage nothing is the same and yet [...] history nevertheless continues to follow a deadly course, if now with other victims and perpetrators and a whole globe of CNN-watching bystanders” (14). Dealing with the question of how an author can write about “the trauma[s] of history” (Ribbat 213) in an adequate way, Rothberg suggests “that the three ‘-isms’ – realism, modernism, postmodernism – should not be seen as mutually exclusive aesthetic programs or styles, but as continual frameworks and answers to the challenges of history” (Ribbat 214; see Rothberg 9).

Interestingly enough, however, Foer’s novels have been criticized because of the use of postmodern techniques and devices.⁴ Although he “has garnered widespread praise [...] from leading critics and writers” (Torbaty para 2), such as, for instance, from Joyce Carol Oates, Cynthia Ozick and Salman Rushdie (see the novels’ blurb texts), especially his second novel has triggered quite controversial reactions. Thus, Adams described *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* as a piece of “narcissistic realism, in love with it [sic] own gimmickry” (para 13), Siegel called Foer “a fraud and a hack” (subtitle of his review) and Myers, whose review is entitled “A Bag of Tired Tricks”, concluded that “[a]fter a while the gimmickry starts to remind one of a clown frantically yanking toys out of his sack” (120).

Since the criticism primarily concentrated on the author’s use of postmodern techniques and devices, this is exactly what my thesis will focus on. By a detailed and close analysis of the use of and effects achieved by the various techniques and devices in each of the two novels, I will try to show to what degree they are similar and in how far they differ from each other.

⁴ See e.g. Adams para 11, 13; Almond para 12; Myers; *Paperback Choice*; Siegel.

The basic parameters for my discussion and comparison will broadly be based on the four criteria of Zerweck's model, according to which contemporary fiction can be ranged between the poles of realistic and experimental writing:

Die typischen Darstellungsformen [...] postmoderner Erzählprosa lassen sich durch vier Kriterien genauer erfassen, welche wirkungsästhetische, narratologische und funktionstheoretische Überlegungen zu den Schreibweisen zeitgenössischer Romane bündeln. Diese vier Kriterien umfassen die Art der Illusionsbildung, die Gestaltung des Wirklichkeitsbezugs, die Formen narrativer Selbstreflexivität, zu denen vor allem Metanarration und Metafiktion gehören, sowie die Funktionalisierungen intertextueller und intermedialer Bezüge. (Zerweck, *Postmodernes Erzählen* 54; see also Zerweck, *Synthese* 16, 38-42, 103-105)⁵

Since the effects which the various techniques and devices achieve on the reader will form a central part in my analysis, a special emphasis will be laid on the reading process and on the "readers' attempts at making sense of [the] texts" (Fludernik, *Narratology* 46) as a cognitive process: "[D]ie kognitive Narratologie richtet ihr Interesse [...] auf die Wirkung von Texten, die Rolle der Rezipientin im Lese-prozeß sowie die Prozesse der Text- und Informationsverarbeitung. [...] Es geht somit um die Frage, wie sich die Bedeutung literarischer Phänomene im Prozeß der Rezeption konstituiert" (Zerweck, *Cognitive Turn* 220).⁶

⁵ See also Broich's discussion of the 'postmodern textual strategies of autoreferentiality, metafiction, and intertextuality' in Broich, *Intertextuality* 249; Waugh's discussion of metafiction as an 'elastic term covering a wide range of fiction' in Waugh 18; Hutcheon's discussion of 'covert and overt narcissistic narratives' in Hutcheon, *Narrative*.

⁶ See also Fludernik's concept of 'narrativization' in Fludernik, *Narratology* 31-34; Herman's discussion of 'storyworlds' in Herman 569-570; Hutcheon's discussion of the reader role in Hutcheon, *Narrative* 138-145.

2. *Everything Is Illuminated*

2.1. Storytelling

2.1.1. Structure

Foer's first novel consists of "three interrelated [narrative] strands with two different authors" (Eaglestone 128).⁷ The first strand or 'novel' is written by Alex, recounting the events of his three-day-trip through Ukraine in eight chapters, which he sends to Jonathan. The second novel, the history of the Jewish shtetl of Trachimbrod, is written by Jonathan and also comprises eight parts – although more than eight chapters –, which Jonathan in return sends to Alex. Finally, the seven letters which Alex sends to Jonathan together with the different sections of his novel, form the third narrative strand of the novel. The eighth and last letter sent to Jonathan is also the last part of the novel and is written by Alex's grandfather. The reader is thus alternately presented with the consecutive parts of the two novels written within the novel *Everything Is Illuminated* – Alex's and Jonathan's – regularly followed by Alex's letters to Jonathan. Since Alex, in his first letter to Jonathan, not only refers to the latter as "an American writer" (*EII* 24) (see also Chapter 2.3.2.), but also comments on "the first division" (*EII* 24) written by Jonathan as part of a "novel" (*EII* 25), we are to assume that what they write are novels.

The important point about the two novels which we get to read within Foer's novel is that the two fictional characters exchange what they write and comment on the sections of each other's manuscripts in their letters,⁸ although, of course, we only read Alex's letters and find out what Jonathan writes to Alex only indirectly and partly through Alex's response to Jonathan – the reason for which will be discussed in Chapter 2.1.2.1. The exchange of the various parts of the two novels between the two writers is depicted in Alex's letters, which form the narrative frame for the two "embedded narrative[s]" (Jahn and Nünning 286), i.e. for the two novels written and told by the fictional characters of Alex and Jonathan: "Frames articulate the rhetorical dynamic of narrative delivery and/or reception" (Williams 100). Alex and Jonathan are not only characters who write novels, but at the same time they

⁷ See also Varvogli 90, Hitchings, *Idiolects* para 2, Spiegel para 4.

⁸ See also Feuer 37, Eaglestone 131.

are also readers and narratees⁹ of their stories, addressing each other in their novels.

Moreover, the letters portray “a [...] scene, placing the [frame] narrative in time and circumstance separate from the time and [...] circumstance of the embedded narrative[s]” (Williams 108). Reading Alex’s letters we can imagine both Alex and Jonathan writing, reading and exchanging their manuscripts after their return from the three-day-trip through Ukraine – Alex back home in Odessa and Jonathan having returned to America – within a time span of approximately six months: The first letter is dated “20 July 1997” (*EII* 23) and the last one “26 January 1998” (*EII* 240). Since the letters occur “throughout [the novel] ... at regular ... [and] mechanical moments, [they constitute] ... a recurring frame” (Williams 123): “[A] recurring frame complicates the very concept of frame since it loses its singular, autonomous position as opening announcement or as closing bracket.” (Williams 123).

As has already been mentioned, the reader not only has to regularly switch between the various sections of the two embedded novels but also to the narrative level of this recurring framing device which, despite its complexity, performs various important functions which will be discussed and analyzed in detail in the course of the next chapter.

2.1.2. Narrator-characters

2.1.2.1. Alex

As a first-person narrator “who belongs [...] to the characters’ world” (Stanzel, *Theory* 17), Alex clearly “relates back to ... [his] personal experience” (Fludernik, *Narratology* 47) telling his “story in retrospect” (Jahn and Nünning 290) and “remember[ing] ... what ... [he] saw (perceived, thought, knew [and] felt)” (Jahn and Nünning 290) during his three-day-trip through Ukraine. On the very first page of the novel before “begin[ning] the story” (*EII* 4) Alex as “the narrating self” (Stanzel, *Narrative Situations* 61) introduces himself to the reader, providing us with information about himself and his family background (see also Feuer 26).¹⁰ Moreover, he regularly addresses the reader especially in the first chapter of his story – “If you want to know why” (*EII* 1, 2, 5), “Do you want to know why?” (*EII* 1), “If you want to

⁹ See the concept of ‘narratee’ e.g. in Prince 57, Abrams 181, Fludernik, *Einführung* 33-34.

¹⁰ See the discussion and typology of different story beginnings in Kings 163-179.

know what" (*EII* 5) and "I will tell you" (*EII* 3). Alex's presence as the narrator of his story draws us into "a 'realistic' storytelling situation in which the speaker (narrator) addresses a narratee and recounts a sufficiently motivated story" (Fludernik, *Narratology* 245).¹¹ The reader is thus able to imagine and get to know Alex as a "personalized narrator ... [to whom] a certain cognitive, ideological [...] and [...] spatio-temporal position may become attributed" (Fludernik, *Narratology* 47) in the course of his telling his story to us.

From the very beginning on, however, we realize that what Alex tells us cannot really be taken for granted, because already in the first chapter of his story there are numerous remarks and comments of his causing us to question his reliability as a narrator.¹² The first instance concerns "die Selbstdarstellung des Erzählers" and "Leseranreden mit Aufforderungscharakter" (Busch 46)¹³: "I have many girls, *believe me* and they all have a different name for me. One dubs me Baby [...]. Another dubs me All Night. [...] I have a girl who dubs me Currency, because I disseminate so much currency around her" (*EII* 1 [emphasis added]).

Alex describes himself as "very potent and generative" (*EII* 1), and it is this remark addressed to the reader which makes us wonder whether this description of himself is realistic and reliable. "Appellative Äußerungen häufen sich [...], wenn ein Erzähler die Notwendigkeit sieht, sich gegenüber einem Ansprechpartner [...] zu rechtfertigen" (Busch 46). The same effect on the reader's side is caused by the following remark about his grandfather's dog named Sammy Davis, Junior, Junior: "(I should not have used 'purchased', because in truth Father did not purchase Sammy Davis, Junior, Junior, but only received her from the home for forgetful dogs [...])" (*EII* 5).

By explicitly telling us that he is trying to "be truthful" (*EII* 3) Alex implicitly draws the reader's attention to the possibility that exactly the opposite may be the case. Apart from these remarks indirectly revealing his unreliability, Alex also overtly admits that he sometimes deliberately lies to us,¹⁴ as for example in his first letter

¹¹ See also textual signals creating the illusion of 'storytelling scenarios' in Nünning, *Mimesis* 29-31; Fludernik's summary of Nünning's paper in Fludernik, *Metanarrative* 4.

¹² For the concept of unreliability as the reader's interpretative strategy see Nünning, *Unreliable Narration* 23-26.

¹³ See also textual signals for a narrator's unreliability in Nünning, *Unreliable Narration* 27-28.

¹⁴ See the textual signals indicating a narrator's unreliability in Nünning, *Unreliable Narration* 28; Feuer 41.

to Jonathan: “And thank you, I feel indebted to utter, for not mentioning the not-truth about how I am tall. I thought it might appear superior if I was tall” (*EII* 24). It is from this moment on that we know for sure that what Alex tells us cannot really be trusted. He obviously tries to present himself in a very favorable light, describing himself as “a very premium person to be with” (*EII* 2) and clearly exaggerates. In his fourth letter to Jonathan he admits that he has “never been carnal with a girl” (*EII* 144) and that he “manufacture[s] these not-truths because it makes ... [him] feel like a premium person” (*EII* 144). Although Alex tells us that he “would never swindle any person” (*EII* 54), he proves himself unreliable and very often lies, especially when translating for Jonathan. On their way from Lvov to Lutsk Alex does not want his grandfather to “blunder with the Jew” (*EII* 57) but “want[s]... him to like the hero” (*EII* 110). On the one hand he knows that his grandfather does not like his job and “hate[s] the Jew” (*EII* 57), but on the other hand he also knows that they both “are being paid [...] to listen to ... [Jonathan] talk” (*EII* 57), and he therefore tries to “translate ... [his grandfather’s] anger into useful information for the hero” (*EII* 58) whenever this is necessary: “‘Tell him to shut his mouth,’ Grandfather said. ‘I cannot drive if he is going to talk.’ ‘Our driver says there are many buildings in Lutsk,’ I told the hero. [...] ‘Tell him to shut his mouth.’ ‘Grandfather says that you should look out of your window if you want to see anything’” (*EII* 57). Alex’s numerous and deliberately false translations as well as his unidiomatic English, which will be analyzed in detail in Chapter 2.3.3., make him a “severely funny” (*EII* 2) character, and at least in this respect his self-description turns out to be reliable.

As has already been shown, Alex tries hard to conceal any offense against Jonathan, not only because he gets money for his job as translator, but also because of his future plans, which he reveals to us already in his second chapter. He tells us that he has “given abnormally many thoughts to altering residences to America when [...] more aged” (*EII* 28). Unlike his “friends [who] are appeased to stay in Odessa for their entire lives” (*EII* 28), he longs for a better life, which he thinks waits for him in America: “Alex [obviously] dream[s]... the typical immigrant dream of unlimited freedom and prosperity” (Varvogli 91). His clearly naïve and stereotyped image of America is the result of what he gets to know about the country of his dreams via the media, i.e. television and the magazines he reads (see Ribbat 212, Varvogli 90). He is very anxious to meet Jonathan but is “underwhelmed to the maximum” (*EII* 32), when he first sees him, because Jonathan obviously

does “not appear like [...] the Americans ... [he has] witnessed in magazines, with yellow hairs and muscles” (*EII* 32). Alex, however, does not abandon his dream and tries “to impress and [...] befriend Jonathan” (*Feuer* 27) during the three days of their trip. In his third letter to Jonathan Alex tells him why he “keep[s] all of ... [his] reserves of currency in a cookie box in the kitchen” (*EII* 100): “[B]ecause I desire to be cocksure that I have enough for a luxurious apartment in Times Square, vast enough for both me and Little Igor: We will have a large-screen television to watch basketball, a jacuzzi, and a hi-fi to write home about, although we will already be home” (*EII* 101). Both his naïve dream and stereotyped image of America are, of course, anything but realistic and widely diverge from the reader’s knowledge of the world, thus once again revealing Alex’s unreliability as a narrator whom we cannot really trust and whose point of view we therefore constantly have to question carefully.¹⁵

Despite his naivety, Alex is also quite cunning and calculating, especially as far as his relationship to Jonathan is concerned. Although he – not unselfishly – tries to become Jonathan’s friend, Alex sometimes lies to him, not because he wants to be polite and obliging, but because he tries to take advantage of him, thinking that Jonathan as a foreigner does not realize and understand what is going on. Moreover, Alex appears to feel inferior to Jonathan, who comes from the “ennobled country America and visit[s] humble towns in [...] Ukraine” (*EII* 3). Jonathan, of course, depends on Alex as his translator, and his behavior sometimes appears to be inadequate – at least in the eyes of Alex and his grandfather: “The American is perceived as Other” (*Ribbat* 213). Although it certainly is reasonable for Jonathan, who visits Ukraine for the first time, to stick to the information in his “guidebook” (*EII* 63), he does not always seem to be well-advised in doing so, or at least his efforts turn out to be naïve or in vain. He keeps his documents in a “fanny pack” (*EII* 63) in order for them not to be stolen but loses them anyway, because Sammy Davis, Junior, Junior not only eats them but allegedly also his “credit card, a bunch of cigarettes [and] some of ... [his] money” (*EII* 106). Similarly, his giving cigarettes to “the petrol man” (*EII* 109) is intended as a friendly gesture but appears quite strange and probably also condescending to Alex and his grandfather. What seems even more interesting is that Jonathan refers to Alex’s country as ‘the’ Ukraine throughout the story, thus indirectly reflecting the kind of superiority which

¹⁵ See the textual and extra-textual signals of unreliable narration in Nünning, *Unreliable Narration* 28-30.

“the [former] Soviet regime ... [used to demonstrate towards the] country ... [as a Russian] province” (Varvogli 90). Alex appears “annoyed when his country is referred to as ‘the Ukraine’” (Varvogli 90), because already at the beginning of the story he tells us that “Ukraine was to celebrate the first birthday of its ultramodern constitution, which makes ... [him] feel very nationalistic” (*EII* 4).

“In his role as translator, Alex [also] assumes the role of cultural mediator” (Varvogli 90), which, however, turns out not to be an easy task for him, because Alex himself appears to have a rather ambiguous and divided attitude not only towards his own country¹⁶ but also towards Jonathan, who represents the country of his dreams and thus a kind of superiority. This ambiguity is reflected in the story which Alex’s father once told him about Ukrainian “border guards” (*EII* 33):

It is best if the guard [...] wants to overawe the American by being a premium guard. This kind of guard thinks that he will encounter the American again one day in America, and that the American will offer to take him to a Chicago Bull game [...]. This guard will confess that he does not love where he lives.

The other kind of guard is also in love with America, but he will hate the American for being an American. [...] This guard knows he will never go to America [...]. He will steal from the American and terror the American [...]. This is the only occasion in his life to have his Ukraine be more than America and to have himself be more than the American. (*EII* 33)

After having found out that Alex not only tries “to impress and [...] befriend Jonathan” (Feuer 27), but that he is sometimes also annoyed by him, and, even more importantly, that Alex finally has to abandon his dream about “altering residences to America” (*EII* 28), the reader retrospectively, i.e. towards the end of the novel, realizes Alex’s reflection within this story.¹⁷ An interesting detail of this passage is that it depicts a kind of guard who “will steal from the American” (*EII* 33), thus implying that Alex will do the same in the course of his story. We therefore realize – again only in retrospect – that although Jonathan finds Sammy Davis, Junior, Junior “chewing [his documents]” (*EII* 105) in the morning, it probably is not the dog but Alex who is responsible for the disappearance of Jonathan’s “credit card, a bunch of cigarettes [and] some of ... [his] money” (*EII* 106) and that what Alex tells us about their first night at the hotel is highly unreliable.

¹⁶ See also the reference to Ukraine’s unstable identity in Varvogli 90.

¹⁷ See the discussion of ‘myse en abyme’ in Wolf, *Ästhetische Illusion* 300-301.

Alex's political incorrectness towards social and ethnic minorities is yet another reason for us to clearly detach ourselves from his attitude and opinion¹⁸. On the one hand he asserts us that he "dig[s] Negroes" (*EII* 2, 70), but on the other hand he also implies that "a Negro homosexual accountant" (*EII* 70) could earn less money than, for example, he himself as a white heterosexual. Although one could argue that Alex's use of "the n-word" (*EII* 70) does not necessarily have to be as racist as it sounds to us, since because of his limited knowledge of English he may not have come across the politically correct expression of "African-American" (*EII* 70), he nevertheless clearly seems to make a difference between himself on the one hand and African-Americans and/or homosexuals on the other hand. He thus indirectly points at a problematic subject, i.e. the latent and overt racism towards African-Americans in America and the dark era of American history when they were brutally exploited and oppressed for centuries. What seems even more important and disconcerting to the reader is Alex's ambiguous attitude towards Jews. At the very beginning of his story he tells us:

I will be truthful again and mention that before the voyage I had the opinion that Jewish people were having shit between their brains [...] because all I knew of Jewish people was that they paid Father very much currency in order to make vacations *from* America *to* Ukraine. But then I met Jonathan Safran Foer, and I will tell you, he is not having shit between his brains. He is an ingenious Jew. (*EII* 3)

In this passage Alex directly refers to the changing of his opinion due to what he experienced in the course of his trip and points to "the narrative distance [...]" from which the narrating self now reports the considerations and feelings which the experiencing self had at the time" (Stanzel, *Theory* 95).¹⁹ The reader's interest in the story is thus raised and we want to find out what caused Alex's alleged transformation, especially because his remark strikes us as being anti-Semitic. As he tells us, he has "never met a Jewish person until the voyage" (*EII* 3), and when he first meets Jonathan Alex is very surprised, because he does not look like "the Jews from history books, with no hairs and prominent bones" (*EII* 32) thus indicating that he certainly must have learned something about the persecution of Jews during the Second World War. His own country's anti-Semitic past (see Feuer 28), however, seems completely unknown to him. When Jonathan tells him that "[t]he

¹⁸ See the extra-textual 'frames of reference' and unreliable narration in Nünning, *Unreliable Narration* 29-30; also mentioned in Allrath 61.

¹⁹ See also the discussion of the past self's perspective and the narrator's unreliability in Busch 50-52.

Ukrainians, back then, were terrible to the Jews ... [,] almost as bad as the Nazis ... [and that] [a]t the beginning of the war, a lot of Jews wanted to go to the Nazis to be protected from the Ukrainians" (*EII* 62), Alex heavily protests and insists that Jonathan is "mistaken" (*EII* 62), because "[i]t does not say this in the history books" (*EII* 62). As "a twenty-year-old Ukrainian" (Feuer 26), born and raised in the "former Soviet republic" (*EII* 23), Alex's knowledge of the Holocaust and the war clearly appears to be influenced by his country's communist past (see Ribbat 213) and therefore not only limited and one-sided but also extremely diverging from our own knowledge of history. Although both his grandfather and father earn their living from working "for a travel agency [...] for Jewish people" (*EII* 3), Alex obviously has never been compelled to question his family's (anti-Semitic) attitude towards Jews, primarily portrayed through the character of his grandfather (see Feuer 28). Since Alex himself unintentionally "unearth[s]" (*EII* 3) and "encounter[s] ... [his] own heritage" (Ribbat 213)²⁰, i.e. the secret and traumatic past of his grandfather, his story "is at least as much about ... [himself]... as it is about the American 'Foer'" (Eaglestone 130).

Although or rather because his story comes to an unexpectedly dramatic end, Alex as a "severely funny" (*EII* 2) character is responsible for the "large dose of comedy" (Feuer 29) and consequently for the "comic relief" (Feuer 29) in the novel. As he himself points out, "humorous is the only truthful way to tell a sad story" (*EII* 53). The numerous comic elements and situations in his story, which make us "laugh[...] out loud" (Prose para 1), are mostly the result of the distance between Alex's and our own knowledge and opinions, which have been analyzed above.²¹

As has already been mentioned, Alex looks back and tells us about his trip through Ukraine together with Jonathan, i.e. what the two fictional characters experienced together. In addition to the numerous instances of reader address, some of which have already been pointed out, Alex also addresses Jonathan, whom he writes for and from whom he receives money for writing his story. Unlike the reader, Jonathan can be said to already know the events which Alex writes about in the course of his story, since in this case "[b]oth narrator and addressee share realms of existence with [the] story world" (Fludernik, *Narratology* 247). Most of Alex's remarks addressed to Jonathan therefore reflect a shared knowledge between the two

²⁰ See also Feuer 28.

²¹ See the discussion of comic elements in Wolf, *Ästhetische Illusion* 442-447; the concept of 'structural irony' as defined in *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* 174-175.

characters. When Alex tells us about his grandfather, whom his “[f]ather dubbed [...] an expert” (EII 6), the reader does not understand yet what Alex means by addressing Jonathan: “(At the time when he said this, it seemed like a very reasonable thing to say. But how does this make you feel, Jonathan, in the luminescence of everything that occurred?)” (EII 6).

Similarly, when Alex tells us about the woman who they thought was Augustine and who invited them into her house, Alex asks Jonathan: “(If we knew then, Jonathan, would we have still gone in?)” (EII 146). Here again the reader does not know yet what could have prevented the two of them from entering the woman’s house. Alex’s comments therefore not only evoke and intensify his presence as a narrator and reflect the distance to his past self, as has already been pointed out, but also arouse suspense in the reader, who is yet to find out what the two characters already know. A similar and certainly even more intensive suspense-creating effect is achieved by Alex’s letters to Jonathan, which will be analyzed in the following.

As has already been discussed in Chapter 2.1.1., the reader has to piece together and try to make sense not only of the various parts of the two embedded novels but also of Alex’s letters to Jonathan. The whole reading process therefore can be said to be quite suspenseful due to the novel’s complex overall structure. Moreover, the letters as a recurring framing device reflecting both Alex’s and Jonathan’s shared experience and knowledge after their trip additionally “enhance suspense [...] and thus [...] the reader’s involvement” (Wolf, *Framing Borders* 191). As Alex tells us in his first chapter, Jonathan comes to Ukraine because “[h]e is looking for the town his grandfather came from [...] and [...] Augustine [...], who salvaged his grandfather from the war” (EII 6). Shortly after this, however, before Alex has even started to tell us about the beginning of the trip, we learn from his first letter to Jonathan that they did not find Augustine. Alex thus anticipates an important outcome of his own story already in his first letter. Although the reader’s expectation can thus be said to be partly disappointed at a very early stage, our suspense is nevertheless raised, because we want to find out what happened during the trip, even though they failed to find Augustine. Similarly, Alex in his first letter apologizes for “the box” (EII 23) which was stolen from Jonathan on his way back to Prague. At this point, of course, we neither know what kind of box this was nor why it was so “momentous” (EII 23) for Jonathan and why “its ingredients were not ex-

changeable" (*EII* 23), and we get the answers to these questions only later on in the course of Alex's story.

Another interesting and important point is that Alex in his letters writes about what happens to him and his family after the trip, i.e. at the time of writing his story. He regularly mentions his grandfather, who keeps asking after Jonathan, and whose state of health constantly declines after their return. In his third letter Alex writes that he "witnessed him crying" (*EII* 102) once "holding a photograph of Augustine in his hands" (*EII* 102) and another time "a photograph of ... [Jonathan]" (*EII* 102). Since at the beginning of Alex's novel his grandfather is portrayed not only as rude and bad-tempered but also as anti-Semitic (see Feuer 28), we are interested in what Alex writes about him, especially because we want to find out whether the trip has had any effect on his character. His increasingly melancholic mood not only implies such a change but also foreshadows the discovery of his own secret and traumatic past. The most suspenseful remark about Alex's grandfather on the level of the frame occurs in the fourth letter, when Alex writes to Jonathan: "Grandfather [...] desires to know if you forgive him for the things he told you about the war, and about Herschel. [...] He is not a bad person. He is a good person, alive in a bad time. [...] A bad person is someone who does not lament his bad actions. Grandfather is now dying because of his" (*EII* 145).

Although shortly after this, we learn from Alex's novel that the woman who they believed was Augustine not only knew Herschel but that Eli, Herschel's "best friend[...], had to shoot ... [him]" (*EII* 152), we get to know what happened to Herschel and Alex's grandfather during the war only towards the end of the novel, i.e. in Alex's last chapter. The letter representing the frame therefore "announces something terrible ... [and] enigmatic, while it denies its explanation and postpones it to ... [a] much later stage in the embedded story" (Wolf, *Framing Borders* 191). Moreover, already in his second letter Alex "as always ... ask[s] for ... [Jonathan's] forgiveness" (*EII* 54), and, as the novel progresses, we begin to realize that Alex obviously somehow tries to defend his grandfather. Our suspense is thus raised once again when he tells Jonathan in his fifth letter that he "know[s] ... [he has to] point a finger at Grandfather pointing at Herschel" (*EII* 178).

Alex's letters not only provide the reader with information about what happens to Alex and his family after the trip, but they also refer to both Alex and Jonathan as

writers and – since they exchange the various parts of their novels – also as readers of their stories. The letters thus portray “a discernible communicative situation” (Wolf, *Framing Borders* 188)²², i.e. the correspondence between Alex and Jonathan, and “provide ‘reception figures’ ([i.e.] the fictitious [...] readers)” (Wolf, *Framing Borders* 190) for their stories. As such, both Alex and Jonathan regularly comment on what they have written (see Feuer 43, Varvogli 90). As we learn from the letters, Jonathan reads the “divisions” (*EII* 24) of Alex’s story and comments on them in his letters to Alex, which, of course, we do not get to read, and Alex writing for Jonathan and receiving money for it wants him to be “appeased by” (*EII* 24) what he writes. He therefore most of the time accepts “the [numerous] corrections ... [which Jonathan] demand[s]” (*EII* 24). Thus Alex, for example, “jettison[s]... out the word ‘Negroes’” (*EII* 24) and “remove[s] ... the sentence ‘He was severely short’” (*EII* 53). He also changes “the division about Sammy Davis, Junior, Junior’s fondness for ... [Jonathan]” (*EII* 101) but refuses “to amputate her from the story, or to have her ‘killed in a tragicomic accident while crossing the road to the hotel’” (*EII* 101), as Jonathan suggests to him. Moreover, Alex himself not only regularly comments on his own sections but also points out his ideas and reflections about how they could write their novels. Thus both Alex and Jonathan are clearly foregrounded as writers of their stories, who together obviously “explore [the] problems, limits ... [and] potentials of storytelling” (Wolf, *Framing Borders* 196)²³. Their comments clearly refer to their stories as fiction and therefore are instances of “explicit metafiction ... [, i.e.] narratorial statement[s] that thematize... [a] narrative’s fictionality (Fludernik, *Metanarrative* 20): “Metafiktionale sind selbstreflexive Aussagen und Elemente einer Erzählung, die nicht auf Inhaltliches als scheinbare Wirklichkeit zielen, sondern zur Reflexion veranlassen über Textualität und ‘Fiktionalität’ – im Sinne von ‘Künstlichkeit, Gemachtheit’ oder ‘Erfundeneheit’ [...]“ (Wolf, *Metafiktion* 447)²⁴.

When writing his story about his trip with Jonathan and his grandfather Alex thus thinks of inventing certain parts of his story. Although most of his ideas, like “making ... [Jonathan] speak Ukrainian” (*EII* 101), cannot be taken seriously and clearly

²² See also the concept of frames as ‘communicative scenario’ in Williams 101; Nünning’s reference to Williams in Nünning, *Mimesis* 28.

²³ See also the discussion of frames and reflexivity in Williams 102.

²⁴ See also Wolf’s definition of metafiction in Wolf, *Metafiktion Formen* 37; Wolf, *Ästhetische Illusion* 228.

have a comic effect on the reader,²⁵ some of his suggestions also indicate that he somehow tries to find a way of not having to write about his grandfather's past. This is implied in his ideas of finding a kind of happy ending (see Behlman 60, Feuer 42) not only for his own story: "We could even find Augustine, [...] and you could thank her, and Grandfather [...] and it could be perfect and beautiful" (*EII* 179), but also for Jonathan's novel: "We could even write your grandmother into your story. Which makes me think that perhaps we could write Grandfather into the story. Perhaps [...] we could have him save your grandfather. He could be Augustine" (*EII* 180).

The numerous comments, only some of which can be mentioned, explicitly make the reader aware of the fictionality of both Alex's and Jonathan's stories and thus also "thematize... [and draw our attention to the] fiction-making process[...]" (Hutcheon, *Narrative* 39)²⁶. Our imagination and illusion "of being re-centered in a possible world as if it were (a slice of) life" (Wolf, *Aesthetic Illusion* para 1), however, is not really destroyed by means of these comments, although probably to some extent undermined.²⁷ As will be shown in the following, the author uses a range of other techniques which affect the text's aesthetic illusion to a much greater extent. Since these instances of explicit metafiction do not occur within the stories themselves but are positioned on the level of the frame, i.e. in Alex's letters, they still allow us to be drawn into Alex's and Jonathan's storyworlds when reading the various parts of their stories: "Da am Anfang eines Lektüreabschnitts nach längerer Unterbrechung Illusion [...] wieder neu gebildet werden muß, stören metafiktionale Reflexionen [...] in solcher ‚marginalen‘ Stellung im Text am wenigsten" (Wolf, *Ästhetische Illusion* 240f.)²⁸.

Moreover, the letters not only draw our attention to "[t]he parallelism of the acts of writing and reading" (Hutcheon, *Narrative* 27), but "the act of reading itself [...] become[s] thematized" (Hutcheon, *Narrative* 37) in the novel (see also Marshall 151; Tani 44). Especially Alex is of interest here, because it is his letters and comments which we get to read directly. As a reader of Jonathan's novel, Alex is shown as "a

²⁵ See the discussion of 'the carnivalesque' and explicit metafiction in Wolf, *Ästhetische Illusion* 460-61.

²⁶ See also examples of explicit metafictional strategies in Waugh 21-22, 102-103.

²⁷ See Wolf's extensive discussion of different types of explicit metafiction and their possible effects on a text's aesthetic illusion in Wolf, *Ästhetische Illusion* 220-259.

²⁸ See also the discussion of frames and aesthetic distance in Wolf, *Framing Borders* 195-197.

character looking at – that is, creating – ... [a] novelistic world” (Hutcheon, *Narrative* 90). He obviously not only tries to understand and make sense of what Jonathan writes and wants to learn from the story (see Feuer 37), but he is also emotionally affected and feels with the characters. Alex can thus be said to basically mirror our own position as readers, i.e. the reader outside the fictional world. By looking at Alex in his reading role we are “made aware of the fact that ... [we] too, in reading ... [are] actively creating a fictional universe” (Hutcheon, *Narrative* 28). Unlike Alex, however, we get to read not only one story but the various parts of two stories and we therefore can be said to create two different “fictional universe[s]” (Hutcheon, *Narrative* 28) or to have to switch between the various stages of two different storyworlds. Alex’s reactions to and interpretations of Jonathan’s story, of course, differ a great deal from our own reading mostly because of the distance between his and our own point of view, which has already been discussed earlier. The “many intelligent things ... [he] utter[s]” (*EII* 25) which the reader, however, cannot take seriously are therefore again responsible for the intense comic effect on the reader’s side.²⁹ Moreover, Alex is shown to have a great interest in what will happen to the characters in the following sections. In this respect he obviously again mirrors the reader outside the fictional world. Like him we are also interested in what direction Jonathan’s story – and, of course, also Alex’s story – will develop: “In the serialized novel [...] the reader works to imagine what happens next, since suspense determines the cut” (Hutcheon, *Narrative* 141f.).

Similarly, Alex also expresses his wish that Jonathan will make his characters happy: “If I could utter a proposal, please allow Brod to be happy. Please. Is this such an impossible thing?” (*EII* 143). Whereas this suggestion to Jonathan as the writer and thus the creator of his storyworld appears quite plausible to us and at least to some extent again mirrors our own sympathy for the fictional characters, his plea to Jonathan concerning his grandfather and himself towards the end of the very same letter does not really make sense to us:

Grandfather [...] desires to know if you forgive him for the things he told you about the war, and about Herschel. (*You could alter it, Jonathan. For him, not for me. Your novel is now verging on the war. It is possible.*) [...] *I beseech you to forgive us, and to make us better than we are. Make us good.* (*EII* 145 [emphasis added])

²⁹ See the discussion of ‘the carnivalesque’ and explicit metafiction in Wolf, *Ästhetische Illusion* 460-461.

Apart from the fact that Herschel is mentioned here for the first time, Jonathan's novel is indeed moving towards the war, as he writes about his grandfather Safran. How Jonathan as a writer of the shtetl-chronicle could have any influence on the way Alex and his grandfather are portrayed in the rest of the novel, however, is anything but logical, because it is Alex himself who writes about his grandfather in his own story. We therefore realize that it is not the fictional character named Jonathan (Safran Foer) whom Alex addresses in this passage but the real author outside the fictional world. Since in this passage "[t]he level of the fictional world and the ontological level occupied by the author as maker of the fictional world collapse together" (McHale 213), this address constitutes a metalepsis, i.e. "eine 'unmögliche' Apostrophe über die Grenze der diegetischen Ebene hinweg" (Wolf, *Ästhetische Illusion* 360)³⁰. In his attempt to "protect his grandfather" (Feuer 34) and to avoid having to tell about his past (see Feuer 35), Alex as a fictional character can thus be said to even turn to his own creator, i.e. the real author outside the fictional world.³¹ However, since this metalepsis is not only very short but additionally occurs on the level of the frame, i.e. in one of Alex's letters, its anti-illusionistic effect on the reader can be said to be relatively harmless.³² Contrary to this, other "metaleptic infractions" (Fludernik, *Narratology* 273), again in the form of Alex's desperate address to the real author before telling about his grandfather and Herschel, have a considerably stronger disturbing effect, since they do not occur on the level of the frame but within Alex's story itself:

(You may understand this as a gift from me to you, Jonathan. And just as I am saving you, *so could you save Grandfather. We are merely two paragraphs away. Please, try to find some other option.*) [...] (Here it is almost too forbidding to continue. I have written to this point many times, [...] but every time I try to persevere, my hand shakes so that I can no longer hold my pen. *Do it for me. Please. It is now yours.*) (Ell 224-226 [emphasis added])

Here, Alex as the narrator of his story obviously is so distraught that he can no longer carry on writing and therefore asks the real author outside the fictional world to take over instead. These instances of metaleptic address clearly undermine our illusion of "a 'realistic' storytelling situation" (Fludernik, *Narratology* 245) to a much

³⁰ For the technique of metalepsis see also Fludernik, *Einführung* 114, 175; Baldick 204-205.

³¹ Compare the metaleptic addresses of an author by one of his fictional characters analyzed in Wolf, *Ästhetische Illusion* 359-360.

³² Compare the analysis of 'punktuellem Kurzschluß' in Wolf, *Ästhetische Illusion* 359-360; his discussion of explicit metafiction and its possible anti-illusionistic effect depending on its position within the text in Wolf, *Ästhetische Illusion* 240-241.

greater extent due to their position within the story itself: "Passagen, die mitten in einen illusionistischen Kontext 'hineinplatzen', [stören] ungleich massiver" (Wolf, *Ästhetische Illusion* 241). Moreover, at this very late stage of the novel our illusion of a realistically portrayed storyworld has already been profoundly undermined by several other, even 'stronger' anti-illusionistic techniques, which will be discussed in Chapter 2.2.³³

Another important aspect of Alex's metaleptic address of his own creator outside the fictional world is the unmistakable resemblance between the latter and the fictional character named Jonathan Safran Foer, whom Alex regularly addresses in the course of his story, as has already been pointed out above. Jonathan not only "bear[s]... the ... [same] name" (McHale 215) but clearly reminds us of the real author due to his physical appearance, which we get to know through the eyes of Alex: "He was severely short. He wore spectacles and had diminutive hairs which were not split anywhere, but rested on his head like a Shapka" (*EII* 31-32). Like the real author, Jonathan is not only Jewish American but also a "very young" (*EII* 69) writer who has not published anything yet except a few "apprentice pieces" (*EII* 69). "[T]he author [thus clearly] writes himself into the text ... [and] fictionalizes himself" (McHale 215). Despite this obvious similarity, however, the "realistic illusion" (Waugh 94) of Alex's story is only profoundly undermined towards the end of the novel and, as has already been mentioned above, by means of a combination of several other anti-illusionistic techniques.³⁴ It is thus only at a rather late point and not only through Alex's metaleptic address of the real author that our attention is drawn to a clearly impossible and "paradoxical interpenetration of two realms that are mutually inaccessible" (McHale 204). Moreover, rather than explicitly commenting on or "obviously bullying his characters" (McHale 210), like some post-modern novelists tend to do³⁵, the real author has his fictionalized "[d]ouble" (Wolf, *Ästhetische Illusion* 369) remain rather quiet and taciturn and instead has one of his fictional characters address him. As a consequence, we also realize at this stage why we get to read only Alex's and not also Jonathan's letters throughout the novel. As his fictionalized double, Jonathan is obviously meant to stay in the background and to draw the reader's attention to the real author as the one "ma-

³³ See anti-illusionistic effects as a result of the combination of various distinct techniques in Wolf, *Ästhetische Illusion* 213-217.

³⁴ Compare the factors conditioning the anti-illusionistic effect of author-like characters in Wolf, *Ästhetische Illusion* 355-356.

³⁵ See the discussion of 'authority' in postmodern novels in Mchale 210-215; Waugh's discussion of 'exaggerated authorial presence' in Waugh 131-133.

nipulating [his] characters and events like a puppet-master" (McHale 210) behind the scenes (see also Chapter 2.2.3).³⁶ The real "author's [...] role" (Waugh 24) is thus mirrored in the fictional character of Jonathan as the creator of his characters and his storyworld. Just like the latter has the power to, for example, make Brod "happy" (*EII* 143), the real author outside the fictional world has the power to make Alex and his grandfather "better than ... [they] are" (*EII* 145). As a consequence, the reader's attention is drawn to the fictional quality of Alex as an invention and creation of the real author and as such he can be said to try to influence his own fate and development in the course of the novel. "[Die] ... Anrede suggeriert [...] ein Wissen ... [Alex'] um ... [seine] Fiktionalität und gleichzeitig eine Selbständigkeit, die ... [er] ... unmöglich haben ... [kann]" (Wolf, *Ästhetische Illusion* 360)³⁷.

"[T]he [consequent] ontological instability [...] of the fictional world[s]" (McHale 211), however, is not only foregrounded by means of these "metaleptic infractions" (Fludernik, *Narratology* 273) but also by several other techniques, which will be discussed in detail in the following chapters.

2.1.2.2. Jonathan

Unlike Alex, who as a first-person narrator clearly "belongs [...] to the characters' world" (Stanzel, *Theory* 17) and tells us about his "personal experience" (Fludernik, *Narratology* 47), Jonathan serves a double function in the novel, i.e. he appears as a fictional character in Alex's story and as "an omniscient [...] narrator" (Jahn and Nünning 290)³⁸ in the story he creates about Trachimbrod. Compared to Alex, whose personal involvement in his story is constantly portrayed throughout,³⁹ Jonathan certainly can be said to be more distanced and controlled, since as an omniscient narrator he "assume[s] a position of superiority over his figures" (Stanzel, *Narrative Situations* 39). Moreover, whereas Alex explicitly introduces himself to the reader at the beginning of his story, Jonathan's identity as the narrator of his story is revealed to us only gradually and indirectly. Although we certainly realize the presence of a narrator especially because of the "use of the first-person pronoun" (Jahn and Nünning 292) in the second chapter of Jonathan's story, where

³⁶ See also the 'author's godlike role' in Waugh 24-25.

³⁷ See also the analysis of postmodern characters and 'metalepsis' in McHale 121-123.

³⁸ See also the discussion of the authorial narrator in Fludernik, *Einführung* 106-108; Nünning and Nünning, *Introduction* 112-113.

³⁹ See the difference between first-person and third-person narration in Jahn and Nünning 292.

he refers to the “baby girl” (EII 13) found in the river as “[m]y great-great-great-great-great-grandmother” (EII 16), we get to know the identity behind this “narratorial ‘I’” (Stanzel, *Theory* 201) only through Alex’s letters.⁴⁰ After having read the first letter, we know that Jonathan writes the story about the shtetl and therefore immediately identify him as the narrator of this narrative, although – strictly speaking – this does not necessarily have to be the case, since Jonathan as the writer of his story does not automatically also have to be the narrator of his story. This difference becomes evident when we try to imagine that Jonathan writing a story about the shtetl could also invent and create a character who tells the story to us. It is therefore only after having read Alex’s fourth letter that we know for certain that the authorial narrator’s *I* in the story about Trachimbrod really is Jonathan, because Alex explicitly refers to Safran as Jonathan’s grandfather: “If I could utter a proposal, please [...] be proximal with your grandfather Safran” (EII 143).

Since we already know from Alex’s story that Jonathan wants to find “the town his grandfather came from” (EII 6), we assume from the very beginning that the story about the shtetl is somehow related to this search, especially because we know that it is written by Jonathan after his return back home, and because it turns out to be about “Trachimbrod” (EII 51).⁴¹ We therefore hope and expect that Jonathan not only will be successful in finding the shtetl he is looking for, but moreover that his story about Trachimbrod and his ancestors is the result of what he has found out about his family’s past during his three-day-trip through Ukraine. Although we already learn from Alex’s first letter that they were not able to find Augustine, and thus our expectations are partly disappointed, as has already been mentioned above, there remains the possibility that Jonathan has found his grandfather’s shtetl and some kind of “source of the narrated material” (Stanzel, *Narrative Situation* 41), i.e. either some kind of written document containing information about his ancestors or maybe even somebody who survived the war and who told him about the history of the shtetl and his family’s past. Most of the unrealistic and fantastic elements portrayed in Jonathan’s story, especially in the first part about his great-great-great-great-great-grandmother, therefore, do not really undermine our illusion of the shtetl-world, because we “recognize narrative patterns that mimic the

⁴⁰ See the reader’s projection of a text’s narrator figure from the “textual *I*” in Fludernik, *Narratology* 278.

⁴¹ See the process of ‘narrativization’ in Fludernik, *Narratology* 45-47; storyworlds and the process of comprehension in Herman 570.

fantastic logic of folk tales” (Mullan 117)⁴². Since Jonathan looks back to what happened more than two hundred years ago, we can make sense of these passages as part of a legendary and folkloristic tale of the shtetl, which has come down to the present by some kind of written or oral source which Jonathan has found during his trip and which he now obviously passes on to us (see Tate 179): “[The] literary third-person narrative, of the authorial type, can [...] be discussed in terms of storytelling models that derive [...] from the shape of the folk tale” (Fludernik, *Narratology* 47).

The important point is that we not only automatically try to relate Jonathan’s story about the shtetl with Alex’s story about the search for Trachimbrod and Augustine, but we also expect that his story will somehow shed light on his family roots, especially his grandfather’s past and how he was able to escape and survive the Holocaust.⁴³ Unlike Alex’ story, which we immediately identify as an account of what he himself experienced, Jonathan’s story is not commented on by his narrator. We therefore can only guess and try to make sense of it by interpreting his story as a kind of legendary and folkloristic story about his ancestors, which he himself somehow seems to have come across in the course of his search. As “the speaker [of his story, Jonathan] has apparently received the information by hearsay rather than direct observation” (Fludernik, *Narratology* 73)⁴⁴. This seems to be the most reasonable way for us to make sense of his story, at least until the point when Jonathan tells us otherwise.

Although both Alex and Jonathan are “personalized narrator[s]” (Stanzel, *Theory* 16), we get to know Jonathan mainly through what Alex tells us about him in the course of his story about the trip, i.e. Jonathan’s “personal features ... [as a] narrator” (Stanzel, *Theory* 90) are hardly revealed to us in his own story. Except from the fact that we learn that he tells us about his ancestors, Jonathan most of the time stays in the background – the reasons for which have already been pointed out above –, since he almost exclusively refers to himself only by regularly using the possessive pronoun ‘my’ in connection with his great-great-great-great-

⁴² Compare the specific genre conventions as large-scale cognitive frames in Fludernik, *Narratology* 44; Wolf’s point of ‘Gattungskontext’ in Wolf, *Ästhetische Illusion* 344-345; storyworlds and the process of narrative comprehension in Herman 570.

⁴³ See the process of ‘narrativization’ in Fludernik, *Narratology* 45-47; storyworlds and the process of comprehension in Herman 570.

⁴⁴ Compare the discussion of narrativizing a text’s teller-figure in Fludernik, *Narratology* 274-278.

great-grandmother and later on with his grandfather. Our attention to his presence as a “personalized narrator” (Stanzel, *Theory* 16) is thus all the more raised when he explicitly expresses himself and uses the “narratorial ‘I’” (Stanzel, *Theory* 201) to refer to himself, which only happens three times in the course of the whole story. The most extensive and unusual instance of “overt narratorial intrusion” (Waugh 14) occurs in the second half of the novel. In the eleventh chapter, “THE DUPE OF CHANCE, 1941-1924” (EII 165), the events move towards the time of the war, and Jonathan tells us about his grandfather Safran, who secretly made love to his “bride’s younger sister” (EII 164) on his wedding day on “June 18, 1941” (EII 163). Before telling us about his grandfather’s youth, however, the question of Safran’s guilt is raised in connection with “his first marital infidelity” (EII 165): “How guilty could he be, really, when he never had any real choice? [...] Could he have been good?” (EII 165). Shortly after this, we are unexpectedly made aware of Jonathan, because he interrupts his story and explicitly and personally intervenes and comments on his grandfather from his point of view as a real, historical person looking at his grandfather’s portrait: “His teeth. It’s the first thing / notice whenever / examine his baby portrait. It’s not *my* dandruff. It’s not a smudge of gesso or white paint. Between my grandfather’s thin lips [...] is a full set of teeth” (EII 165 [emphasis added]). This passage, in which the level of the shtetl-world merges with the level occupied by Jonathan as a character in the novel, constitutes another metaleptic leap. The grandfather’s portrait is meant to serve as a realistic proof for the unusual “phenomenon” (EII 165), which is underlined by Jonathan’s assertive comment that his grandfather’s teeth really can be seen. He goes on by telling us about his great-grandmother and another portrait: “But then there is the family portrait, painted three months later. *Look*, this time, at her lips, and *you will* see that [...] my young great-grandmother was frowning” (EII 165 [emphasis added]). Here again, the portrait is meant as a kind of realistic piece of evidence for what Jonathan tells us. He then carries on with his observations and seemingly logical conclusions about his grandfather’s teeth as the obvious reason for his allegedly dead “right arm” (EII 166), which Jonathan infers from the way his grandfather is portrayed in the “photographs” (EII 166). When he tells us that Safran’s dead arm was finally the reason why he survived the war, we realize that his observations and conclusions about his grandfather drawn from the portraits and photographs are mere speculations and anything but certain:

So it was *because of* his teeth, *I imagine*, that he got no milk, and it was *because* he got no milk that his right arm died. It was *because* his arm died

that [...] he was exempted from the draft that sent his schoolmates off to be killed in hopeless battles against the Nazis. [...] And it was *because of* his arm, *I'm sure* [...] that he had the power to make any woman who crossed his path fall in hopeless love with him [...]. (*EII* 166 [emphasis added])

Since his first conclusion about his grandfather's teeth is only imagined – as Jonathan here explicitly states himself –, the ensuing “causal chain” (Richardson 50) of events also turns out to be the product of the narrator's fantasy. His comment expressing and emphasizing his certainty at this point creates exactly the opposite effect on the reader's side, i.e. our uncertainty about what Jonathan tells us is further enhanced.⁴⁵ Moreover, and more importantly, we realize that the future events of the story about his grandfather and the shtetl, which are mentioned here but which we have not read about yet, are merely imagined and thus clearly invented by the narrator (see Varvogli 89). This passage thus heavily affects the illusionistic context, because it deliberately draws the reader's attention to the story's inventiveness and therefore is another instance of explicit metafiction: “[Die] ... Thematisierung ... [der Erfundenheit eines Textes] macht ... [dem Leser] genau jenes Absehen von der bewußten Analyse der ‘Wahrheit’ des Gelesenen unmöglich, das für den Zustand der Illusion charakteristisch ist“ (Wolf, *Ästhetische Illusion* 248).

Unlike the explicit metafictional comments about Alex's and Jonathan's story occurring on the level of the framing letters, which have already been discussed in the last chapter, this passage unexpectedly confronts the reader with the story's fictionality and consequently profoundly undermines our illusion⁴⁶. Moreover, since the future events are not only anticipated but already exposed as invented, we are automatically induced to reflect upon and question the past events of the story as well, i.e. what Jonathan has told us so far. Our attention is thus drawn to the passage in the story's seventh chapter when Brod – like Jonathan – anticipates future events. Like Jonathan, who obviously attempts to provide the reader with logical reasons for what will happen, in this passage Brod also tries “to piece [...] together” (*EII* 88) and to make sense of what she views through the “powerful telescope” (*EII* 87). She not only views details of Safran's life but also reads about “her [own] paper-thin future” (*EII* 89) in a chapter of “*The Book of Antecedents*” (*EII* 89). Since both passages make the reader aware of the story's apparent “artificiality

⁴⁵ Compare the point of a narrator's attempt to rectify himself in Busch 46-47.

⁴⁶ See the anti-illusionistic effects of explicit metafictional passages depending on their position within the text in Wolf, *Ästhetische Illusion* 239-242.

and constructedness” (Fludernik, *Narratology* 275)⁴⁷, we realize that not only the events concerning Jonathan’s grandfather are imagined and invented, but that the whole story about Trachimbrod, i.e. also Brod’s life and what has been related to us so far, is obviously the result of Jonathan’s imagination and never really happened in historically realistic terms. We are therefore caused to revise our initial interpretation of the source of Jonathan’s story.⁴⁸ Whereas until this point we probably have read the story as a kind of folkloristic tale which Jonathan has come across in the course of his trip and which he passes on to us, we now realize that “the apparent teller of the tale is its inventor and not a recorder of [historical] events” (Waugh 33). Jonathan’s unexpected and personal intrusion as an authorial narrator (see Waugh 132f.) in the second half of the novel therefore can be said to be a very effective way of exposing and making the reader aware of the unrealistic nature of his story as “the I’s [...] fantasies ... [and] textual inventions” (Fludernik, *Narratology* 278). The story about Trachimbrod thus turns out to be Jonathan’s attempt to imagine and reconstruct his family’s past with the help of old portraits and photographs (see Sicher, *Future* 70). They obviously are not only used as the basis or starting point for his imagined tale about his grandfather but are also meant to serve as a kind of realistic proof to make his story seem logical and plausible to us.⁴⁹ As will be shown in Chapter 2.2.1., Jonathan’s imagined story is not only based on these portraits and photographs as apparently realistic “representations of the past” (Hutcheon, *Politics* 87), but also, and more importantly, on other elements, i.e. “information about the past” (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 90) which Jonathan turns out to have found in the course of his trip.

2.2. Storyworlds

In addition to the anti-illusionistic techniques which have been analyzed so far, the novel contains a number of other elements and techniques which disrupt our illusion of the portrayed storyworlds, i.e. the “mentally and emotionally projected environments” (Herman 570). Unlike the explicit metafictional comments, which have been analyzed in Chapter 2.1.2., these techniques and elements implicitly draw the reader’s attention to and consequently expose the novel’s fictionality. They the-

⁴⁷ See also the definition of explicit metafiction in Wolf, *Ästhetische Illusion* 228; Waugh’s examples of explicit metafictional strategies in Waugh 21-22.

⁴⁸ See the concept of ‘primacy effect’ and ‘recency effect’ discussed in Zerweck, *Cognitive Turn* 222-223; the concept of ‘narrativization’ in Fludernik, *Narratology* 31-32, 34; storyworlds and the process of narrative comprehension in Herman 570.

⁴⁹ See the discussion of photography as transparent representation of reality and the past in Hutcheon, *Politics* 38-40, 87-88.

refore can be subsumed under the concept of 'implicit metafiction': "Von *impliziter* Metafiktion ist [...] auszugehen, wenn [...] indirekt, aus dem 'showing' bestimmter Vertextungsverfahren [...] geschlossen werden kann, daß Metafiktion vorliegt. Metafiktion wird in ihrer impliziten Spielart also nicht über eine verbale Thematisierung, sondern eine Inszenierung faßbar" (Wolf, *Ästhetische Illusion* 226)⁵⁰

2.2.1. The Present – the Past

Since "[w]e only have access to the past today through its traces – its documents, the testimony of witnesses, and other archival materials" (Hutcheon, *Politics* 55)⁵¹, Lista as a survivor of the Holocaust turns out to be a very important "linkage[...] to the past" (Behlman 61) which Jonathan is in search of during his trip through Ukraine. Her personal account of how the Jews of Trachimbrod were exterminated by the Nazis is deeply shocking and "makes the [...] reader a witness of events that have not been personally experienced" (Sicher, *Future* 68)⁵², especially because she is not interrupted by Alex, who translates for Jonathan only at the beginning and then stops, because Jonathan does not "want to hear any more" (*EII* 186). Whereas we certainly do not doubt what Lista tells us about this inconceivable "atrocities" (Eaglestone 130), her memories of the past are not unproblematic, because they are partly contradictory and thus cannot be wholly trusted (see Hutcheon, *Politics* 64-65). We realize in the course of her account that it could not be her sister whom the Nazi soldiers "shot [...] in her place" (*EII* 187), but that it was Lista herself, whose unborn baby was killed and who therefore survived the mass shooting. Alex tells us that she "had a very unusual walk ... [and that] [s]he could not move any faster than slow" (*EII* 146). Moreover, she does not give any explanation of how she herself was able to escape and clearly evades the questions of Alex's grandfather on this matter. Although she is such an old woman, she says that she has "a baby girl" (*EII* 182), whom she has to take care of, and asks Alex if "the war [is already] over" (*EII* 193). Since she lives all by herself in the house "most proximal to Trachimbrod" (*EII* 189), it can only be her who "promised herself to live there until she died" (*EII* 189) and who "secured all of the things" (*EII* 189) which she now stores in numerous boxes. Moreover, she remembers that her "brother held one of the chuppah poles" (*EII* 154) at Safran's wedding, but later on she clearly contradicts herself, pointing out that she "did not have a brother"

⁵⁰ See also the difference between 'overt' and 'covert narcissism' in Hutcheon, *Narrative* 7, 23.

⁵¹ See also Hutcheon, *Poetics* 97; Hutcheon, *Pastime* 67-68.

⁵² See also the point of unmediated experience of 'Oral History' in Simonis 425-426.

(*EII* 191). We therefore realize that we cannot really rely on and trust her memories. Since she is already very old, she obviously is confused and her memories are blurred. Lista therefore can be said to be “senile” (Feuer 33) rather than “intentionally forgetful” (Feuer 33), the latter of which seems quite unlikely, although she wants to talk to Alex’s grandfather alone, implying a possible secret she may not want to give away in public (see also Feuer 33). Due to her blurred memories the past of Jonathan’s grandfather turns out to be inaccessible, because it cannot be reconstructed in objective and reliable terms. Our attention is thus not only “draw[n] ... to the [...] the fluidity of memory” (Sicher, *Future* 81) but also “to the impossibility of any unmediated, wholly accurate access to the past” (Behlman 59-60).

Moreover and more importantly, both Alex’s and Jonathan’s story provide the reader with information about Jonathan’s grandfather and Lista, i.e. they “converge[...] in 1941, ... [at the time of] the Nazi invasion” (Gessen 68).⁵³ The problem, however, is that what Lista tells us about herself and Safran in Alex’s story cannot logically be related to what Jonathan tells us about Lista and his grandfather in the course of his story about the shtetl.⁵⁴ Following Lista’s account we find out that in March 1942, when the shtetl was destroyed, she not only had a husband, with whom she “had made a house” (*EII* 186), but moreover that she “was pregnant and had a big belly” (*EII* 186). Before this, however, Lista occurs in Jonathan’s story as one of Safran’s many “one-episode lover[s]” (*EII* 172) and as a “young widow” (*EII* 170), whom Safran made love to when he was ten years old, i.e. in the year 1934. Although it is not explicitly mentioned in either of the stories, it is possible for us to imagine that Lista’s husband at the time of the Nazi invasion maybe already was her second husband. This, however, seems more than unlikely, because Jonathan tells us that when Safran met Lista in 1934, she planned to “move back in with ... [her] mother” (*EII* 171), because the house she lived in “was supposed to be for when ... [she] was married” (*EII* 171). Moreover, we later on learn from Jonathan’s story that when Safran visited her shortly before his wedding, i.e. in June 1941, Lista indeed lived with her mother and thus obviously was not married. She herself, however, tells us that her sister’s, i.e. her own, “husband stood at the end of the line” (*EII* 186) when her family was shot by the Nazis in 1942.

⁵³ See also Feuer 33; *Luminous Talent* para 5.

⁵⁴ See the discussion incompatible story lines undermining a text’s coherence in Wolf, *Ästhetische Illusion* 320-325; a text’s narrative inconsistencies in Fludernik, *Narratology* 269-274.

The two stories, both relating back to past events concerning Safran and Lista, thus obviously do not “harmonize” (*EII* 192). As a consequence, the textual coherence of the novel is clearly undermined: “Kohärenzschwächung ist ein Zerfall der Geschichte in Teile, die *in sich* zwar stimmig, sinnzentriert und wahrscheinlich sein mögen, deren Zusammenhang *untereinander* aber durch markante Isersche Leerstellen im Dunkeln bleibt“ (Wolf, *Ästhetische Illusion* 320).⁵⁵

Since the reader does not get any additional information about how to resolve the contradictions and ambiguities, neither of the stories provides reliable answers to the following questions: Who was Augustine? How did she save Jonathan’s grandfather? Was Safran in love with her? How did he escape the Holocaust? How did his “wife and ... [his] baby” (*EII* 59) die during the war? Instead of receiving any answers, there are even more questions raised in the course of the novel, thus making the reader even more uncertain about what she/he is being told: Is the woman whom they find in the old house really Lista or is it possible that, “because ... [her eyes] were blue and resplendent” (*EII* 148), she might be “the Augustine from the picture” (*EII* 148), as Alex and Jonathan assume at the beginning? How far can we trust Lista’s memories? Did Safran really lose two babies as Lista points out? If yes, was the second baby also Zosha’s, or was Safran maybe really unfaithful to his wife as Jonathan tells us in his story?

Although we already know that Jonathan’s tale about his grandfather is invented, we nevertheless expect that the “textual contradictions [between the two stories] are finally [somehow] resolved” (Waugh 137) at the end of the novel. Yet since Jonathan’s imagined story cannot logically be linked up with what we get to know from Lista, the events related turn out to “resist resolution in terms of everyday logic” (Waugh 142). The reader’s “conventional expectations of meaning and closure” (Waugh 22) are thus frustrated and we do not gain any “final certainty” (Waugh 137) about Safran’s past.⁵⁶ Instead, the secret and traumatic past of Alex’s grandfather, which he obviously tries to hide throughout the trip, is unintentionally brought to the surface towards the end of the novel. The box which Jonathan received from Lista thus indeed turns out “to be a bomb” (*EII* 221-222), because it contains the photograph of Alex’s grandfather and Herschel (see Feuer 34). As a consequence, the reader’s attention is not only drawn to one of the

⁵⁵ See also the point of incoherent and incompatible story lines in Fludernik, *Narratology* 270.

⁵⁶ See also the discussion of totalizing narrative representation in Hutcheon, *Politics* 59-67.

novel's central thematic aspects, i.e. the questions of truth and guilt, which will be discussed in Chapter 2.4., but also to the novel's "foreground[ed] ... artificiality and constructedness" (Fludernik, *Narratology* 275): "Dem sinnsuchenden Leser bleibt [...] keine andere Wahl als der Sprung aus der Illusion in die Reflexion über die fragwürdige und eben unlösbare Kohärenz. Damit wird diese selbst zum Problem, die Geschichte aber [...] zum sichtlichen Vorwand [bzw. Mittel] seiner Thematisierung" (Wolf, *Ästhetische Illusion* 322)⁵⁷.

In addition to realizing why Jonathan imagines his story, i.e. because he was not able to find any reliable information about his grandfather's past, we are made aware of and find out how Jonathan reconstructs the past in his fantasy. As has already been pointed out in Chapter 2.1.2.2, Jonathan's imagined tale is not only based on old family portraits and photographs, but also on other remains, which he obviously found in the course of his trip (see Feuer 39). Again, "[t]he scene[...] at the restaurant" (Feuer 29) and the box which Jonathan received from Lista are important in this respect, because they not only remind the reader of Lista "mov[ing] her hands through the things in the box, like the things were water" (*EII* 152), but also of the first chapter in Jonathan's story. When Alex tells us that "Grandfather [...] moved his hand through the box [...] like a child reaching into a box of gifts" (*EII* 222), and that they "were similar to three children" (*EII* 224), the reader's attention is drawn to the initial scene of Jonathan's first chapter when "[t]he slightly younger and less cautious twin raked her fingers through the water and each time came up with something new" (*EII* 9). The reader realizes that the items found in "the box marked IN CASE" (*EII* 8) in Alex's story obviously resemble "the rising life-debris" (*EII* 8) floating on the river's surface. The old pearl necklace which Alex's grandfather fishes out of the box and the "MAP OF THE WORLD, 1791" (*EII* 223), which Alex finds, remind us of the "unstrung pearls" (*EII* 11) and the "faded map of the universe" (*EII* 9) at the beginning of Jonathan's story. Even more importantly, "*The Book of Past Occurrences*" (*EII* 224), which Jonathan takes out of the box, contains a passage about a shtetl which was "colorful with the actions of its residents" (*EII* 224), which clearly resembles the entry entitled "THE TIME OF DYED HANDS" (*EII* 199-200) contained in '*The Book of Antecedents*' written by the Uprighters (see also Chapter 2.2.3.) (see Feuer 39).

⁵⁷ See also Hutcheon's discussion of 'covertly narcissistic texts' in Hutcheon, *Narrative* 139.

Towards the end of the novel Jonathan's imagined story thus turns out to be partly reconstructed from the remains of Trachimbrod which Lista keeps in the boxes in her house. These remains are "[o]bjets trouvés ... [, i.e.] bits and pieces of undigested [past] 'real life' [which] appear to float into the fictional frame" (Waugh 143)⁵⁸. In the case of Jonathan's story, these remains of the unknown past found during the trip literally float into his storyworld as the "curious flotsam rising to the surface" (*EII* 8) of the river at the beginning of his first chapter. They not only consist of the things contained in the box which Jonathan received from Lista, but also of other remains of Trachimbrod which Lista keeps in her house and which Jonathan obviously wrote down, as Alex points out: "If I had been a smart person, I would have recorded all of the names [on the boxes] on a piece of paper, as the hero did in his diary" (*EII* 147). When writing and imagining his story about the shtetl of his ancestors after his return back home, Jonathan obviously remembers these boxes and integrates their content as the "the rising life-debris" (*EII* 8) at the beginning of his story. Thus, for example, the "PINWHEELS" (*EII* 147), "SPOOLS / CANDLES" (*EII* 47) and "HAND MIRRORS" (*EII* 150) contained in Lista's boxes in Alex's story all rise from "the bottom of the Brod River" (*EII* 8) in Jonathan's story. Other items contained in these boxes appear as partly transformed, mixed or the result of what Jonathan seems to associate with them in his fantasy, as for example the content of the box named "MENORAHS / INK / KEYS" (*EII* 149) and "FIGURINES / SPECTACLES" (*EII* 147) is transformed into the "splintered chandelier crystal" (*EII* 11), "the bleeding red-ink script of a resolution" (*EII* 8), the "skeleton key" (*EII* 8), "the hands of a baby doll" (*EII* 8) and the "schmootzy pince-nez" (*EII* 8). Other contents are obviously integrated not as tangible objects but reappear as elements of the plot of his story about the shtetl, as for instance the labels "WEDDINGS AND OTHER CELEBRATIONS" (*EII* 147), "DEATH OF THE FIRST-BORN" (*EII* 147) and "WATER INTO BLOOD" (*EII* 150), all of which are transformed into events in the course of Safran's imagined life related to us by Jonathan: Safran gets married and his first child, a baby girl, is not only born in the Brod River, thus "turning the waters [...] red" (*EII* 273), but also dies in the river during the bombing of Trachimbrod in March 1942.

Like "the women of the shtetl" (*EII* 20), who could view Brod only through "an egg-sized hole ... [in] the synagogue's back wall" (*EII* 20) and who therefore "had to piece together mental collages of her from each of the fragmented views" (*EII* 20),

⁵⁸ See also the definition and discussion of 'montage/collage' in Voigts-Virchow 472-473.

Jonathan's story is imagined and pieced together from the remains of the past, because it cannot be reconstructed otherwise. By "transforming 'found' materials [and] by incorporating them in" (Baldick 42) his imagined story Jonathan creates a collage-like storyworld of the shtetl and his family ancestors.⁵⁹ In addition to the transformed list of the boxes' contents⁶⁰, the past of Trachimbrod turns out to be reconstructed from other information about Safran which Jonathan found during his trip. Having learned from Lista that after the shtetl had been destroyed by the Nazis, she "saw ... [Safran] ... maybe a year later, maybe two" (*EII* 190) and that she "gave him a bath" (*EII* 190), Jonathan tells us that "Lista held a special place in ... [Safran's] memory [...] as being the only partner to inspire him to bathe" (*EII* 172). Similarly, Lista remembers that when Safran returned to Trachimbrod after "the Nazi raid" (*EII* 59) they "talked about Shakespeare ..., a play ... [he] once gave ... [her] to read" (*EII* 190) and that they "had a fight about Ophelia" (*EII* 190). This is reflected in Jonathan's story not only in the character of the Kolker, who hasn't "heard of Shakespeare, but [to whom] Hamlet sound[s] familiar" (*EII* 123), but also, and more importantly, in the story about Safran, who visits Lista shortly before his wedding and gives her "the book [...] *Hamlet*, [...] that he ... [has] taken from the shelf to have something to hold" (*EII* 238). Another interesting transformation concerns the number of Safran's children and Lista, who points out that Safran "lost [...] two babies [...] in the war" (*EII* 153). Although Alex does not translate this for Jonathan, the latter obviously seems to have understood what Lista told them, because in his own story about his family's past both Yankel and Brod lose two of their children as well (see *EII* 44, 210). Moreover, the story about his ancestors turns out to reflect aspects of Jonathan himself as well as his family. Thus, for example, Brod – like Jonathan – is a vegetarian, and her eyes – like Jonathan's grandmother's eyes – are "mismatched ..., [o]ne blue, one brown" (*EII* 48). Similarly, the "terrible varicose veins" (*EII* 157) of Jonathan's grandmother and "the smell of ... [his] secret hiding place" (*EII* 158) underneath his grandmother's dress are transformed and integrated in his story about Safran and the old widows whom he makes love to (see *EII* 166-168, 194). Furthermore, Jonathan's story also contains and reflects elements of what Alex in turn tells us about his family. Thus, for example, in his second chapter Alex writes about his aggressive and authoritarian father, who "removed three pieces of ice from the refrigerator, closed the refrigerator, and punched [Alex]" (*EII* 29). Although at this point Alex refers to something

⁵⁹ See also the discussion of collage in Waugh 143-145; *Collage*.

⁶⁰ See the reference to lists, family history and evidence of truth in Mullan 266-269.

that he experienced before he met Jonathan, the latter after having read Alex's second chapter obviously incorporates and transforms this episode in his own story about Brod and the Kolker, who also have a row and use "a small block of ice" (EII 133) to soothe Kolker's bruised eye. The most important transformation, however, concerns the secret and traumatic past of Alex's grandfather. Although the reader finds out about what happened to him only towards the end of the novel, i.e. in Alex's last chapter, the events are indirectly foreshadowed in the course of Jonathan's story. In addition to the various secrets of some of the shtetl's members, especially Yankel's and Brod's secrets, which Jonathan writes about already in his second chapter, Jonathan tells us about his grandfather Safran and asks: "How guilty could he be, really, when he never had any real choice? [...] Could he have been good?" (EII 165). Moreover, Safran shares a secret love and friendship with the Gypsy girl, whom the members of the Jewish community regard as socially inferior. Before the Gypsy girl commits suicide, Safran at his "wedding reception" (EII 253) holds her "caramel hand" (EII 254) and "squeeze[s] ... [her] fingers, as if to say, *It's not too late. There is still time. We could run, leave everything behind, never look back, save ourselves*" (EII 254). Shortly before this, Alex's grandfather, before holding Herschel's hand, thinks of his best friend: "Herschel must escape how can he escape he must run now run into the darkness" (EII 248).

Since Jonathan in his fantasy can thus be said to playfully "rearrange fragments continually in new and different patterns or configurations" (Deleuze and Guattari qtd. in Lucy 196)⁶¹, only some of which are mentioned above, the shtetl-world turns out to be "a kaleidoscopic display" (Waugh 139) of transformed material, i.e. the relics of the past (see Peters 482) found in the course of his trip, as well as Jonathan's personal experience: "The shtetl can only be reconstructed, and that only in the light of what 'Jonathan [...]' knows" (Eaglestone 130). As personalized narrators of their stories, both Alex and Jonathan can thus be said to relate back to their experience, which "is [...] stored as emotionally charged remembrance, and [...] is reproduced in narrative form" (Fludernik, *Narratology* 29). Unlike Alex's story, which evokes a world "identical to the interlocutor's shared environment" (Fludernik, *Narratology* 37), Jonathan's experience and memory of the trip occurs as transformed and as "an invented fictional fantasy" (Fludernik, *Narratology* 37) of his an-

⁶¹ See also the concept of 'bricolage' in Britton 58-59; Kuester 73-74; Waugh's discussion of the 'metafictional collage' in Waugh 143-145; Hutcheon, *Postmodern Parody* 223.

cestors, which the reader is likely to recognize as such only towards the end of the novel, i.e. probably after having read Alex's seventh chapter.

2.2.2. 'Reality' – Fantasy

The search for Trachimbrod and Augustine depicted in Alex's story clearly is set in a contemporary and realistic environment. The Ukrainian cities mentioned, i.e. Odessa, Lvov and Lutsk, all refer to real places outside the fictional world and the country's economic and social situation after its independence in 1991 can be said to be realistically portrayed in the novel.⁶² Moreover, the shtetl of Trachimbrod refers to a "real-life town, [i.e.] Trochenbrod, ... [which] was located in what is today northwestern Ukraine, not far from the city of Lutsk, in the province of Volhyn" (Bendavid-Val para 2) (see also Chapter 1.). Its "Russian name was "Sofiyovka"" (Bendavid-Val para 4) and, as Alex and Jonathan find out in the course of their trip, "[i]n [...] 1942 the Nazis and their helpers murdered the people of Trochenbrod-Sofiyovka ... [and] all traces of the town [...] were erased" (Bendavid-Val para 6)⁶³.

In contrast to the "basically realistic context" (Waugh 43) of Alex's story, Jonathan's imagined story about his ancestors contains numerous "fantastic [and unrealistic] elements" (Faris 281). Already at the very beginning of the first chapter we read about Trachim's mysterious accident and about Brod surfacing from the river as a baby, "still mucus-glazed" (*EII* 13). Furthermore, the shtetl's synagogue, which has wheels so that it can be "lifted and moved" (*EII* 10) according to "the ratio of sacred to secular" (*EII* 10), the Kolker's "tragic flour mill accident" (*EII* 120) due to which his head is divided by the saw "blade ... [, which] embed[s] itself, perfectly vertical, in the middle of his skull (*EII* 125) and his ensuing "malicious eruptions" (*EII* 127) are certainly fantastic (see Feuer 39-40). Similarly, Safran's "132 mistresses" (*EII* 168) and many love affairs cannot really be said to correspond to our "'real world' experience" (Fludernik, *History* 95). Since we do not get any "narratorial hint of ... [the] impossibility or absurdity" (Waugh 43) of these obviously fantastic occurrences, only some of which can be mentioned, Jonathan as "the narrator ... [obviously] has 'two voices'. Sometimes he [...] depicts events from a

⁶² See a text's hetero- and auto-referential elements in Zerweck, *Synthese* 56-64; Fludernik's discussion of realism in Fludernik, *Einführung* 66-69; Fludernik, *Narratology* 35-37.

⁶³ See also interviews with the author in Mackenzie para 17; *Interview with JS Foer* para 18; Hernandez para 2, 20-23.

rational point of view (the 'realist' component) and sometimes from that of a believer in magic (the 'magical' element)" (Spindler 80)⁶⁴.

As has already been pointed out in Chapter 2.1.2.2., our illusion of the shtetl-world, however, is not so much undermined by the fantastic elements within Jonathan's family history,⁶⁵ but by a number of other elements and techniques, which will be discussed in the following (see also Chapter 2.2.3.). Whether we read the story as a legendary folk tale which Jonathan has come across in the course of his trip or as the product of his fantasy, "the imaginative leap into ... [Alex's and Jonathan's story] world[s] of time and space must be made in both cases" (Hutcheon, *Narrative* 78). What is foregrounded by the magical realist style in his story about his ancestors is the traumatic break between the 'realistic' present depicted in Alex's story and the past of the Jewish community before the Nazi invasion.⁶⁶ Our attention is thus once again drawn to the fact that "the return to the past is impossible ... [and] the places where Jews lived no longer exist except in fantasy" (Sicher, *Novel* 174).⁶⁷

The first event depicted in Jonathan's "invented cosmos [...] of [the shtetl]" (Hutcheon, *Narrative* 78) is the mysterious accident of Trachim and the birth of Jonathan's "great-great-great-great-great-grandmother" (*EII* 16), who surfaces from the river. The important point about this enigmatic incidence is that the community of the shtetl remembers it "for the next one hundred fifty years" (*EII* 14) at the "annual Trachimday festival" (*EII* 91) (see also Eaglestone 129). This way the events of March 18, 1791 are passed on to the following generations, i.e. they are turned into the "legend of Trachim" (*EII* 256) and thus clearly mythologized.⁶⁸ Similarly, the Kolker's accident is commemorated by the shtetl community by turning his body into a "statue ... [which not only becomes] a symbol of luck's power" (*EII* 139) but as such also part "of the sacred ritual ... [performed] by every married man in Trachimbrod" (*EII* 120). Yet the continuity of both Jonathan's family and the shtetl

⁶⁴ For the concept of 'magic realism' see also Sim 310-311; Marshall 179-181; the discussion of fantasy literature in Hutcheon, *Narrative* 76-82; Ribbat 214; Eaglestone 129; Varvogli 94; Mullan 117-118.

⁶⁵ Compare the specific genre conventions as large-scale cognitive frames in Fludernik, *Narratology* 44; Wolf's point of 'Gattungskontext' in Wolf, *Ästhetische Illusion* 344-345.

⁶⁶ See also Behlman 58-61; Lawson para 8; Marshall 179-181; Mullan 118-119; Mendelsohn para 5; *Interview with JS Foer* para 20-21.

⁶⁷ See also Eaglestone 130.

⁶⁸ See the concept of 'Ursprungs- oder Schöpfungsmythos' in Dücker 613-615; Feuer 37; Mangold para 7.

community, which is emphasized by these rituals, is traumatically disrupted and completely destroyed on “March 18, 1942” (*EII* 267). Shortly before the bombing of Trachimbrod is depicted in the last chapter, the reader’s attention is explicitly drawn to the first chapter of Jonathan’s story, i.e. “Brod’s curious birth” (*EII* 270), by the partly almost verbatim repetition of Jonathan’s comment in his first chapter about “[t]he prehistoric ant in Yankel’s ring, which [...] hid its head between its many legs, in shame” (*EII* 13). Moreover, the first and the last chapter of his story are both entitled “THE BEGINNING OF THE WORLD OFTEN COMES” (*EII* 8, 267). We therefore realize that the end of Jonathan’s family history clearly resembles its beginning and consequently also become aware of the story’s undermined teleology, i.e. its progressive development is obviously thwarted by a circular structure.⁶⁹ Like the mysterious and imagined beginning of Jonathan’s family history is “commemorat[ed]” (*EII* 268) in a “plaque” (*EII* 93, 268), “the monument for Trachimbrod” (*EII* 189) reminds us of the story’s end (see Eaglestone 129). Similarly, the continuous remodeling of the Kolker’s statue reflects another important aspect of Jonathan’s story, namely its inverted causality: “[T]he craftsmen modeled the Dial’s face after the faces of his male descendants – reverse heredity. (So when my grandfather thought he saw that he was growing to look like his great-great-grandfather, what he really saw was that his great-great-great-grandfather was growing to look like him [...])” (*EII* 140).

Like Safran, we, too, realize – although only retrospectively towards the end of the novel – that in Jonathan’s story the “temporal direction of causation obviously is reversed” (Richardson 49).⁷⁰ The end of his story can thus be said to be more or less already fixed, because, as Alex and Jonathan found out during their trip, the shtetl was completely destroyed and its inhabitants were murdered by the Nazis.⁷¹ Consequently, Jonathan reconstructing the shtetl-world can be said to know its end before imagining its beginning, and he therefore obviously models the story’s beginning upon its end. He tells us that “it’s relatively easy to reason how a life could be lost in a river, but for one to arise from it?” (*EII* 16). Although we get to read this comment already in his second chapter in connection with Brod’s birth, we can really make sense of it only at the end, i.e. when we read his last chapter.

⁶⁹ See the concept of teleology and postmodern fiction in Szegedy-Maszák 273-277; teleological significance in both history and fiction in Fludernik, *History and Metafiction* 89; Wolf’s discussion of the formal concept of teleology in Wolf, *Ästhetische Illusion* 337-340.

⁷⁰ See the disruption of the formal concepts of causality and teleology in Wolf, *Ästhetische Illusion* 337-338; Fludernik’s reference to Wolf in Fludernik, *Narratology* 273-274.

⁷¹ See the discussion of Holocaust fiction in Behlman 57; Eaglestone 131.

Yet despite the story's circular structure and its inversed causality, our illusion of Jonathan's fantastic shtetl as a "consistent fictional world" (Fludernik, *Narratology* 36) is not really undermined, since we become aware of these aspects only towards the end of the novel.

Our illusion of Jonathan's imagined family history and the shtetl-world, however, is partly disrupted by incompatible time spans.⁷² Thus, the number of years between Safran's first encounter of Lista and the Gypsy girl and his marriage in June 1941 turns out to be contradictory. In his twelfth chapter, "THE THICKNESS OF BLOOD AND DRAMA, 1934" (*EII* 169), Jonathan tells us what happened to his grandfather in the year 1934, and the Gypsy girl occurs as the third of the numerous women whom Safran makes love to. As we read on, we learn in his fourteenth chapter that "[t]he final time ... [Safran and the Gypsy girl] made love, [was] seven months before ... [the Gypsy girl] killed herself and ... [Safran] married" (*EII* 229), i.e. this last encounter must have taken place before November 18, 1940, since Safran got married on "June 18, 1941" (*EII* 163). Thus Safran and the Gypsy girl would have made love for six years, i.e. from 1934 until 1940. Shortly after this, however, Jonathan tells us that his "grandfather and the Gypsy girl made love for seven years" (*EII* 231 [emphasis added]). Whereas this difference of one year or seven months does not really confuse the reader, Jonathan's fourteenth chapter contains another "chronological disruption" (Fludernik, *Narratology* 273), which certainly is much more obvious and therefore also more disturbing for the reader. In this chapter Jonathan tells us that seven months before Safran's wedding, his grandfather and the Gypsy girl not only "wanted badly to go back seven years to their first encounter, at the theater" (*EII* 236 [emphasis added]), but also that when Safran visited Lista at that time, she "looked so much older than she had only three years before, at the theater" (*EII* 237 [emphasis added]). Since, however, we have already been told that Safran and Lista met in the theater only once, i.e. in 1934, and that this encounter had taken place before Safran met the Gypsy girl, Jonathan at this point of his story clearly contradicts himself. As a consequence, the time relations of the related events cannot be trusted and the story's coherent chronology "cannot be recuperated" (Fludernik, *Narratology* 270). Our illusion is thus clearly "disrupt[ed]" (Fludernik *Narratology* 270) at his point of Jonathan's story.

⁷² See the story elements logically contradicting the represented time and space in Wolf, *Ästhetische Illusion* 338-339, 347; Fludernik's reference to Wolf in Fludernik, *Narratology*, 273-274.

Similarly, the written records about the number of “GENERATIONS BETWEEN BROD AND SAFRAN” (EII 210) in ‘*The Book of Antecedents*’ turn out to be contradictory to what Jonathan tells us about his ancestors. If Brod’s husband, the Kolker, was Safran’s “great-great-great-grandfather” (EII 140), and thus Brod was Jonathan’s great-great-great-great-great-grandmother (EII 16), as Jonathan tells us in the course of his story, then there can only be four generations between Brod and Safran and not “FIVE GENERATIONS” (EII 210) as recorded in ‘*The Book of Antecedents*’. Or, vice versa, if we trust the written record as the more reliable source of information, then the Kolker has to be Safran’s great-great-great-great-grandfather and Brod has to be Jonathan’s great-great-great-great-great-great-grandmother. Since the generations between Brod and Safran are only mentioned once in ‘*The Book of Antecedents*’ and are not explicitly depicted in Jonathan’s story, which only tells us about Brod’s and Safran’s life, this difference of one generation can easily be overlooked by the reader. Moreover, Jonathan obviously again transforms his experience of the trip within his own story. Since Alex’s history books differ a great deal from what Jonathan knows about the Holocaust (see Chapter 2.1.2.1.), at this point “the novel [can be said to] play[...] upon the truth [...] of the historical record ... [, and the reader is made aware of] the possible mnemonic failures of recorded history and the [...] potential for both deliberate and inadvertent error” (Hutcheon, *Pastime* 63)⁷³.

As has already been mentioned above, these elements are more disturbing for the reader than the story’s unrealistic events or its circular structure. Whereas the latter can be said to foreground the fantastic nature of Jonathan’s imagined shtetl-world and thus “can [...] be recuperated” (Fludernik, *Narratology* 36) by the reader, the incompatible time spans – like the novel’s incoherent story lines, which have been analyzed in the last chapter, – clearly disrupt our illusion of a coherent story-world.

2.2.3. ‘Mises-en-abyme’ and ‘Texts-within-texts’

Both Alex and Jonathan’s stories contain excerpts and parts of various embedded texts or books which partly undermine our illusion of the storyworlds portrayed and which will be analyzed in the following. The dramatized version of Trachim’s mysterious accident, i.e. the performance in “the shtetl theater” (EII 170) in Jonathan’s

⁷³ See also the discussion of historiography in Hutcheon, *Politics* 64-67; Marshall 170.

twelfth chapter clearly mirrors the beginning of his first chapter and therefore constitutes a typical instance of 'mise-en-abyme':

Mise en abyme [...] bezeichnet eine Form [...] literar. Rekursivität bzw. Ähnlichkeit und damit Selbstreferenz, die sich in einem isolierbaren Segment auf einer ontologisch oder textlogisch untergeordneten Ebene eines Textes [...] manifestiert, so daß auf dieser mindestens ein [...] signifikantes Element (inhaltlicher oder formaler Natur) einer übergeordneten Ebene ›gespiegelt‹ erscheint. (Wolf, *Mise en abyme* 461)

Whereas the play itself can be said to be another way of commemorating this important event, the unusual aspect of this passage is the conversation between Safran and the Gypsy girl watching the play in the theater, which is presented as if it was part of the play itself, i.e. as if they both were characters acting on stage. Similarly, Jonathan's authorial voice as the narrator relating to us what happens between Safran and the Gypsy girl during the performance is turned into stage directions. The difference between "the level of the primary, diegetic world" (McHale 124) of the shtetl and the "inferior [...] level" (McHale 125) of the embedded play is thus no longer clearly maintained and the two levels seem to merge at this point.⁷⁴

As has already been mentioned in Chapter 2.1.2.2., Brod reads about her own future, i.e. her "FIRST RAPE ... [on] the thirteenth Trachimday festival, March 18, 1804" (EII 89), in '*The Book of Antecedents*'. Yet since she is not able to read the whole entry, and since Jonathan in his ensuing eighth chapter telling us about exactly this day only mentions that Brod "ignored ... [the men of the shtetl] even when they made a woman out of her" (EII 96), we get to read what really happened to Brod on March 18, 1804, only when Safran reads about this incident in '*The Book of Antecedents*' in Jonathan's thirteenth chapter. What strikes the reader at this point, however, is that this entry about "THE FIRST RAPE OF BROD D" (EII 203) contains a verbatim repetition, i.e. another 'mise-en-abyme', of a passage of Jonathan's eighth chapter about Yankel's death and the first encounter between Brod and the Kolker (see EII 205, 98). Our illusion is thus undermined, because we get the impression that the embedded entry in '*The Book of Antecedents*' cannot really have been written and recorded by the Uprighters but by Jonathan himself.⁷⁵ Furthermore, the passage about the colorful shtetl contained in '*The Book of Past Occur-*

⁷⁴ See the metalepses between the intra- and hypodiegetic level analyzed in Wolf, *Ästhetische Illusion* 364-366, 401-402.

⁷⁵ See 'mise-en-abyme' and its anti-illusionistic effect in Wolf, *Ästhetische Illusion* 305.

rences', which Jonathan finds in Lista's box, mirrors the entry in '*The Book of Antecedents*' entitled "THE TIME OF DYED HANDS" (EII 199-200). As has already been pointed out in Chapter 2.2.1., the striking similarity between these two book entries not only puzzles the reader but also undermines our illusion of the shtetl-world, because our attention is drawn to the way how Jonathan in his fantasy invents his story about his ancestors. Moreover, '*The Book of Past Occurrences*' clearly mirrors and thus reminds the reader of the layout of the novel itself.⁷⁶ Like the book-within-the-book, the novel's paperback edition has "[t]he writing [...] on both covers, and [...] also on the insides of both covers" (EII 224).

In addition to '*The Book of Antecedents*', Jonathan's story embeds various entries of another book, i.e. '*The Book of Recurrent Dreams*' containing the dreams of the Slouchers. The title of this book clearly reminds the reader of Alex's grandfather, whom Alex regularly awakes from dreams about his late wife Anna, and thus can be said to be another instance of Jonathan's transformed experience and memory of his trip. Moreover, the very end of Jonathan's story, i.e. how Zosha and the baby girl die in the river and how Safran survives the bombing, is presented as a dream recorded in this book.⁷⁷ Jonathan at this point clearly draws the reader's attention to the beginning of his story. Before we get to read the dream, he tells us that "one of ... [the book's] pages fell out [...] and descended, coming to rest like a veil on a child's burnt face" (EII 272), just like in his first chapter a "star chart sank to the river's bottom, coming to rest, like a veil, on the horse's face" (EII 10). The story's circular structure is thus once again underlined. Moreover, Jonathan's authorial voice vanishes and is replaced by the prophetic voice of Brod, who dreams about being the River Brod: "**9.613** – *The dream of the end of the world.* [...] my safran picked up his wife and carried her like a newlywed into the water [...] hundreds of bodies poured into the brod *that river with my name* I embraced them with open arms come to me come I wanted to save them all" (EII 272 [emphasis added except for the first sentence]).

As a result, the lower level of "th[is] [embedded] episode [, which] is dream-like, but not so dream-like that it couldn't pass for real" (McHale 116), seems to merge with the higher level of the shtetl-world's reality.⁷⁸ Since we do not get any narratorial

⁷⁶ See the paperback edition published by Penguin Books in 2003.

⁷⁷ See Feuer 43; Mullan 119; *Luminous Talent* para 7.

⁷⁸ See the metalepses between the intra- and hypodiegetic level analyzed in Wolf, *Ästhetische Illusion* 364-366.

explanations or comments from Jonathan, we are to assume that Brod's recorded dream obviously has turned into reality reflecting what happened to Safran and his family during the bombing of Trachimbrod.⁷⁹ Although these obvious "ontological instabilities" (McHale 211) between the primary level of the shtetl-world and "the 'unreal', hypodiegetic worlds" (McHale 117) of the theater performance and the books written by the members of the shtetl undermine the reader's illusion, they can be said to basically foreground the fantastic nature of Jonathan's invented family history. As will be shown in the following, the "play[...] with narrative levels" (Fludernik, *Narratology* 275) in Alex's story has an even stronger disrupting effect on his seemingly realistically portrayed storyworld.

Jonathan, who "desires to write a book about his grandfather's village" (*EII* 6), keeps a diary and takes notes during his trip. At the beginning of Grandfather's account about how the Nazis invaded Kolki and how he murdered his best friend Herschel Alex thus remarks: "I told all of this to Jonathan as Grandfather told it to me, and he wrote all of it in his diary. *He wrote*: [...]" (*EII* 243 [emphasis added]). As Alex explicitly points out, we obviously get to read the ensuing account as an entry in Jonathan's diary, which Alex must have read. What strikes us at this point, however, is that shortly after this, it is again Alex who clearly appears as the writer and narrator of this passage, telling us what happened on the evening at the restaurant and, like in the rest of his story, regularly addresses Jonathan, to whom he sends his chapters. Unlike the excerpt from Jonathan's diary contained in Alex's fifth chapter (see *EII* 160), this passage or entry is not explicitly marked as such. The transition from the level of Jonathan's diary entry to the higher level of Alex's story therefore remains unclear and blurred. Yet since Alex's comment occurs at the beginning of his chapter, the reader is likely to pass over it as he reads on and is drawn into the related scene in the restaurant, especially because the events are quite suspenseful, and we finally want to find out what happened to Herschel and Alex's grandfather.⁸⁰

In contrast to this ambiguous beginning of Alex's last chapter already briefly indicating a possible fusion of the diegetic levels within his story (see Waugh 47), our illusion of a seemingly realistically portrayed storyworld is finally wholly undermined at the very end of the novel, i.e. when we get to read the letter of his grand-

⁷⁹ See the concepts of 'frame-breaking' and 'texts within texts' in Waugh 31.

⁸⁰ Compare anti-illusionistic effects depending on their occurrence within the text in Wolf, *Ästhetische Illusion* 240-241.

father. At this very late point, Jonathan's diary entry about the row between Alex and his father, which has already been mentioned above, retrospectively turns out to be a verbatim 'mise-en-abyme' of a passage contained in this letter (see *EII* 160, 274). This passage thus constitutes an impossible and metaleptic transgression between the recurrent level of the frame, i.e. the letters written after the trip, and the lower level of Jonathan's embedded diary entry.⁸¹ Since Jonathan writing in his diary at the time of the trip can impossibly foresee what will happen to Alex and his family after the trip, "[t]he level of the fictional world and the ontological level occupied by the author as maker of the fictional world collapse together; the result is something like a short-circuit of the ontological structure" (McHale 213).

As a consequence, Jonathan at this point again is revealed as the fictionalized double of the real author outside the fictional world (see Chapter 2.1.2.1)⁸², who "prematurely reveal[s] the ends of [his] characters in [a] flashforward[...]" (Waugh 120), i.e. in his diary entry, which Alex reads while waiting outside Lista's house. Unlike Alex's metaleptic addresses of the real author, which have been discussed in Chapter 2.1.2.1, by means of which he deliberately tries to influence his own fate, the reader realizes retrospectively that Alex in his fifth chapter reads about his own future, which already seems to have been irreversibly fixed by the author: "Der Ich-Erzähler wird mit seiner eigenen Fiktionalisierung ... [im] Text konfrontiert" (Wolf, *Ästhetische Illusion* 369).

He told his father that he could care for Mother and Little Igor. It took his saying it to make it true. Finally, he was ready. His father could not believe this thing. What? He asked. What? And Sasha told him [...] that he would understand if his father had to leave and never return, and that it would not even make him less of a father. He told his father that he would forgive. Oh, his father became so angry, so full of wrath, and he told Sasha that he would kill him, and Sasha told his father that he would kill him, and they moved at each other with violence and his father said, Say it to my face, not to the floor, and Sasha said, You are not my father. (*EII* 160, 274)

Like Brod's future is anticipated in '*The Book of Antecedents*', Alex's future as a fictional character is foreshadowed in Jonathan's diary. Yet whereas the first instance draws the reader's attention to Jonathan as the writer of his imagined family history, the passage in Jonathan's diary "cannot be recuperated" (Fludernik, *Narra-*

⁸¹ See the metalepses between the intra- and hypodiegetic level analyzed in Wolf, *Ästhetische Illusion* 364-366; the discussion of Jonathan's diary entry in Feuer 44.

⁸² Compare the contamination of ontological boundaries between reality and fiction analyzed in Wolf, *Ästhetische Illusion* 349-356.

tology 270) by the reader and therefore clearly disrupts our illusion of an autonomous reality portrayed in Alex's story.⁸³ Compared to the previously discussed "ontological instabilities" (McHale 211) within Jonathan's story, which implicitly draw our attention to Jonathan as a writer who transforms his experience and invents his fantastic family history, this 'mise-en-abyme' can be said to be the novel's most anti-illusionistic instance: "Das gespiegelte Mikroelement avanciert [...] zum unwahrscheinlichen Determinator der Makrogeschichte und läßt hinter ihr – mit entsprechend illusionsstörendem Effekt für die gesamte Geschichte – den fingerenden Autor indirekt zum Vorschein kommen" (Wolf, *Ästhetische Illusion* 298).

It not only undermines the seemingly realistic context of Alex's story about the search for Augustine and Trachimbrod but, even more importantly, also the higher ontological reality of the letters written after the trip, which "implicitly authenticate ... [Alex's] embedded stor[y]" (Wolf, *Framing Borders* 191). As a consequence, the reader becomes aware of "the notion that ... [both Alex's and Jonathan's] fictional world[s] ... [are] created by ... [the] real author" (Waugh 57) outside the fictional world, for whom – as Alex points out in one of his letters – "it [obviously] is an interesting thing [...] to imagine worlds that are not exactly like this one, or worlds that are exactly like this one" (*EII* 145).⁸⁴ Compared to the various explicit metafictional comments referring to both Alex and Jonathan as writers of their stories (see Chapter 2.1.2.), the implicit metafictional techniques analyzed in Chapter 2.2. can thus be said to be much more anti-illusionistic:

Charakteristisch für Illusionsstörungen durch implizite Metafiktion ist ihr scheinbares Entstehen aus der Geschichte selbst heraus. Sie müssen nicht – wie explizite Metafiktion – notwendig auf eine innerfiktionale Instanz rückführbar sein. [...] Damit ist ... [implizite Metafiktion] als die potentiell radikalere Form der Illusionsstörung anzusehen. (Wolf, *Ästhetische Illusion* 235)⁸⁵

Moreover, these techniques can be said to further complicate the reading process, since we not only have to piece together the various parts of Alex and Jonathan's story but also have to try to make sense of the various inconsistencies, which have been analyzed above (see Wolf, *Ästhetische Illusion* 229). Whereas some of these disturbing elements "can [...] be recuperated" (Fludernik, *Narratology* 36) by the

⁸³ See the discussion of 'mise en abyme' and its anti-illusionistic effects in Wolf, *Ästhetische Illusion* 305.

⁸⁴ See Wolf's discussion of 'mise en abyme' and the author behind the text in Wolf, *Ästhetische Illusion* 293-305.

⁸⁵ See also the concept of 'overt' and 'covert metafiction' in Hutcheon, *Narrative* 154.

reader, others cannot, as I have tried to show, and therefore clearly disrupt our illusion of the portrayed storyworlds.

2.3. Language and Style

2.3.1. Metaphors

In addition to the metaleptic fusion of different diegetic levels within the novel, the use of metaphors “which develop into realities within the fictional world” (McHale 134) is another device to foreground the real author outside the fictional world.⁸⁶ As has already been pointed out, not only Alex and Jonathan are depicted as writers, but within Jonathan’s story, the life of the shtetl community is recorded in ‘*The Book of Antecedents*’, “which began as a record of major events, ... [but] became more detailed ... [and] was continually updated ... [thus] becoming more like life” (EII 196). Apart from the use of this “traditional metaphor of the world as a book” (Waugh 2), the author especially uses metaphors for memory (see Pethes 196-199), which appear as literalized within the novel. As has already been mentioned in the last chapter, Alex’s Grandfather, who sleeps in the car obviously dreaming about his late wife Anna, regularly has to be woken up by Alex. The grandfather’s sleep and his consequent awakening can be said to be “realization[s] of metaphor[s]” (McHale 134) for forgetting and remembering.⁸⁷ Similarly, Jonathan’s scar “from a dog bite” (EII 35), which “looks like two intersecting lines” (EII 35) is a literalized metaphor for memory. Moreover, it implicitly describes the two novels written by Alex and Jonathan and “their development toward each other” (*Interview with JS Foer* para 21), which has already been pointed out in Chapter 2.2.1. Even more importantly, the “canopies of thin white string” (EII 92, 267), randomly stretched over the shtetl on every Trachimday, are literal transformations of another metaphor for memory, i.e. Ariadne’s thread (see Pethes 196), which Jonathan explicitly refers to towards the end of his story: “Villagers became embodiments of that legend they had been told so many times, of mad Sofiowka, swaddled in white string, [...] struggling in vain to remember a beginning or end. [...] They tried to follow the line back, like Theseus out of the labyrinth, but only went in deeper” (EII 258-259).

⁸⁶ See the discussion of metaphors in Wolf, *Ästhetische Illusion* 290-292; McHale 133-135; Waugh 17-18, 140.

⁸⁷ See metaphors for forgetting in Birk 90; metaphors for remembering in Butzer 12.

Moreover, the process of remembering, sometimes metaphorically described as archaeological excavation (see Birk 89), is literally realized in Alex's story (see also Chapter 2.2.1). Both Lista and Alex's grandfather remember the past by randomly picking items out of a box: "In der Metapher des Ausgrabens ... [wird] bildlich gefaßt [...], wie vergangene Inhalte an die Oberfläche geholt und in die Gegenwart integriert werden" (Birk 89). Yet whereas Lista has dedicated her life to the memory of the past, Alex's grandfather is unwillingly confronted with his past, the memory of which he has tried so hard to suppress and which finally leads to his suicide at the very end of the novel.

Another important metaphorical image which appears as literalized within the novel is the "'fault-line[...]', a geological metaphor" (Barry 73) describing the "shifts and breaks of various kinds" (Barry 73) within a text. Thus, Jonathan tells us already in his first chapter that the shtetl was divided by "the Jewish/Human fault line, [...] drawn in chalk from Radziwell Forest to the river" (*Ell* 10) (see also Mendelsohn para 5). Similarly, the Kolker's divided head can be said to point to the "many rifts in the book" (*Interview with JS Foer* para 21), which Foer himself mentioned in an interview (see *Interview with JS Foer* para 21). The important point about these literalized metaphorical images is that they undermine our illusion and thus draw our attention to the author's use of language (see Wolf, *Ästhetische Illusion* 290-292): "The reader is alerted to the way in which the explicitly artificial construction of these connections [between the level of language and the level of the plot] fits in with the larger designs of the novelist playing God" (Waugh 18).

2.3.2. Intertextuality, Intermediality

The concept of intertextuality is another important postmodern device in Foer's novel: "Intertextualität ... [bezeichnet] jene Verfahren eines mehr oder weniger bewußten und im Text selbst auch in irgendeiner Weise konkret greifbaren Bezugs auf einzelne Prätexte [oder] Gruppen von Prätexten" (Pfister 15).

Since the novel contains numerous intertextual references, I will have to concentrate on a number of important examples, which I will generally refer to as intertextual 'allusions', i.e. "directional signal[s] that refer[...] the reader to another text outside the alluding text" (Hebel 137). The most obvious instances of intertextuality in the novel are "located in the internal system of communication [and] are [thus] accessible to the fictional characters and presented as part of the narrated fictional

world" (Hebel 146).⁸⁸ For example, Alex in his first letter obviously wants to flatter Jonathan, whom he compares to "Ernest Hemingway" (*EII* 24). Similarly, on their first evening at the restaurant, Alex points out that "[t]here are many premium Russian writers" (*EII* 70), like "Tolstoy ... [, who] wrote *War*; and also *Peace* [...] and [...] earned the Nobel Peace Prize for writing" (*EII* 70).⁸⁹ As has already been mentioned in Chapter 2.1.2.1., these remarks are humorous and ironic instances revealing Alex as a comic figure, whose knowledge of literature obviously differs a lot from our own.⁹⁰ Moreover, Alex's story contains an explicit intermedial reference, i.e. the dog of Alex's grandfather "was named for his favorite singer [...] Sammy Davis, Junior" (*EII* 58).⁹¹ This allusion to "the Negro of the Rat Pack" (*EII* 58) clearly is meant to foreground the problematic attitude of both Alex and his grandfather towards Jews and ethnic minorities (see Chapter 2.1.2.1.). Moreover, Brod in Jonathan's story thinks of "Lady Macbeth ... [and] her hands" (*EII* 88) and thus not only anticipates the episode about the "TIME OF DYED HANDS" (*EII* 199-200) (see also Chapters 2.2.1. and 2.2.3.) but, even more importantly, also the question of guilt in connection with Alex's grandfather. Lista remembers having "talked about Shakespeare" (*EII* 190) and of "a fight about Ophelia" (*EII* 190) with Safran. Her reference to Shakespeare's most famous tragedy implies a possible love relationship between her and Jonathan's grandfather. Furthermore, it can be said to call forth the ideas of madness and suicide, thus indirectly pointing to Lista's own state of mind (see also Chapter 2.2.1.) and to the Gypsy girl's tragic end.

In addition to these references made by the novel's characters, the text contains countless "allusions [that] are unknown to the characters of the fictional world" (Hebel 146), i.e. they "are located in the external system of communication between the narrator [...] and the reader" (Hebel 146).⁹² Thus, for example, Foer alludes to T.S. Eliot's famous poem "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (see 1972), when he tells us about the indecisive shtetl community before the Nazi invasion and about "large maps [that were] spread out on tables like patients waiting to be cut open" (*EII* 262).⁹³ Shortly before this, Ari F. at the "shtetl meeting" (*EII* 261) seems to get lost in his memory of his birth, because his thoughts and

⁸⁸ See also the ways of marking a text's intertextual references in Broich, *Markierung* 39-40.

⁸⁹ Compare also fictional characters talking about literary texts in Broich, *Markierung* 39.

⁹⁰ See the discussion of comic elements and the breaking of norms in Wolf, *Ästhetische Illusion* 442-443.

⁹¹ See the definition and discussion of different types of intermediality in Wolf, *Intermedialität* 167-182.

⁹² See the marking of intertextual elements in Broich, *Markierung* 41-44.

⁹³ For this metaphor see also the discussion in McHale 133.

associations are put and layered into seven opening and closing brackets – “)]]]]) ...” (*EII* 261). By obviously alluding to John Barth’s short story “Menelaiad” (158) and its “Chinese-box structure totaling seven narrative levels” (McHale 114), Foer at this point indirectly draws the reader’s attention to the construction of his own novel.⁹⁴

The most extensive allusions in Jonathan’s story are those to Gabriel García Márquez and two of his novels written in the magical realist style. As some critics have pointed out, Jonathan’s Eastern European shtetl is comparable to the Latin American village of Macondo depicted in Márquez’s novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (*OHYS*), first published in 1967: “Jewishness performs the narrative function here that Catholicism and pre-Christian myth did in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, illuminating the tension between reality and illusion, history and fiction, past and present” (*Luminous Talent* para 7).⁹⁵

Like Macondo, “Trachimbrod ... [can be said to be] a mythic space where almost anything can happen” (Feuer 37), and like Márquez’s novel, Jonathan’s story is a “quasi-mythic history of ... [a] family’s lineage” (Feuer 38).⁹⁶ Thus, “THE FIVE GENERATIONS BETWEEN BROD AND SAFRAN” (*EII* 210) mentioned in ‘*The Book of Antecedents*’ clearly remind us of the “fantastic genealogy” (Mullan 118) depicted in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. In contrast to the pretext, the generations in Jonathan’s story are only briefly mentioned. Yet their names, which are compound names of Jonathan’s ancestors, can easily be mixed up by the reader, just like “the insistent repetition of names” (*OHYS* 186) in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (see also Wolf, *Ästhetische Illusion* 294, 318). Furthermore, Brod, who “receive[s] at least one proposal of marriage from every citizen of Trachimbrod” (*EII* 90), reminds the reader of Remedios the Beauty and the men who are “attracted by ... [her] magical fascination” (*OHYS* 200) (see Spiegel para 9). Like the latter is “elect[ed] ... beauty queen of the carnival” (*OHYS* 203), Brod is “the Float Queen of Trachimday” (*EII* 77). Similarly, the “red-headed boy” (*EII* 93), who later turns out to be Shalom, the Kolker, and the “butterflies ... [around] the float[s]” (*EII* 93) of the festival also appear in Márquez’s novel (see *OHYS* 281, 292). Brod’s furious outburst when noticing the Kolker in front of her window, “Go away!” (*EII* 98) is taken over verbatim from *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, where Amaranta utters exactly the same

⁹⁴ See also the reference to “Menelaiad” in Wolf, *Ästhetische Illusion* 302.

⁹⁵ See also Feuer 37; Spiegel para 9-10; Mullan 118; *Paperback choice* para 1, 4.

⁹⁶ Compare discussion of reproducing the structure of a pretext in Karrer, 106.

words in front of her nephew (see *OHYS* 152). Also “the young W twins” (*EII* 8), who are “identical in every way save the hairs connecting ... [their] eyebrows” (*EII* 9) remind us of the twins José Arcadio and Aureliano, who “were so much alike [...] during childhood that not even ... [their mother] could tell them apart” (*OHYS* 187). In addition to these references in Jonathan’s story about Brod, the chapters about his grandfather also contain allusions to *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, the most evident of which is the Gypsy girl whom Safran is in love with and whom the Jewish community regards as socially inferior. Like Úrsula worries that her son José Arcadio, who falls in love and runs away with a gypsy girl, has “become a gypsy” (*OHYS* 34), Safran’s father tells his son: “We were beginning to think you had Gypsy blood” (*EII* 169), and later on seems relieved, because he tells him: “You’re not the lazy Gypsy boy we thought you were” (*EII* 194). Finally, the Gypsy girl’s suicide is another reference to one of Márquez’s characters, i.e. “Pietro Crespi ... [, who is] found with his wrists cut by a razor” (*OHYS* 113) due to his unhappy love to Amaranta.

Whereas the intertextual relations to Márquez’s most famous novel have been pointed out by many critics⁹⁷, Jonathan’s fantastic story contains at least as many allusions to yet another novel written by García Márquez, i.e. to *Love in the Time of Cholera* (*LTC*), first published in 1985. Jonathan’s grandfather Safran and the many women he makes love to clearly remind the reader of Florentino Ariza, who has “six hundred twenty-two ... long-term liaisons, apart from [...] countless fleeting adventures” (*LTC* 183). Like Lista and the Gypsy girl are Safran’s “chance theater encounter[s]” (*EII* 172), Florentino Ariza meets one of his lovers at “the old National Theater” (*LTC* 232), wants to leave earlier with her and “continue[s] to make love [to this woman] for several years” (*LTC* 236). Moreover, Florentino once “need[s] the help of a woman” (*LTC* 346) and visits another of his many lovers and is “surprised at how much ... [this woman] ha[s] aged since the last time he ... [has seen] her” (*LTC* 347).⁹⁸ Similarly “the lace panties” (*EII* 119), “the lighthouse” (*EII* 168) and “the smell” (*EII* 167, 194) of old women in Jonathan’s story about Safran are clearly allusions to the Latin American Florentino Ariza and his countless love affairs (see *LTC* 179, 209-210, 401, 408). Another interesting reference is the “wind of haunting speed” (*EII* 163), which at Safran’s wedding reception mixes up the guests’ “place cards ... on the table[s]” (*EII* 163). Like Foer, García Márquez

⁹⁷ See e.g. Feuer 37; Spiegel para 9-10; Mullan 118.

⁹⁸ Compare Safran visiting Lista at her house in *EII* 237.

writes about “a turbulent wind” (*LTC* 39) due to which “the name cards ... [are] in confusion” (*LTC* 40). Finally, Safran’s question to the Gypsy girl during the theater performance, “Do you like music?” (*EII* 173), again is taken over verbatim from Márquez’s novel, where Dr. Juvenal Urbino when first visiting Fermina Daza asks her exactly the same question (see *LTC* 141).

In addition to the numerous allusions which clearly refer to either *Love in the Time of Cholera* or *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and only some of which are mentioned above, Jonathan’s story contains intertextual elements which cannot definitely be related to either of these novels. Thus, for instance, the sunken treasure which Florentino tries to find and the secret love letters in *Love in the Time of Cholera*, which Foer alludes to in *Everything Is Illuminated* (see *EII* 14, 94, 270; 232-233.), are also elements in Márquez’s first novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (see *OHYS* 377, 68). Due to the obvious “intertextual threads” (Marshall 182; see also Broich, *Einzeltextreferenz* 51) between Márquez’s own novels⁹⁹ these elements thus seem to reappear as already transformed in *Love in the Time of Cholera*, and consequently the pretext which Foer refers to cannot exactly be determined.¹⁰⁰

Whereas the relations between *Everything Is Illuminated* and García Márquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude* have been pointed out by many critics, as has already been mentioned above, John Mullan seems to be the only one who relates *Everything Is Illuminated* to yet another “major work[...] that attest[s] to ... [the] widespread distribution” (Faris 281) of the concept of magical realism, i.e. Günter Grass’s famous novel *Die Blechtrommel* (*BT*), first published in 1959 (Mullan 118-119). Grass’s work not only plays an important role in connection with the intertextual references in *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* (see Chapter 3.3.1.) but also serves as a pretext for Foer’s first novel.

Apart from the fact that Alex’s grandmother is called Anna and thus shares her first name with Oskar Matzerath’s grandmother (see *BT* 12), the latter also reminds the reader of Jonathan’s grandmother. Jonathan tells Alex about his “secret hiding place” (*EII* 158) as a child, and that he “used to sit under ... [his grandmother’s] dress at family dinners” (*EII* 157). Similarly, Oskar Matzerath refers to his grand-

⁹⁹ See the concept of ‘Auto-/Intratextualität’ discussed in Broich, *Einzeltextreferenz* 49-50.

¹⁰⁰ See also the discussion of intertextuality in Marshall 182-183.

mother's skirts, under which not only he himself but also his grandfather obviously felt protected (see *BT* 17, 28). Oskar even thinks of all kinds of tricks to get under her skirts (see *BT* 275-276), which he mentions throughout his story: "Noch heute wünsche ich mir [...] unter den Röcken meiner Großmutter [...] liegen zu dürfen" (*BT* 159). Furthermore, both Brod's father and Oskar's grandfather allegedly drown in a river, and since their bodies are never found, in both novels people tell each other different versions of how they might have been saved and have survived (see *EII* 14-15, *BT* 37-39). Like Jonathan, Oskar has old family photographs, which are very important for him, and he also addresses the reader, inviting us to look at them: "Betrachten Sie bitte die Hände. Sie werden zugeben müssen, [...]" (*BT* 68). Even more importantly, Oskar imagines how he would sit under his grandmother's skirts together with his son and, with the help of his tin drum, would be able to visit his ancestors: "Selbst heute [...] male ich mir [...] die schönsten Familienszenen im Kreis meiner Vorfahren aus. So stelle ich mir [...] vor: [...]" (*BT* 459). These passages clearly remind the reader of Jonathan imagining his story about his ancestors and his narratorial comments, which have been analyzed in Chapter 2.1.2.2.

As I have tried to show by analyzing some of the numerous intertextual references, the author takes these elements from other texts and playfully integrates them into his own.¹⁰¹ The elements of the various pretexts therefore reappear in a new context in Foer's novel: "The concept of a writer who [...] reassembles and recycles materials from earlier texts [...] find[s] its adequate expression in "bricolage[...]" or [...] "collage[...]" (Broich, *Intertextuality* 251; see also Hutcheon, *Postmodern Parody* 225).

In addition to the transformed elements of Jonathan's experience and memory of his trip (see Chapter 2.2.1.), the fantastic shtetl-world can thus be said to be pieced together of numerous intertextual elements from other, well-known literary texts. In this respect, Jonathan, as the writer of his story, again mirrors the real author outside the fictional world. Moreover, since these intertextual references clearly draw our attention to the author's use of language, they additionally undermine our illusion of the portrayed storyworlds (see Wolf, *Ästhetische Illusion* 280, 394-395).

¹⁰¹ See the reproduction of elements of a pretext in Karrer 99.

2.3.3. Individual Style

One of the most obvious typographic differences between Alex's and Jonathan's story, which probably strikes the reader already at the beginning of the novel, is the use of different types to indicate the direct speech parts. Whereas in Alex's story these parts are put under quotation marks and are printed in normal type, the characters' direct speech utterances in Jonathan's story are italicized, and the words of the Rabbis are additionally capitalized (see also Grossman para 5). Another difference between Alex's and Jonathan's stories has to do with their chapter headings and the representation of time. In contrast to Alex, who relates the events of his trip in a linear and chronological way, Jonathan's story clearly is told in a non-linear way. Especially his seventh, eighth and ninth chapters (see *EII* 86-99; 119-141) contain flashforwards, by means of which the time levels of Brod's and Safran's life seem to merge into each other. Since the generations between Brod and Safran are not depicted (see Chapter 2.2.2.), these chapters mark the gradual transition from Brod's life to the events related to us about Safran. This difference in time representation is reflected in another typographic device, i.e. in the novel's different chapter headings. Whereas Alex's chapter headings are printed in straight lines, Jonathan's chapters are headed by curved lines and additionally contain information on the years which the various chapters cover. The difference between Alex's story about the realistic present and the imagined story about the past related to us by Jonathan is thus additionally underlined by these typographic devices. Moreover, the text is thus clearly foregrounded as printed material (see Wolf, *Ästhetische Illusion* 379, 387-388; McHale 181-184).

As Myers points out in his review, the novel's "critical acclaim concentrated [...] heavily on one part" (116), i.e. on the part written by Alex, whose "imperfect English" (Lawson para 5) was extensively commented on.¹⁰² At the beginning of his first letter, Alex tells Jonathan (see also Lawson para 5):

Like you know, I am not first rate with English. In Russian my ideas are asserted abnormally well, but my second tongue is not so premium. I undertook [sic] to input the things you counseled me to, and I fatigued the thesaurus you presented me, [...] when my words appeared too petite, or not befitting. (*EII* 23)

¹⁰² See e.g. Feuer 26; Gessen 68; Grossman para 3; Hitchings, *Idiolects* para 4; *Luminous Talent* para 3-4; Mangold para 7; Maslin para 4; Prose para 1-4; Ribbat 212.

Although he uses a “thesaurus” (*EII* 23) “to enrich his vocabulary” (Lawson para 5), Alex constantly uses unidiomatic expressions and phrases, because he “sees no distinction between common, demotic and poetic words” (Lawson para 5), such as, for instance, in the following sentences:

I have a girl who dubs me Currency, because I disseminate so much currency around her. (*EII* 1)

I will be truthful again and mention that before the voyage I had the opinion that Jewish people were having shit between their brains. (*EII* 3)

I have tutored Little Igor to be a man of this world. For example, I exhibited him a smutty magazine three days yore [...]. (*EII* 3)

Sometimes he even creates new words and expressions, such as, for instance, in his first letter to Jonathan: “Perhaps if I think something is very half-witted, I could tell you, and you could make it whole-witted” (*EII* 25). Similarly, on their first encounter at the train station in Lvov Alex asks Jonathan whether he was able to “manufacture any Z’s” (*EII* 32), i.e. whether he was able to sleep on the train (see also Prose para 4). As has already been pointed out in Chapter 2.1.2.1., apart from the fact that he sometimes produces deliberately false translations, Alex’s unidiomatic language clearly has a comic effect on the reader: “[K]omische Distanz [beruht] auf einer rational begründeten Abkoppelung des Lachenden vom komischen Anlaß. Immer steht dabei im Hintergrund die Vorstellung einer Norm [...], deren Verletzung einen ‘Fehler’ sichtbar macht, eine Diskrepanz zum Vorschein bringt, die zum Lachen reizt.” (Wolf, *Ästhetische Illusion* 442). The important point is that Alex himself is not aware of his mistakes and thus “believes his language is ‘proper’ when in fact it is not” (Feuer 26). Since Alex’s “imperfect English” (Lawson para 5) “is not intended by [him as a] ... fictional speaker” (*Irony* 143), it is part of the novel’s “structural irony [, which] depends on a knowledge of the author’s [...] intention [...] shared by the reader” (*Irony* 143), who consequently laughs “at the expense of [Alex as] a character ... [and] fictional narrator” (*Irony, Oxford Dictionary* 174).

Although Alex obviously transforms the experience of his three-day trip into a written account, as has already been discussed in Chapter 2.1.1. and 2.1.2.1., “his idiosyncratic [...] lingo” (Prose para 4) creates “the illusion of spoken language” (Goetsch 413) and can therefore be related to the concept of ‘skaz’: “Das Verfahren des S[kaz] erzeugt die Illusion der naturalistischen Niederschrift einer lebhaften und spontanen mündlichen Erzählung eines stark individualisierten Erzählers. Typische stilistische Mittel sind Dialekt, [...] Slang, Idiosynkrasien in

Grammatik oder Aussprache“ (Mosthaf 610).¹⁰³ In addition to his language, which creates the illusion of “oral storytelling” (Fludernik, *Narratology* 394), “the illusion of spoken language” (Goetsch 413) is achieved by yet another device, i.e. by the numerous dialogues contained in his story. As Volk points out, “[f]ingierte Mündlichkeit liegt dann vor, wenn in einem geschriebenen Text der Eindruck von gesprochener Sprache erweckt werden soll, also z.B. durch einen Dialog ... [oder] eine Rede“ (Volk 155; see also Nünning, *Mimesis* 25-26, 30). Like Alex’s regular reader addresses, which have already been analyzed in Chapter 2.1.2.1., the related dialogues thus additionally create “the illusion of spoken language” (Goetsch 413) and consequently draw the reader into what is being told:

Das Ergebnis der Illusionsbildung besteht im Falle der Mimesis des Erzählens darin, daß sich zum einen die Vorstellung bildet, der Rezipient sei Zuhörer oder Adressat eines Erzählvorgangs [...]. Zum anderen entsteht im Rezeptionsprozeß der Eindruck von – freilich fingierter – mündlicher Kommunikation. (Nünning, *Mimesis* 25; see also Volk 162-163)

The countless direct speech utterances thus “remind [the] reader[...] of the spontaneity and dynamics that [...] accompany face-to-face interactions” (Goetsch 413), such as, for instance, in the following passage, in which Alex tells us about his first encounter with Jonathan:

[H]e punched me on the shoulder and said, “Alex?” I told him yes. “You’re my translator, right?” I asked him to be slow, because I could not understand him. In truth I was manufacturing a brick wall of shits. I attempted to be sedate. “Lesson one. Hello. How are you doing this day?” “What?” “Lesson two. OK, isn’t the weather full of delight?” “You’re my translator,” he said, manufacturing movements, “yes?” “Yes,” I said, presenting him my hand. “I am Alexander Perchov. I am your humble translator.” “It would not be nice to beat you,” he said. “What?” I said. “I said,” he said, “it would not be nice to beat you.” “Oh yes,” I laughed, “it would not be nice to beat you also. I implore you to forgive my speaking of English. I am not so premium with it.” “Jonathan Safran Foer,” he said, and presented me his hand. “What?” “I’m Jonathan Safran Foer.” “Jon-fen?” “Safran Foer.” “I am Alex,” I said. “I know,” he said. (*EII* 32)

Apart from “the illusion of spoken language” (Goetsch 413), the dialogues very often display a typical rhythm, because the phrases such as “I said” and “he said” regularly follow the direct speech utterances, as in the above-quoted passage. Indeed, while reading some of the dialogues, we have to pay attention in order to follow the conversations in terms of who says what (see e.g. *EII* 108; 150-151).

¹⁰³ For the concept of ‘skaz’ see also Fludernik, *Narratology* 274, 394; *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* 309-310; Nünning, *Mimesis* 25.

Moreover, Alex's translations for Jonathan additionally give his story a rhythm, because he regularly repeats what has already been uttered, such as, for instance, in the following scene at the restaurant when Jonathan tells Alex that he is "a vegetarian" (*EII* 65):

"He does not eat meat", I told Grandfather. "Yes he does," he informed me. "Yes you do," I likewise informed the hero. "No. I don't." "Why not?" I inquired him again. [...] "What is wrong with him?" [Grandfather] ... asked. "What is wrong with you?" I asked him. "It's just the way I am," he said. [...] "What did he say is wrong with him?" Grandfather asked. "It is just the way he is." (*EII* 65)

Although we get to read Alex's translations almost throughout his novel, it is important to point out that there are some passages which he does not translate for Jonathan, the most important of which is Lista's account, which has already been discussed as an oral memory of the past in Chapter 2.2.1. Similarly, when Alex's grandfather tells them about his traumatic experience of how the Nazis came to Kolki and he betrayed his best friend, we do not get to read Alex's translations either. As Ribbat points out, "at this point the farce ends ... [and] the grandfather's narrative of the Holocaust ... [is] present[ed] [as] a breathless monologue" (213), in the course of which "all punctuation [gradually] disappears" (Ribbat 213) (see also Feuer 42). It seems interesting to mention that the bombing of Trachimbrod depicted in Jonathan's story is described verbally only in Brod's dream (see Chapter 2.2.3.), which does not contain any punctuation as well (see *EII* 272-273). Moreover, before we get to read the dream, the bombing of the shtetl is expressed by means of a typographic device, i.e. we only get to read four sentences dispersed across one and a half pages full of periods (see *EII* 270-271; see Eaglestone 129), which "suggests that [...] language may be an insufficient vehicle for expressing" (Varvogli 93) what happened. Moreover, although both Lista's and the grandfather's accounts of the past are narrated by Alex, they are not written in his usual "imperfect" (Lawson para 5) but in correct English (see *EII* 185-189; 247-252). The comic element of Alex's unidiomatic language thus is not used to portray the traumatic experiences of the past, when both survivors of the Holocaust remember and try to express what happened to them (see also Feuer 31).

Alex's "imperfect English" (Lawson para 5) was also criticized, for instance by Myers, who argued that "all forms of malapropism ... [were] no more than variations on a single joke" (116) and pointed out that "Alex impart[ed] no sense of a Slavic speaker learning English" (116). Alex's constant misuse of idiomatic expres-

sions, however, also draws the reader's attention to the ambiguity of language (see *Paperback Choice* para 3; Barry 74; Waugh 137-143). For instance, he uses the word to "excavate[...]" (EII 59) instead of 'to take out' and thus unintentionally not only alludes to the main activity of archaeologists but also to their search for Augustine and Trachimbrod, since they, too, hope "to discover information about the past" (*Collins Cobuild* 572) (see also Chapter 4.1.). Similarly, he tells us that on their way to Trachimbrod they had "to make a hiatus" (EII 182), because Lista got tired. Since this formal word not only denotes "a pause in which nothing happens" (*Collins Cobuild* 792) but also "a gap where something is missing" (*Collins Cobuild* 792), we realize that Alex's misuse of this expression is deliberately intended by the author, who thus indirectly refers and draws the reader's attention to the novel's construction, i.e. to the incoherent storylines which have been analyzed in Chapter 2.2.1. Alex himself, however, has no knowledge of the effect created by the misuse of such expressions. Since this appears as deliberately intended by the author, his language partly undermines our illusion of the storyworld portrayed. A very similar effect is created by the use of the word to "rotate[...]" (EII 34, 193) instead of 'to turn' (see Lawson para 5), since it implies the "turn[ing] with a circular movement" (*Collins Cobuild* 1447), which again hints at one of the formal aspects of the novel, i.e. the circular structure of Jonathan's invented family history, which has been analyzed in Chapter 2.2.2. The author thus draws our attention to the ambiguity of language and indirectly makes us aware of the novel's "artificiality and constructedness" (Fludernik, *Narratology* 275). As I have tried to show above, Alex's language thus on the one hand clearly draws the reader into his story, but on the other hand also partly undermines our illusion of the storyworld portrayed.

In contrast to Alex, Jonathan tells his invented family history in a more elaborate and sophisticated way (see Prose para 6; Lawson para 8). As has already been pointed out in Chapter 2.1.2.2., his story reminds the reader of a legend or folk tale, which underlines the distance to the events related to us. An interesting aspect of Jonathan's style is that in some introductory passages of his chapters he makes use of a rhythmic language. Thus, for instance, the sentences at the beginning of his fourteenth chapter entitled "Falling in Love, 1934-1941" (EII 229) consist of regularly alternating stressed and unstressed syllables:

THE FINAL TIME they made love, seven months before she killed herself
and he married someone else, the Gypsy girl asked my grandfather how he
arranged his books.

She had been the only one he returned to without having to be asked. *They would meet* at the bazaar [...]. *They would meet* at the theater or in front of her thatch-roofed shanty [...]. *They would meet* on the wooden bridge, or beneath the wooden bridge [...]. But more often than not, they would end up in the petrified corner of Radziwell Forest [...]. (EII 229 [emphasis added])

In addition to the rhythm created by the underlying “stress-pattern” (*Meter* 168), especially in the first two sentences, the anaphoric repetition of the phrase “[t]hey would meet” (EII 229) at the beginning of the following sentences additionally creates a rhythm and thus clearly draws the reader into the following episode about Safran and the Gypsy girl.¹⁰⁴ Moreover, his style can be associated with the way in which folk tales are narrated and, even more importantly, it can also be linked with the “formulaic language” (Fludernik, *Narratology* 59) of epic poetry (see also *Oral Poetry*), which seems especially interesting, because Fludernik discusses both as “types of natural narrative” (Fludernik, *Narratology* 57), i.e. originally “oral modes” (Fludernik, *Narratology* 53) of storytelling which gradually developed into written forms (see Fludernik, *Narratology* 53-59; *Oral Poetry*). Whereas in Alex’s story the illusion of oral storytelling is primarily achieved by his “idiosyncratic” (Prose para 4) language, Jonathan’s style can also be said to call forth “oral modes” (Fludernik, *Narratology* 53) of storytelling, although of a very different kind and by different means, i.e. by the use of a rhythmic and to a certain degree thus also poetic language, especially at the beginning of his chapters.

Another important aspect of Jonathan’s style is that his language sometimes turns out to be contradictory and paradoxical¹⁰⁵, such as, for instance, in the following sentence: “THE BEST DECISION IS NO DECISION, [the Well-Regarded Rabbi] ... decided, and put the letters in [Brod’s] ... crib, vowing to give [her] ... to the author of the first note she grabbed for” (EII 21). This statement clearly is self-contradictory, because although the Rabbi decided not to decide, he nevertheless did make a decision. Another instance of the paradoxical use of two mutually exclusive terms is Jonathan’s statement about Safran after his wedding night: “He was a boy still, but no longer a boy. A man, but not yet a man” (EII 261). Similarly, when the Gypsy girl tells Safran that “the easiest things for [him] ... to give are the

¹⁰⁴ For the concept of ‘anaphora’ see *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* 14; Nünning and Nünning, *Introduction* 66.

¹⁰⁵ For the concept of the ‘paradox’ see *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* 246; Nünning and Nünning, *Introduction* 75; Barry’s discussion of deconstructive practice in Barry 73-79; Waugh’s discussion of contradiction and paradox and in Waugh 137-143.

hardest things for [him] ... to give" (*EII* 230), our attention is drawn to "the polarity of [...] binary oppositions" (Barry 74) and the paradox resulting from their permutation (see Barry 74). The important aspect of these self-contradictory phrases and statements, only a few of which can be mentioned here, is that they draw the reader's attention to "language's endemic unreliability and slipperiness" (Barry 74). At least in this respect, they can be linked with Alex's unintentional misuse of words and expressions, which, as I have pointed out above, partly results in an ambiguous meaning.

2.4. Themes

One of the novel's thematic aspects portrayed in Alex's story about his three-day trip together with Jonathan is the cultural and economic difference between America representing the Western world and Ukraine as an Eastern European country and part of the "former Soviet [R]epublic" (*EII* 23) (see Chapter 2.1.2.1.). Since the events are related to us through the eyes of Alex, we regularly become aware how Alex's view of the world differs widely from our own, especially because of his naïve dream about the "ennobled country America" (*EII* 3), which is anything but realistic. His story thus contains numerous ironic situations, in which the reader laughs at his expense. However, as has already been pointed out in Chapter 2.1.2.1., Alex is sometimes also shown to have a rather divided attitude not only towards America, which he regards as superior to his own country, but also towards Ukraine.

Towards the end of their trip the secret past of Alex's grandfather is unintentionally brought to the surface, and we get to read his account of his traumatic experience of the Holocaust, about which he has never told anyone in his family, especially not his son and his grandson (see Chapter 2.1.2.1. and 2.2.1.). In addition to Alex's grandfather, there are other characters who keep secrets from their families, such as, for instance, Alex himself. He tells Jonathan in his second letter: "*Father does not know this. He thinks I disseminate everything I possess at famous discotheques, but as proxy for I often go to the beach and roost for many hours, so I do not have to disseminate currency*" (*EII* 52). Similarly, Jonathan does not tell his grandmother about his journey to Ukraine, not even after his return back home. In contrast to Alex's rather harmless secret, Jonathan's secret from his grandmother is much more central and serious. Since his grandmother has survived the Holocaust, like Lista and Alex's grandfather, she probably would be the most direct link

to the past which Jonathan is in search of. If Jonathan had told her about his trip to Ukraine after his return to America and had asked her about Alex's grandfather, maybe he would have been able to find out more, especially because both his grandmother and Alex's grandfather were from Kolki, even though Alex's grandfather points out that he does not know Jonathan's grandmother and does "not want to know her name" (*EII* 227). Moreover, Jonathan tells Alex that his grandmother gave him the picture of his grandfather only "two years ago" (*EII* 61), yet without telling him anything about it: "If she had wanted to tell us anything about it, she would have" (*EII* 61). This implies that Jonathan's grandmother, just like Alex's grandfather, is reluctant to talk about the past and, even more importantly, might keep her own secrets from her family, i.e. what she knows about the past of her husband. As has already been pointed out in Chapter 2.2.1., the family secrets which the reader discovers in the course of the novel, the most important of which is the secret past of Alex's grandfather, are mirrored in Jonathan's imagined story about the past. Thus Yankel keeps it a secret from Brod that he is not her real father and Brod, in return, has her own little secrets from Yankel. Similarly, Safran's many love affairs and his love for the Gypsy girl are kept a secret as well (see also Chapter 2.2.1.).

Jonathan's "desire to uncover his grandfather's past" (Varvogli 89) certainly also has to do with his own identity. The novel thus "address[es] a need to remember a past one never knew in order to know who one is" (Sicher, *Future* 71; see also Varvogli 89). The problem, however is, that Jonathan cannot find any reliable information about the past (see Chapter 2.2.1.). His quest does not lead him anywhere (see also Chapter 4.1.), except that he realizes that the past is lost and cannot be reconstructed in objective terms. Jonathan can thus only write "a fiction of an imagined past, a made-up family history through which [he] ... attempts to find his own place in the world" (Varvogli 89; see also Sicher, *Future* 70, 81; Eaglestone 130). The author seems to indirectly point at Jonathan's vain quest for identity by partly raising doubts about the identities of some of the fictional characters, i.e. of Lista and Alex's grandfather.

As has already been pointed out in Chapter 2.2.1., the reader cannot really be sure whether the woman whom Alex finds "roosting on the steps of a very diminutive house" (*EII* 115) really is Lista and does not know anything about Augustine, as she tells them. Since she strongly resembles Augustine, it seems possible that she

might be “the Augustine from the picture” (*EII* 148), as they first assume, and that she tells Alex that she is called Lista instead of Augustine, because she is afraid of revealing her real name and identity, especially because she does not know whether “the war [is already] over” (*EII* 193). Still another possibility would be that she really is the woman in the picture, but that the name of this woman is not Augustine, especially because Jonathan tells Alex on their way from Lvov to Lutsk: “For all I know the writing doesn’t have anything to do with the picture. It could be that he used this for scrap paper” (*EII* 61). Since we do not know how far we can trust what Lista tells Alex and Jonathan, we are partly left in the dark about the woman’s real identity.

In contrast to Eaglestone and Ribbat, who both refer to Alex’s grandfather as a “non-Jew” (Eaglestone 130; Ribbat 213), Feuer points out that the religious identity of Alex’s grandfather partly remains unclear and contradictory (see Feuer 45-47). Whereas Alex’s grandfather, when telling his grandson about the past, mentions that he himself “was not a Jew” (*EII* 246), Lista remembers that “Herschel and Eli were best friends, and [that] Eli had to shoot Herschel, because if he did not, they would shoot him” (*EII* 152). Thus, according to Lista’s memories and in contrast to what Alex’s grandfather recounts, “Eli killed Herschel ... [which means that] the grandfather is Eli” (Feuer 45) and consequently a Jew himself. This would mean that the grandfather deliberately keeps his “Jewish identity” (Feuer 46) a secret from of his family. Since we do not get any further information on this subject, the question whether Alex’s grandfather really is Jewish, remains unanswered till the very end of the novel. Apart from this remaining ambiguity, “the implications of Jews killing other Jews” (Feuer 47) is thematized by yet another instance mentioned by Alex’s grandfather. As he remembers, “the first person ... [whom the General] went to was a Jew named Abraham ... [, who] pointed to Aaron” (*EII* 249) and another “Jew pointed at his [own] cousin” (*EII* 250).

Regardless of his religious identity, “the grandfather’s involvement in the massacre of Trachimbrod ... [during which] he is forced to point out, to betray, his Jewish best friend to the Germans” (Eaglestone 130) certainly raises the question of how guilty “the bystanders” (Eaglestone 131) are, because they did not help the Jews. When Alex’s grandfather defends them by pointing out that “if they had helped, they would have been killed, and so would their families” (*EII* 187), Alex tells us that he “thought about this for many moments” (*EII* 187). We are thus induced to

think about how we would have reacted and whether we would have helped, even if this “signified that ... [we] would be murdered and ... [our] family would be murdered” (*EII* 187). Moreover, this raises the question of how guilty Alex’s grandfather is, because of “what ... [he] did [, which] was as good as murdering” (*EII* 247) Herschel. On the one hand, we know that “Herschel [probably] would have been murdered with or without” (*EII* 247) him – we learn that the Nazis either shot the Jews or burned them in the synagogues – and that Alex’s grandfather had a wife and a son, whom he tried to protect. As he points out, he did not really have a choice: “You had to choose, and hope to choose the smaller evil” (*EII* 246). On the other hand, however, Alex’s grandfather tells us that there was a Jew who “pointed at himself because he would not point at another” (*EII* 250), which shows that there were people who preferred to be killed themselves rather than to betray and thus kill somebody else. This also implies that Alex’s grandfather could have reacted in the same way, and that if he had not pointed at his best friend, the latter might have had a chance to escape. At the end of his last chapter, Alex thus asks Jonathan: “is it forgivable what [Grandfather] ... did canheeverbeforgiven for his finger for whathisfingerdid for whathepointedto [...] he is stillguilty” (*EII* 252).

Since Alex towards the end of his trip unexpectedly “encounter[s] his own heritage” (*Ribbat* 213) (see also Chapter 2.1.2.1.), the novel portrays how “the grandchildren of [both] survivors and bystanders” (*Eaglestone* 128) are confronted with “the trauma of history” (*Ribbat* 213). In connection with this thematic aspect Feuer argues that Jonathan, as “a grandchild of survivors” (*Feuer* 24) of the Holocaust, is shown to be unable to forgive and is therefore not interested in a friendship with Alex (see *Feuer* 24-25, 43-45, 47). This, however, seems to be a rather one-sided conclusion and interpretation. Instead, I would rather argue that the question whether Jonathan can forgive Alex’s grandfather remains open, like so many other questions remain unanswered throughout the novel, some of which I have already pointed out above. Since Jonathan does not directly and explicitly react upon the revelations of Alex’s grandfather on their last evening together, or at least Alex does not write anything about this in his story, we only get to know Jonathan’s transformed memories and experiences of the trip in his imagined story about Trachimbrod (see Chapter 2.2.1.). His invented family history, however, cannot be said to reflect a “refusal to forgive” (*Feuer* 45). Instead, it contains a number of “rifts” (*Interview with JS Foer* para 21), which portray the traumatic past without giving any definite answers indicating an “either/or thinking” (*Hutcheon, Poetics* 49)

of Jonathan. Thus, Jonathan at the very beginning of his story divides the shtetl-members into Uprighters, who were “strict adherents to the letter of the law” (Ges-sen 68) and the Slouchers, “who seemed willing to sacrifice any Jewish law for the sake of what they feebly termed the great and necessary reconciliation of religion with life” (*EII* 18). The important point is that he has his “great-great-great-great-great-grandmother” (*EII* 16) brought up by a Sloucher and not by an Uprighter, and that he tells us that she and her descendants, including Jonathan himself, “were to be in good hands” (*EII* 22). If Jonathan really was not able to forgive, as Feuer argues, it would seem more plausible that he would have chosen an Uprighter rather than a Sloucher to raise Brod. Moreover, as has already been pointed out in Chapter 2.2.1., when he imagines the past of his grandfather Safran, Jonathan raises the same question that Alex poses in connection with his grandfather’s past, i.e. “How guilty could he be, really, when he never had any real choice?” (*EII* 165). As Eaglestone points out with respect to the Holocaust, the novel “illuminat[es] [...] a grey zone, where neither history nor moral judgments are simple” (130). The important point is that the novel does not provide any clear answers and explanations for the reader. On the contrary, as has already been pointed out in Chapter 2.2.1., it contains a number of “textual contradictions ... [which cannot be] resolved ... [and due to which] there can be no final certainty” (Waugh 137). We can thus only try to draw our own conclusions from the text, and, even more importantly, are induced to think about the problematic subject ourselves (see also Chapter 4.1.) (see Hutcheon, *Narrative* 152).

In this connection Lista’s father has to be considered as well. As Lista tells Alex and Jonathan, her father, who “command[ed] ... [his children] to kiss any book that touched the ground” (*EII* 185), refused to spit on the Torah. He therefore can be said to have reacted like an Uprighter, who was not willing to betray his convictions and beliefs, even if this meant that his family would be killed. In contrast to what Alex’s grandfather thinks, Lista’s father, however, “did not spit” (*EII* 187) because “[h]e was so religious” (*EII* 187), but because “he did *not* believe in God” (*EII* 187 [emphasis added]). We thus become aware of how two totally opposite and contrary attitudes towards religion would have had the same effect and consequences in a given situation. The problem, however, is why Lista’s father refused to spit on the Torah after the Nazis had “shot ... [her] in her place” (*EII* 187). As we learn from Lista, he finally chose to be shot himself after his wife and younger daughter had already been killed: “[The General] ... put the gun against my father’s head.

Spit, [he] ... said, and we will kill you.' [...] 'And he spit.'" (*EII* 187). So why did he not save his elder daughter from dying slowly and painfully? Did he know that she would survive, because, as Lista tells later on, "the baby [had] accepted the bullet and [thus] saved its mother" (*EII* 188)? Even if he did know or at least maybe hoped that she would somehow survive the mass shooting, how could he have been sure? Moreover, why did he then not try to save his wife and younger daughter as well by already spitting on the Torah when the Nazis "put the gun in ... [their] mouth[s]" (*EII* 186)? Again, these are questions, which the reader is confronted with, but to which we do not get any answers (see Hutcheon, *Poetics* 44-45). Instead, the reactions of Lista's father partly remain contradictory and ambiguous.

Moreover, the question is whether Lista's father really could have saved his family by spitting on the Torah. As the reader realizes in the course of her account, her family probably would have been killed anyway, no matter how her father had reacted and, even more importantly, no matter why he had reacted in the one or the other way. Although Lista does not say anything about what happened to the Jews who spit on the Torah, we are to assume that they were all killed, especially because she mentions the "bodies, which were in a hole in front of the synagogue" (*EII* 188) and that she was one of the few Jews who survived the atrocity. We thus realize that Lista's father, like Alex's grandfather, did not really have a choice either, which draws our attention to the unimaginable cruelty of the Holocaust. As Lista points out, "[i]t is not a thing that you can imagine. It only is. After that, there can be no imagining" (*EII* 188).

In addition to the incoherent storylines (see Chapter 2.2.1.), the novel thus contains a number of other "[i]nternal contradictions" (Barry 74) and thematic ambiguities "which cannot be unraveled or solved" (Barry 78).¹⁰⁶ Due to these "unresolved paradoxes" (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 21), the novel turns out to "offer[...] ... resistance [sic] to total interpretation" (Waugh 141). As Hutcheon points out, "[t]he resulting contradictions are not dialectically resolved but coexist in a heterogeneous way" (*Politics* 62)¹⁰⁷. Instead of providing any "absolute and final answers" (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 21), the novel can thus be said to "problematize[...] the [...] possibility of

¹⁰⁶ See the process of deconstructive reading and the concept of 'aporia' as defined in Barry 75-79; Wolf's 'thematisch-negatives Kohärenzprinzip' in Wolf, *Ästhetische Illusion* 341-342; the discussion of a novel's 'thematic open ending' in Szegedy-Maszák 277-279.

¹⁰⁷ See also Hutcheon, *Poetics* 42-43; Hutcheon, *Postmodern Parody* 234.

historical knowledge” (Hutcheon, *Pastime* 55) in connection with the Holocaust, especially because “[t]he multiple and peripheral perspectives offered in the [...] eye-witness accounts resist any final meaningful closure” (Hutcheon, *Politics* 64) (see also Chapter 2.2.1. and 4.2.).

3. *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*

3.1. Storytelling

3.1.1. Structure

Like Foer's first novel, *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* consists of three intertwining narrative strands. Oskar's narrative about "the worst day" (*ELIC* 12) and his ensuing "quest to solve the mystery of a key found in a vase" (Faber para 2) constitutes the first strand. It comprises thirteen chapters and takes up the main part of the novel (see Gessen 70). In-between Oskar's narrative we alternately get to read four parts of three letters written by Oskar's grandfather to Oskar's father, the first letter consisting of two parts, and the letter of Oskar's grandmother addressed to Oskar, which also comprises four chapters. As Mason points out, "the chapters [of the three narrative strands are] moving forward in a repeating pattern (Oskar; Grandfather; Oskar; Grandmother)" (para 18) (see also Nünning and Nünning, *Multiperspektivität* 56). Whereas the thirteen chapters of Oskar's narrative all have different chapter headings, his grandfather's letters dated "5/12/63" (*ELIC* 16, 108), "4/12/78" (*ELIC* 208) and "9/11/03" (*ELIC* 262), all have the same title, i.e. "WHY I'M NOT WHERE YOU ARE" (*ELIC* 16, 108, 208, 262). Similarly, all four parts of the letter of Oskar's grandmother written on "12 September 2003" (*ELIC* 75) are entitled "MY FEELINGS" (*ELIC* 75, 174, 224, 306) (see also Hoth 291-292).

Unlike in *Everything Is Illuminated*, the letters in Foer's second novel do not constitute a narrative frame (see Chapter 2.1.1.), but are positioned on the same narrative level as Oskar's story. Moreover, in contrast to *Everything Is Illuminated*, the reader realizes in the course of the novel that the three narrative strands partly overlap, i.e. some events are related to us by more than one of the three narrator-characters and are thus seen through different perspectives (see Hoth 291)¹⁰⁸. The reader therefore not only has to switch between the various stages of the three alternating narrative strands, but also has to try to make sense of the various and partly diverging perspectives at different points of the novel.¹⁰⁹ As will be shown in

¹⁰⁸ See the concept of multiperspectivity as defined in Nünning and Nünning, *Perspektivenstruktur* 13, 18; Nünning and Nünning, *Multiperspektivität* 42.

¹⁰⁹ See the relations between the various perspectives presented in a text in Nünning and Nünning, *Multiperspektivität* 55-60, 70-73.

Chapter 3.2.1., the concept of multiperspectivity thus further complicates the reading process (see Nünning and Nünning, *Multiperspektivität* 52, 62-63, 73).

Finally, unlike Foer's first novel, *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* contains a number of pictures and photographs, which the reader again has to try to make sense of (see Hoth 286, 294-297), not only within Oskar's narrative but also within his grandfather's letters, which will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3.3.2.

3.1.2. Narrator-characters

3.1.2.1. Oskar

Like Alex, Oskar is a first-person narrator who "reports what he experienced [...] at a previous point in time ... [and] what he has learned about it" (Stanzel, *Theory* 88). Yet unlike Alex, Oskar does not explicitly introduce himself in his opening chapter, but begins his narrative with a question obviously addressed to the reader (see Gessen 68)¹¹⁰: "What about a teakettle? [...] I could invent a teakettle that reads in Dad's voice, so I could fall asleep" (*ELIC* 1). Apart from the fact that Oskar mentions his father already in his third sentence, it is his explanatory remark about a foreign word which draws the reader's attention to his personal features as a narrator (see Nünning, *Mimesis* 29): "[B]ecause entomology is one of my *raison d'être*, which is a French expression that I know" (*ELIC* 1). Shortly after this, Oskar mentions "the Hall of Mirrors" (*ELIC* 1) and again provides the reader with an additional comment about this famous location, "which is in Versailles, which is outside of Paris, which is in France, obviously" (*ELIC* 1). Although we do not know yet, who the "textual speaker-I" (Fludernik, *Narratology* 269) exactly is, these comments make the reader aware of the narrator (see Nünning, *Mimesis* 29), who provides us with explanations, which the adult reader, however, does not really need in order to understand what he tells us about. These comments at the very beginning of Oskar's narrative therefore already expose him as someone whose general knowledge obviously differs considerably from our own and thus draw our attention to his unreliability as a narrator (see Nünning, *Unreliable Narration* 30). Similarly, Oskar asks the reader: "What about little microphones? What if [...] they played the sounds of our hearts through little speakers [...]" (*ELIC* 1). Here again, Oskar

¹¹⁰ See the discussion and typology of different story beginnings in Krings 164-171; the textual signals creating the illusion of 'storytelling scenarios' in Nünning, *Mimesis* 29-31; Fludernik's summary of Nünning's paper in Fludernik, *Metanarrative* 4.

adds a similar comment: “I wonder if everyone’s hearts would start to beat at the same time, like how women who live together have their menstrual periods at the same time, *which I know about, but don’t really want to know about*” (*ELIC* 1 [emphasis added]). Oskar at the beginning of his narrative can thus be said to start talking about the things that occupy his mind and are important for him.¹¹¹ Instead of introducing himself, he provides us with explanations, because he obviously wants to make sure that the reader understands what he says. When talking about his “first jujitsu class” (*ELIC* 2) he not only mentions his mother for the first time but also tells us: “There were fourteen kids in the class, and we all had on neat white robes” (*ELIC* 2). It is at this point that the reader knows for certain that the narrator’s voice belongs to a child and consequently cannot really be trusted (see Nünning, *Unreliable Narration* 29-30). Moreover, we recognize the motivation for his above-mentioned comments: “I told [Sensei Mark] ..., ‘I’m a pacifist,’ and *since most people my age don’t know what that means*, I turned around and told the others, ‘I don’t think it’s right to destroy people’s privates’” (*ELIC* 2 [emphasis added]). The beginning of Oskar’s narrative can thus be said to remind the reader of the way in which a child tries to establish or get in contact with others, i.e. by telling what is important for him and by talking to the reader like to one of his peers. Although Oskar does not regularly address the reader like Alex does in his written account of his trip (see Chapter 2.1.2.1.), we are nevertheless drawn into his narrative, not only by his questions and narratorial comments but also by means of features of oral storytelling (see Nünning, *Mimesis* 29-30), which will be discussed in Chapter 3.3.3.

Oskar does not provide us with information about himself and his family at the beginning, but we get to know most of his background only incidentally and in the course of his telling his story to us. Before we get to know his name when he tells us about how he introduced himself to the driver of the limousine “in Stephen Hawking voice” (*ELIC* 4), we learn that his father is dead in connection with his “tambourine” (*ELIC* 2): “My most impressive song that I can play on my tambourine is ‘The Flight of the Bumblebee,’ by Nicolai Rimsky-Korsakov, which is also the ring tone I downloaded for the cell phone I got after Dad died” (*ELIC* 3) (see also Chapter 3.3.2). At this point Oskar also mentions Ron, but he does not tell us who he is, and we learn more about his relationship to Ron only in the course of the

¹¹¹ Compare the discussion of the beginning of Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* in Kings 165-166.

novel. Similarly, Oskar does not explicitly tell us his age, but we find out how old he is when he tells us what he got “[f]or ... [his] ninth birthday last year” (*ELIC* 3). Oskar’s narratorial comments clearly expose him as a child, who presupposes certain information about himself in his narrative, which the reader, however, does not know yet (see Krings 166; Nünning, *Mimesis* 30). Moreover, when telling us about his “ninth birthday” (*ELIC* 3) we incidentally get to know when his grandfather left his grandmother. Since Oskar mentions that he “was negative-thirty years old” (*ELIC* 3) at that time, this must have happened thirty-nine years ago. Similarly, Oskar refers to important events at the beginning without giving any further explanations and which he relates to us in detail only in the course of his narrative. Our suspense is thus raised, because we want to find out what exactly happened when, for instance, he mentions “his second time in a limousine, when the renter and ... [he] were on ... [their] way to dig up ... [his father’s] empty coffin” (*ELIC* 7-8).

As has already been pointed out above, Oskar is a nine-year-old child and thus a narrator, whose point of view we cannot really rely upon. Oskar – like Alex – overtly admits that he lies in the course of his narrative (see Nünning, *Unreliable Narration* 28). Already at the beginning he tells us that “he never used to lie to [his mother] ... before everything happened [, because he] ... didn’t have a reason to” (*ELIC* 6). It is only after having found the “weird-looking key” (*ELIC* 37) in his father’s “closet” (*ELIC* 36) and his decision “that finding the lock was [his] ... ultimate *raison d’être*” (*ELIC* 69) that he started to tell lies. In addition to overtly admitting his lies he also starts counting them: “The next morning I told Mom that I couldn’t go to school, because I was too sick. It was the first lie that I had to tell. [...] I said, ‘I took my temperature and it’s one hundred point seven degrees.’ That was the second lie” (*ELIC* 38). Shortly after this Oskar has to lie again, this time to “Stan the doorman” (*ELIC* 6): “I tried to get past him without him noticing, but he noticed. ‘You don’t look sick,’ he said [...]. I told him, ‘I feel sick.’ He asked, ‘Where’s Mr. Feeling Sick going?’ I told him, ‘To the drugstore on Eighty-fourth to get some cough drops.’ Lie #3” (*ELIC* 38). Oskar keeps counting his lies until the end of his third chapter when he tells us about his “lie #59” (*ELIC* 97) to Abby Black about his age. As the reader finds out, Oskar can be quite clever and manipulating when it comes to pursuing his “great plan ... [of] finding all of the people named Black and learning what they knew about the key” (*ELIC* 51). He thus not only lies about his age to Aaron Black (see *ELIC* 90) and Abby Black (see *ELIC* 97) but also tells the

latter that he is “diabetic and [...] need[s] some sugar asap” (ELIC 91), because he wants “to get inside her apartment” (ELIC 91).

In addition to his lies, Oskar writes a letter to his French teacher pretending to be his mother who cancels the French lessons of her son: “Obviously there is no need to call me when Oskar doesn’t come to his lessons, because I already know, because this was my decision. Also, I will keep sending you checks, because you are a nice guy” (ELIC 51). The way in which the letter is written clearly exposes Oskar as the writer of the letter and shows his cleverness but also his naivety as a nine-year-old child and consequently his unreliability as a narrator (see Nünning, *Unreliable Narration* 30). Moreover, although he does not really lie to his mother about the “copy of ... [their] apartment key” (ELIC 6), which he gave to the “mailwoman” (ELIC 6), he is clever enough not to tell his mother that he “already made copies of the key for the deliverer from Pizza Hut, and the UPS person, and also the nice guys from Greenpeace” (ELIC 7). In addition to counting his lies, Oskar also counts the disappointments that he encounters in the course of his search for the lock until the end of his third chapter when he tells us that he “lost count of the disappointments” (ELIC 107).

Despite his numerous lies, Oskar is shown to have a conscience and to know exactly when he behaves in a wrong way (see Nünning, *Unreliable Narration* 30). Thus, he not only decides that he “wouldn’t lie unless [he] ... absolutely ha[s] to” (ELIC 87) but also tells the renter, whom he encounters in his grandmother’s apartment towards the end of his search: “Also I’ve had to tell a googolplex lies, which doesn’t make me feel good about myself” (ELIC 255). When pretending to Abby Black that he is “diabetic” (ELIC 91) he mentions: “I didn’t feel great about lying [...]. In exchange for the lie, I made a promise to myself that when I got a raise in my allowance, I would donate part of that raise to people who in reality *do* have diabetes” (ELIC 91-92). As the letter from “the American Diabetes Foundation” (ELIC 151) proves later on, he really has kept this promise. Similarly, the taxi driver’s letter to Oskar shows that Oskar has indeed sent him the money, i.e. “the \$76.50 ... [he] owed ... [him]” (ELIC 193) for his drive to “visit Abe Black in Coney Island” (ELIC 147).

Moreover, Oskar establishes certain rules for himself showing that he tries to act in a well-behaved way: “I wouldn’t be sexist again, or racist, or ageist, or homophobic,

or overly wimpy, or discriminatory to handicapped people or mental retards” (ELIC 87) (see also Saval para 4). When Oskar offends his grandmother and his mother, he immediately regrets his behavior afterwards. In his argument with his mother about his father and Ron, Oskar gets very abusive and tells us that he “said something that [he] ... wasn’t planning on saying, and didn’t even want to say” (ELIC 171) and wants to apologize afterwards: “I take it back” (ELIC 172). In contrast to his grandmother and his mother, Ron seems to be the only adult whom Oskar offends without any regrets. As we learn in the course of the story, Ron is a “friend” (ELIC 35) of Oskar’s mother, whom Oskar is jealous of, because he thinks that his mother is “in love with Ron” (ELIC 35): “Mom was with Ron in the living room, listening to music too loud and playing board games. She wasn’t missing Dad” (ELIC 36). Although his mother explains to Oskar that “Ron is going through a lot, too” (ELIC 171), Oskar has no understanding for him and regards him as an intruder who wants to take up his father’s position. Here again, Oskar’s point of view proves to be unreliable, because as we learn at the end of the novel, Ron and Oskar’s mother “met in a group for people that have lost family” (ELIC 315) and Ron – like Oskar and his mother – “needs help, too” (ELIC 316).¹¹²

Oskar’s jealousy and dislike of Ron reflect how important and irreplaceable the father was for the nine-year-old boy. As has already been pointed out, he mentions his father right at the beginning of his story and not only tells us about “the Reconnaissance Expeditions” (ELIC 8), which he used to play with him (see also Chapter 3.2.2.), but also about “the night before the worst day” (ELIC 12) in his first chapter: “Being with him made my brain quiet. I didn’t have to invent a thing” (ELIC 12). After having lost his father, however, Oskar tells us that he “can’t sleep” (ELIC 10) at night and therefore “started inventing things, and then [...] couldn’t stop” (ELIC 36). As has already been mentioned above, we read about these inventions already on the very first page of the novel, even before knowing who the narrating voice of the story belongs to.

In addition to inventing all sorts of things in his mind, Oskar develops another unusual habit after his father’s death: “A few weeks after the worst day, I started writing lots of letters. I don’t know why, but it was one of the only things that made my boots lighter” (ELIC 11). As the reader finds out in the course of the novel, Oskar’s

¹¹² See the textual signals indicating a narrator’s unreliability in Nünning, *Unreliable Narration* 28; an unreliable narrator’s evaluation of events in Nünning and Nünning, *Multiperspektivität* 53-54.

letters are addressed to famous and well-known persons, such as Stephen Hawking, whose “protégé” (*ELIC* 11) he would like to become (see Hitchings, *Googlist* para 3), or Ringo Starr, whom he asks if he would give him “lessons” (*ELIC* 40). Moreover, he tells his grandmother that he writes to “Kofi Annan, Siegfried, Roy, Jacques Chirac, E. O. Wilson, Weird Al Yankovic, Bill Gates, Vladimir Putin, and some other people” (*ELIC* 106). Although Oskar receives answers to some of his letters, e.g. from Stephen Hawking and Ringo Starr, his letters again reveal him as a child who naively thinks that these people would really write their letters themselves and, even more importantly, would answer his inquiries in a positive way. Here again, the distance between Oskar’s and the reader’s knowledge of the world is underlined (see Nünning, *Unreliable Narration* 29-30).

Unlike with Alex, whose point of view mainly diverges from the reader’s perspective due to his cultural background (see Nünning, *Unreliable Narration* 30) (see Chapter 2.1.2.1.), the distance between Oskar’s and the reader’s point of view is primarily a matter of age, since the events are related to us through the eyes of a nine-year-old boy. The reader gradually gets to know Oskar’s world, i.e. the world of a child who is “not allowed to watch TV” (*ELIC* 4) and “to use curse words” (*ELIC* 5) and who most of the time tries not to misbehave. Although we almost constantly become aware of the distance between his and our own point of view throughout the novel, we nevertheless feel with him, especially because Oskar is shown to be a child who desperately “tries to cope with the loss of his father” (Hoth 287). As Hoth points out, “[t]he homodiegetic narration is likely to evoke a high degree of potential for identification or at least empathy on the part of the recipient” (287) (see also Thomas para 4).

Like in Alex’s story, in Oskar’s narrative the reader becomes aware of “[t]he narrative distance [...] between narrating and experiencing self” (Stanzel, *Narrative Situations* 66)¹¹³, which is underlined several times at the beginning. Thus, Oskar tells us: “I desperately wish I had my tambourine with me *now*, because *even after everything I’m still wearing heavy boots*, and sometimes it helps to play a good beat” (*ELIC* 2 [emphasis added]). Similarly, he refers to the change of some of his opinions due to what he experienced: “Even though I’m not anymore, I used to be an atheist [...]. It’s not that I believe in things that can’t be observed now, because

¹¹³ See also Stanzel, *Theory* 95; Jahn and Nünning 290; Nünning and Nünning, *Introduction* 111-112.

I don't. It's that I believe that things are extremely complicated" (*ELIC* 4). Moreover, when telling us about his father Oskar points out: "It isn't anymore, but for a really long time it was my dream to take over the family jewelry business" (*ELIC* 7). His comments and remarks clearly arouse suspense in the reader, because we not only want to find out what happened to him, but also what caused Oskar to change his above-mentioned opinions and dreams. Although the reader probably has already read the blurb text of the novel and therefore already knows that Oskar's "father [...] died in the World Trade Center on 9/11" (*ELIC* blurb text)¹¹⁴, we nevertheless want to know what exactly happened, especially because he tells us that he is "still wearing heavy boots" (*ELIC* 2) and that "even after a year [he] ... still had an extremely difficult time doing certain things" (*ELIC* 36).

Similarly, when Oskar tells us about his plan to "meet every person in New York with the last name Black ... [, because he] needed to do something" (*ELIC* 86-87), the reader becomes aware of the fact that Oskar's "narrating I [clearly] has a wider horizon than ... [his] experiencing I" (Jahn and Nünning 290)¹¹⁵. He thus remarks about his mother:

So for those eight months when I went looking around New York, and she would ask where I was going and when I'd be back, I would just say, "I'm going out. I'll be back later." What was so weird, and *what I should have tried harder to understand*, was that she never asked anything else, not even "Out where?" or "Later when?" even though she was normally so cautious about me, especially since Dad died. (*ELIC* 52 [emphasis added])

At this point Oskar not only comments on his experience "from the point of view of ... [his] older, more mature [...] narrating self" (Stanzel, *Narrative Situations* 66), but also anticipates an important aspect of the related search for the lock, i.e. that his mother knew about his plan right from the beginning (see also Chapter 3.2.1. and 3.2.2). Since the reader, however, learns that Oskar's mother "had talked to all of ... [the Blacks] before ... [Oskar] had" (*ELIC* 291) only towards the end of the novel (see Gessen 70), his comments at the beginning of his narrative clearly arouse our suspense, because we are left in the dark about what Oskar exactly means.

¹¹⁴ See the discussion of paratexts and cognitive frames in Rubik 343.

¹¹⁵ See also the discussion of the past self's perspective and the narrator's unreliability in Busch 50-52.

Despite the fact that the reader becomes aware of “the narrative distance” (Stanzel, *Narrative Situations* 66) in his story, especially in the first two chapters, we are not able to determine when exactly Oskar tells his story to us, since Oskar’s “precise now-and-here remains [...] uncertain” (Stanzel, *Narrative Situations* 67). Due to the narrative frame in *Everything Is Illuminated*, i.e. Alex’s letters to Jonathan, the reader can determine the exact time when Alex and Jonathan write or at least exchange the different parts of their stories (see Chapter 2.1.1.).¹¹⁶ Yet in contrast to the two narrator-characters in Foer’s first novel, Oskar is not explicitly introduced as a writer of his story. Moreover, Foer’s second novel does not contain a narrative frame (see Chapter 2.1.1). We therefore not only get the impression that Oskar tells his story to us rather than writing it down (see also Chapter 3.3.3.), but can only infer the approximate time of the “narrative delivery” (Williams 100) from what he himself mentions in the course of his story. Since he tells us that he and the renter decided to “dig[...] up ... [his father’s] empty coffin” (*ELIC* 259) on “the second anniversary of ... [his father’s] death” (*ELIC* 304), Oskar can only tell his story at some point after 9 September, 2003. Moreover, when telling us about how “the renter opened the suitcases [...] filled with papers” (*ELIC* 322) in his last chapter, Oskar remarks:

To be honest, I don’t know what I understood then. I don’t think I figured out that he was my grandpa not even in the deep parts of my brain. I definitely didn’t make the connection between the letters in his suitcase and the envelopes in Grandma’s dresser, even if I should have. But I must have understood something, I *must* have, because why else would I have opened my left hand? (*ELIC* 322)

Thus, Oskar at the time of his telling his story to us certainly has found out about the renter’s real identity, which makes us presume that he probably has read his grandmother’s letter addressed to him, which is dated “12 September 2003” (*ELIC* 75).

Another important aspect of his story is the way in which Oskar tells us about his experience of “the worst day” (*ELIC* 12). Although we get to know that his father is dead already at the very beginning, Oskar mentions how his father died only in the second third of the novel, i.e. when he talks to Abe Black, who “had a dog run away once” (*ELIC* 149): “‘But my dad didn’t run away’ [...]. ‘He was killed in a terrorist attack’” (*ELIC* 149). Moreover, and even more importantly, although Oskar

¹¹⁶ See the discussion of narrative frames and narrative delivery in Williams 100-101.

tells us about “the worst day” (*ELIC* 12) already towards the end of his first chapter, we get to know what really happened to him that day only towards the end of the novel when he talks to William Black. Oskar thus tells us about the day of the attacks towards the end of his first chapter: “[W]hen I came home from school the next day [...] I wasn’t even a little bit panicky, because both Mom and Dad worked in midtown, and Grandma didn’t work, so *everyone I loved was safe*” (*ELIC* 14 [emphasis added]). Shortly after this, however, after having told us that he “checked the phone messages” (*ELIC* 14), we get to read the first of his father’s five messages and realize that in contrast to what Oskar had thought, his father was anything but safe, but in mortal danger, because he tried to reach his family from the World Trade Center (see *ELIC* 14-15). Instead of carrying on with what happened after “the phone started ringing ... [and Oskar] looked at the caller ID and saw that it was [his father again]” (*ELIC* 15), his first chapter abruptly ends at this point. Since at the beginning of his second chapter he does not carry on where he has stopped before but starts at a different point by talking about the jewelry he made for his mother after his father’s death (see *ELIC* 35), we get to read the additional four messages of his father only gradually in the course of the novel. What he does tell us in his second chapter, however, is that he keeps “think[ing] about those four and a half minutes between when ... [he] came home and when ... [his father] called” (*ELIC* 68) and, again, that he “listened to ... [the phone messages] one after another” (*ELIC* 68) yet without telling us their exact contents. Moreover, we learn that when Oskar realized that his father was in danger he did not know what to do obviously because of “the shock of the first moment” (Caruth, *Trauma and Experience* 10). What Oskar knew, however, was that he “could never let ... [his mother] hear the messages” (*ELIC* 68), because he wanted to protect her. He thus goes on by telling us what he did after having listened to his father’s messages: “I went to the Radio Shack on Amsterdam. It was on a TV there that I saw that the first building had fallen. I bought the exact same phone ... [and] wrapped up the old phone in the scarf that Grandma was never able to finish [...] and [...] put that [...] under a bunch of stuff in my closet” (*ELIC* 68).

The hidden phone with his father’s messages, however, is a secret which turns out to be a burden on the child¹¹⁷: “That secret was a hole in the middle of me that every happy thing fell into” (*ELIC* 71). Although Oskar mentions several times that he did try to talk to his mother and his grandmother about what happened (see

¹¹⁷ See Adams para 5; Deveson para 2; Hitchings, *Googlist* para 4; Kim para 4.

ELIC 51, 71, 105), he obviously cannot. In contrast to what Hoth points out, i.e. that Oskar “does not want to talk to either his mother or his grandmother” (289), it seems more plausible that he simply cannot talk about what happened, because of the shock he suffered (see Caruth, *Trauma and Experience* 10). This becomes most evident when we learn towards the end of the novel that Oskar could not answer his father’s last call before he died in the World Trade Center. The important aspect is that Oskar talks about – and we thus get to read – the contents of the five phone messages recorded on the hidden phone only gradually, i.e. one after the other, in the course of the novel. Oskar twice listens to the messages secretly in his room (see *ELIC* 69, 207) (see Hoth 288) and once lets the renter listen to them when he finds him in his grandmother’s apartment (see *ELIC* 255, 280). Thus, each time Oskar unwraps “the phone [and takes it] out of all its protections” (*ELIC* 69), we get to read another of his father’s messages. The fact that Oskar only little by little breaks his silence and is able to tell us what happened that day only gradually in the course of the novel reflects how difficult it is for him to talk about the events of that day (see Saval para 9). The reader thus becomes aware of the child’s “struggles to communicate [the] traumatic experience” (Caruth, *Recapturing* 156) of his father’s death, i.e. his “confrontation with an event that, in its unexpectedness of horror” (Caruth, *Recapturing* 153), is simply too much for Oskar, who at the time of the terrorist attacks was only eight years old.

Moreover, as has already been mentioned earlier, after his father’s death Oskar “can’t sleep” (*ELIC* 10) at night and therefore “started inventing things, and then [...] couldn’t stop, like beavers” (*ELIC* 36). His inventions reflect another important aspect of his traumatic experience, i.e. although he cannot talk about what happened he nevertheless cannot “stop thinking about it” (Mason para 15)¹¹⁸: “To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event” (Caruth, *Trauma and Experience* 4). Thus, Oskar tells the renter, whom he hardly knows: “I want to stop inventing. If I could know how he died, exactly how he died, I wouldn’t have to invent him dying [...]” (*ELIC* 257). Oskar’s inventions, which we not only read about already at the very beginning of the novel but throughout his narrative, thus regularly refer the reader to his father’s death and Oskar’s trauma (see Hoth 288). Moreover, they can be said to constitute a leitmotif, i.e. “[a] frequently repeated [...] situation [...], the recurrence of which [...] indicates ... [and] supports ... [one of the novel’s] theme[s]” (Baldick 185), namely the child’s traumatic experience (see

¹¹⁸ See also Charles para 3; Hoth 288; Siegel para 6.

also Chapter 3.4.), and it thus gives Oskar's story a kind of rhythm.¹¹⁹ Each time we read about his inventions we are made aware of the fact that Oscar experienced the day of the attacks and his father's unexpected death as "overwhelming events ... [which] repeatedly possess [him], in intrusive images and thoughts" (Caruth, *Recapturing* 151).

Since Oskar obviously cannot talk about what happened, neither to his mother nor his grandmother, he has to do something in order "to cope with the loss" (Hoth 287) and "the grief" (Faber para 2): "I needed to do something, like sharks, who die if they don't swim, which I know about" (see *ELIC* 87). The key he finds in his father's closet and his ensuing plan to find the lock in order to find out how his father died thus reflect the boy's attempt to "put an end to his trauma" (Saval para 3). Oskar points out that "[e]very time [he went] ... searching for the lock, [he] ... became a little lighter, because [he] ... was getting closer to" (*ELIC* 52) his father, or at least he felt so. Because of his not being able to let go of his father, "Oskar becomes obsessed with finding out whom the key belongs to" (Kakutani para 6). In contrast to his chaotic and restless inner self, which is primarily portrayed through his numerous inventions, his plan to "meet every person in New York with the last name Black" (*ELIC* 86-87) reflects an ordered intellectual effort (see Caruth, *Recapturing* 153). His decision to "go through the names alphabetically, from Aaron to Zyna," (*ELIC* 87), also implies and suggests a circular movement and consequently his being caught up within his traumatic experience. As Oskar tells us, he starts at the beginning of the alphabet and works through until the letters 'P' and 'R' – he visits "Peter [Black] ... in Sugar Hill" (*ELIC* 287) and "Ruth Black [...] on [top] ... of the Empire State Building" (*ELIC* 243). Having arrived almost at the end, however, he turns towards the beginning of his search and the alphabet, i.e. to Abby Black, whose "message had been waiting for ... [him] for eight months" (*ELIC* 288) and who admits that she "*wasn't completely honest with*" (*ELIC* 288) him when he first visited her. Oskar towards the end of the novel thus meets William Black, i.e. he "finds the right Black – [but] ... learns that the key was in his father's possession entirely by accident; it was the key to nothing all along" (Gessen 72). The circular structure of Oskar's search for the lock thus can be said to reflect an important thematic aspect, i.e. his being caught up within his traumatic experience and his inability to accept his father's unexpected death. In this connec-

¹¹⁹ For the concept of the 'leitmotif' see also Bielefeldt 341; Fludernik, *Einführung* 91; Schneider 31; Wolf, "Leitmotif" 276. See also *Interview with JS Foer* para 36.

tion it is interesting to mention that Oskar throughout the novel refers to his father as his 'dad' and thus uses a word which "palindromically suggests [...] circularity" (Waugh 142; see also Hutcheon, *Narrative* 101, 121). Oskar's traumatic experience is therefore reflected in formal devices, which "direct [the reader] ... to the main themes of the novel" (Hutcheon, *Narrative* 101). Thus Oskar's difficulties of talking about and coming to terms with what he experienced are additionally underlined.

Having found William Black, Oskar is finally able to talk about what really happened on the day of his father's death towards the end of the novel. We thus learn that "his father's final telephone call[...] went unanswered because [Oskar] ..., home alone, was too scared to lift the receiver" (Adams para 5). The important point is not only that Oskar talks about this experience for the first time but also that he asks William Black: "'Do you forgive me?' [...] 'For not being able to tell anyone'" (*ELIC* 302). Breaking his silence by talking about the events of that day thus seems to be a great relief for him (see Hoth 293), and it is at this point that the reader fully becomes aware of the traumatizing effect these events had on the eight-year-old child.

Oskar's plan to "dig[...] up [his father's] ...empty coffin" (*ELIC* 259) is another way of trying "to cope with the loss of his father" (Hoth 287). It helps him "to accept that his father is really gone" (Hoth 291) and enables him to "open[...] up to his mother for the first time and [to] share[...] his grief with her" (Hoth 291). Oskar thus tells us: "It was the first time since Dad died that I'd seen her not to try to stop her tears. [...] I cried so much that everything blurred into everything else" (*ELIC* 324). Oskar's narrative thus can be said to reflect his effort to overcome his traumatic experience by trying to talk about it and to "transform[...] [it] ... into a narrative memory that allows the story to be verbalized and communicated" (Caruth, *Recapturing* 153; see also Rothberg 136).

3.1.2.2. Grandfather

Like Oskar, his grandfather is a first-person narrator. Yet unlike Oskar's narrative, which evokes the impression of being told to us, his grandfather's letters clearly appear as a written form of narrative: "The writing of letters is equivalent to the

situation of the narrative act" (Stanzel, *Narrative Situations* 66)¹²⁰. Moreover, unlike with Oskar's narrative, the reader can identify the exact time when the letters are written, i.e. they are dated "5/12/63" (*ELIC* 16, 108), "4/12/78" (*ELIC* 208) and "9/11/03" (*ELIC* 262).

The unusual aspect of the first letter of Oskar's grandfather, however, is that it is addressed to his "unborn child" (*ELIC* 16), especially because the reader is not able to identify the "textual I" (Fludernik, *Narratology* 277) at the beginning, i.e. in the first part of his letter. Although we already know from Oskar that his grandfather left his grandmother thirty-nine years ago, it is only after having read the first part of the letter of Oskar's grandmother that we realize that these letters are written by Oskar's grandfather to Oskar's father. When his grandmother tells Oskar how she met "a childhood friend [...] at the moment ... [she] most needed him" (*ELIC* 79) and that "he and ... [her] older sister, Anna, were friends" (*ELIC* 80) the reader realizes that the letters of Oskar's grandparents obviously overlap, i.e. they both contain information about the same past events and circumstances (see Hoth 292). The concept of multiperspectivity, which will be closely analyzed in Chapter 3.2.1., can thus be said to "help [the reader] to narrativize" (Fludernik, *Narratology* 314) the different parts of the novel by relating the information provided to us in the different narrative strands (see Nünning and Nünning, *Multiperspektivität* 58).

Like Oskar, his grandfather does not introduce himself at the beginning, and it is thus only in the course of the novel that we gradually get to know his background and, even more importantly, realize why his first letter is addressed to his "unborn child" (*ELIC* 16), i.e. because he left his wife before his son was born. He points out at the end of the second part of his first letter dated "5/21/63" (*ELIC* 108), "I'm sitting in an airport trying to explain myself" (*ELIC* 113). He tells his unborn child how he lost his words and, even more importantly, that he lost "the only person ... [he] could have spent ... [his] only life with" (*ELIC* 33). What strikes the reader, however, is that Oskar's grandfather obviously presumes that his unborn child will be a son: "I'm [...] trying to explain myself to my unborn son" (*ELIC* 113 [emphasis added]). Since at this point he cannot possibly know yet whether his child will be a son or a daughter, this remark somehow puzzles the reader. However, it remains unclear whether at this point Oskar's grandfather merely assumes or expresses his

¹²⁰ See also Fludernik, *Narratology* 168.

wish that his wife will give birth to a son, or whether this remark constitutes an impossible metaleptic instance at which the real author outside the fictional world anticipates future events which the fictional character cannot possibly have knowledge of (see Wolf, *Ästhetische Illusion* 359-361).

In this letter we also learn that he is about to leave his wife (see *ELIC* 108) and that he feels sorry for it: “I’m sorry. That’s what I’ve been trying to say to you, I’m sorry for everything. [...] I’m sorry for what I’m about to do to your mother and to you. I’m sorry I’ll never get to see your face, and feed you, and tell you bedtime stories” (*ELIC* 132). Although he points out that he will “never write another word again” (*ELIC* 135) at the end of this letter, we get to read additional letters addressed “to ... [his] child” (*ELIC* 208, 267) written by him at a later time. Thus, in his second letter dated “4/12/78” (*ELIC* 208) we not only learn that he went back to Dresden but also that he obviously has never sent his letters to his son: “I’m sitting in this library, thousands of miles from my life, *writing another letter I know I won’t be able to send*, no matter how hard I try and how much I want to” (*ELIC* 216 [emphasis added]). Apart from the fact that this letter is marked with a red pen, the reason for which will be discussed in Chapter 3.2.2., it is important, because it contains his memories of the bombings of Dresden in 1945. We thus learn about the traumatic experience of his youth and how he “lost everything” (*ELIC* 30), i.e. not only his parents but, even more importantly, also Anna, who was “pregnant” (*ELIC* 210) by him.

Like Oskar, his grandfather is shown to try “to cope with [this traumatic] ... loss” (Hoth 287). Already at the beginning of his first letter he mentions the love of his life in connection with how he lost his words: “[S]he was the only thing I wanted to talk about, it kept happening, when I didn’t have a pen, I’d write “Anna” in the air – backward and right to left – [...], and when I was on the phone I’d dial the numbers – 2, 6, 6, 2 – so that the person could hear what I couldn’t, myself, say” (*ELIC* 16). The reader thus becomes aware of this “palindromic[...]

(Waugh 142) name, which again “suggests [...] circularity” (Waugh 142; see also Hutcheon, *Narrative* 101, 121). Like the palindrome ‘dad’ formally can be said to underline Oskar’s circular movement and his being caught up within his traumatic experience of having lost his father (see Chapter 3.1.2.1.), the name ‘Anna’ reflects the grandfather’s traumatic loss and his inability to let go of this beloved person – “the cancer of never letting go” (*ELIC* 17). As he writes to his son in the second part of his first

letter: “I’m thinking of Anna, I would give everything never to think about her again, I can only hold on to the things I want to lose” (*ELIC* 113). Moreover, like Oskar, his grandfather tries to overcome the trauma he has suffered: “Sometimes I think if I could tell you what happened to me that night, I could leave that night behind me, maybe I could come home to you, but that night has no beginning or end” (*ELIC* 208). Furthermore, similar to Oskar, his grandfather turns out to move in a circle. As we learn in the course of the novel, he moved from Dresden to New York after having survived the bombings, but could not stay there when he learned that his wife was pregnant. Consequently, in 1963 he decided to go back to Dresden. Having “lost everything for the second time” (*ELIC* 272), i.e. after his son’s death in 2001, he moves to New York again where he lives “in the guest room” (*ELIC* 274) and “follow[s] [Oskar] all over the city” (*ELIC* 278) in order to protect him (see also Chapter 3.2.1). Finally, we learn from his wife’s letter to Oskar that in September 2003 he sits at the airport together with her and does not know where to go (see *ELIC* 311-312).

Moreover, Oskar’s grandfather is shown to have been “so traumatized by his experiences that he stopped speaking and took to writing down everything instead” (Kakutani para 9)¹²¹. As he tells his son in his first letter, he was only able to communicate by writing in his “day book[s]” (*ELIC* 31) after his first arrival in New York (see Hoth 292). Apart from his general inability to speak, which “overtook [him] ... like a cancer” (*ELIC* 16), he is shown to be unable to talk about what happened to him to his family, i. e. his wife:

When your mother found me in the bakery on Broadway, I wanted to tell her everything, maybe if I’d been able to, we could have lived differently, maybe I’d be there with you instead of here. Maybe if I had said, “I lost a baby,” [...] maybe that would have made the impossible possible. Maybe, but I couldn’t do it, I had buried too much too deeply inside me. (*ELIC* 216)

Like Oskar, his grandfather thus seems to be isolated and unable to express his feelings. Although he points out that he “wanted to pull the thread and unravel the scarf of [his] ... silence” (*ELIC* 17) (see also Chapter 3.3.1.), he later on writes to his son that he and his wife “never talk[ed] about the past, [which was] ... a rule” (*ELIC* 108).

¹²¹ See also Almond para 9; Faber para 6; Hoth 292.

Although his grandfather is, of course, much older than Oskar, he nevertheless proves himself an unreliable narrator, at least as far as his memories of his marriage with Oskar's grandmother are concerned. After having read the letters of both grandparents in which they both write about how they first met each other "at the Columbian Bakery on Broadway" (*ELIC* 28; see also *ELIC* 81), we realize that their accounts partly diverge from each other (see Hoth 292). In contrast to what "Thomas [Schell] sen." (Hoth 292) writes to his son, Oskar's grandmother tells her grandson that she did not ask his grandfather to marry her already at their first meeting at the bakery, but that she first "posed for him" (*ELIC* 82) and "made love" (*ELIC* 84) to him. Only then did they "walk[...] together to the bakery where ... [they] first met" (*ELIC* 84) and she asked him to marry her. We obviously get to read two different versions of the same past event, and we thus become aware of the narrators' unreliability (see Nünning, *Unreliable Narration* 28). Moreover, since we are not able to say which of the grandparents' accounts is the more reliable one (see Nünning and Nünning, *Multiperspektivität* 53-54; Surkamp 112, 130-131), we are unable to determine the exact circumstances of their first encounter in the United States after having survived the bombings of Dresden in 1945. In addition to this first instance of their partly contradicting perspectives (Nünning and Nünning, *Multiperspektivität* 58), which draws the reader's attention to their unreliability as narrators, we learn about other events of their past in different and partly diverging versions, which will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3.2.1. Whereas Oskar's unreliability as a first-person narrator primarily is a matter of age, i.e. he is a child-narrator with a limited knowledge of the world (see Nünning, *Unreliable Narration* 30), the grandparents' unreliability turns out to be the result of their subjective and diverging memories of the past (see Nünning, *Unreliable Narration* 30; Nünning and Nünning, *Multiperspektivität* 58).

Although, compared to Oskar's narrative, his grandfather's letters and consequently his perspective clearly take up a minor part within the novel (see Nünning and Nünning, *Multiperspektivität* 56), they nevertheless provide us with important information which we would not get otherwise, i.e. neither through Oskar's nor his grandmother's perspective (see Nünning and Nünning, *Multiperspektivität* 57-58) (see Chapter 3.2.1.). Moreover, by writing about what happened to him after his second arrival in New York after his son's death in his last, i.e. his third, letter dated "9/11/03 (*ELIC* 262), we get to read about the first encounter between him and Oskar through two different perspectives, i.e. both Oskar's and his grandfa-

ther's. As will be shown in Chapter 3.2.1., their accounts do not contradict each other, but they nevertheless differ from each other. Finally, his letters not only contain typographic peculiarities (see Chapter 3.2.2.), but – like Oskar's narrative – also photographs, which will be analyzed in Chapter 3.3.2.

3.1.2.3. Grandmother

Like Oskar's grandfather, his grandmother also writes a letter, which we get to read in four parts in the course of the novel. Yet in contrast to his grandfather, the reader can identify her more easily as the writer of the letter. Oskar is explicitly addressed at the beginning of her letter dated "12 September 2003" (*ELIC* 75). Moreover, she mentions that she is "an old woman now, but once [...] was a girl" (*ELIC* 75). When she tells Oskar: "So I asked my father, your great-grandfather, [...] to write a letter to me," (*ELIC* 76) we realize that the letter is written by Oskar's grandmother. Like his grandfather in 1963, she writes "from the airport" (*ELIC* 75), although forty years later, i.e. in 2003, and like her husband, she tries to explain herself in her letter: "I have so much to say to you. I want to begin at the beginning, because that is what you deserve. I want to tell you everything, without leaving out a single detail" (*ELIC* 75). As Mason points out in his review, Oskar's grandmother "is writing a kind of valediction to her grandson" (para 18).

Although she tells Oskar in the first part of her letter that she "want[s] to begin at the beginning" (*ELIC* 75), we realize that especially after the first part of her letter her "thoughts ... [keep] wandering [...] to Dresden" (*ELIC* 181) and back to when she "was a girl" (*ELIC* 75). We thus learn that, like her husband, she survived the bombings of Dresden in 1945 (see Hoth 292). After having read the second part of the first letter of Oskar's grandfather, we realize why her letter is entitled "MY FEELINGS" (*ELIC* 75, 174, 224, 306), i.e. because her husband suggested to her a long time ago: "You could write about your feelings" (*ELIC* 130). As he mentions in his own letter, he wanted to help her to cope with the past: "I thought maybe if she could express herself rather than suffer herself, if she had a way to relieve the burden" (*ELIC* 119). As we learn, however, she not only told her husband that her "eyes were crummy, because ... [she] wanted him to pay attention to ... [her]" (*ELIC* 176), but also wrote "her life story every day on a typewriter with no ribbon" (Charles para 7) and merely "pretended to write" (*ELIC* 176): "I hit the space bar

again and again and again" (*ELIC* 176)¹²² (see also Chapter 3.2.2.). Thus, Oskar's grandmother obviously could not write about her feelings at that time of her marriage and – like her husband and her grandson – is shown to be unable to talk about her traumatic experience, i.e. the loss of her parents and her "older sister, Anna" (*ELIC* 80), for a long time.

Although she points out that her "marriage was not unhappy" (*ELIC* 175), she tells Oskar that she "needed a child" (*ELIC* 177): "One morning I awoke and understood the hole in the middle of me. [...] It was not out of weakness that I made it happen, but it was not out of strength either. It was out of need. I needed a child" (*ELIC* 177). The child thus helps her to be able to go on with her life, although she, too, cannot really let go of the past. She thus writes to Oskar about her son's funeral: "When we got to the grave and they lowered the empty coffin, you let out a noise like an animal. [...] You were a wounded animal. [...] *It was what I had spent forty years looking for, what I wanted my life and life story to be. [...] All of my sounds were locked inside me*" (*ELIC* 232-233 [emphasis added]).

Moreover, Oskar tells us in his third chapter that although he spends a lot of time with his grandmother, he does not know her very well (see also Gessen 68):

[T]here were a lot of people that I knew better. For example, I didn't know anything about what it was like when she was a kid, or how she met Grandpa, or what their marriage was like, or why he left. If I had to write her life story, all I could say is that her husband could talk to animals, and that I should never love anything as much as she loved me. (*ELIC* 105)

It is thus obviously only two years after her son's death, i.e. in September 2003 when she sits at the airport together with her husband (see *ELIC* 174), that she is able to express her feelings and tell her grandson about the past and the things she has not been able to talk about for so many years. In the last part of her letter to Oskar she thus remembers the last time she saw her father (see *ELIC* 308) and the "night before [she] ... lost everything [which] was like any other night" (*ELIC* 313), i.e. she was talking to her sister Anna before falling asleep. Moreover, she writes about her "dream [in which] ... [t]he fire went back into the bombs, which rose up and into the bellies of planes whose propellers turned backward" (*ELIC* 306-307). Apart from being able to write about the night of the bombings for the first time and "verbaliz[ing] and communicat[ing]" (Caruth, *Recapturing* 153)

¹²² See also Faber para 6; Saval para 7; Thomas para 5.

her traumatic experience, her dream, in which time runs backward, reflects her wish that the horrible events of that night should never have happened (see Mason para 20). It can thus be related to the ending of the novel when Oskar “reverse[s] the order” (*ELIC* 325) of “the pictures of the falling body” (*ELIC* 325) and imagines time running backwards (see Chapter 3.3.2.). Like Oskar and his grandfather, his grandmother writes about “the worst day” (*ELIC* 12) in the third part of her letter, and we get to know how she experienced and perceived the day of the terrorist attacks when her son was killed (see Chapter 3.2.1.). Moreover, it is in her letter that we get to read what happened to Oskar’s grandfather after having dug up his son’s empty coffin together with his grandson, and we thus, again, get to know certain events only through her letter to Oskar.

As has already been mentioned in the last chapter, her perspective and account of some past events prove to be unreliable. Since we also get to read her husband’s account of their marriage, which partly differs from what she writes to Oskar, we are not able to determine which of the two perspectives is the more reliable one (see Nünning and Nünning, *Multiperspektivität* 53-54) (see also Chapter 3.2.1.).

Finally, it seems interesting to mention that unlike with her “older sister, Anna,” (*ELIC* 80), we do not get to know her first name throughout the novel. In the letters of Oskar’s grandfather to his son she is referred to as “your mother” (*ELIC* 28) throughout. Although we learn that “her maiden name” (*ELIC* 274) was “Schmidt” (*ELIC* 274), which she took on again after her husband had left her (see *ELIC* 274), Oskar’s grandfather never addresses her with her first name. Similarly, Oskar refers to his grandmother as “Grandma” (“*ELIC* 3) throughout his narrative, and in her own letter she never mentions her first name either. We thus primarily get to know her as Oskar’s grandmother and as a mother who has lost her son.

3.2. Storyworlds

Although the author does not make use of any explicit metafictional techniques like in *Everything Is Illuminated* (see Chapter 2.1.2.), he uses a number of implicit metafictional techniques as defined in Chapter 2.2., which partly undermine our illusion of the portrayed storyworld (see Wolf, *Ästhetische Illusion* 226).

3.2.1. Multiperspectivity

As has already been mentioned above, we realize in the course of the reading process that some of the events are related to us by more than one of the three narrator-characters at different points in the novel. We thus become aware of the novel's multiperspectivity, a concept which Nünning and Nünning define as follows: "Multiperspektivisches Erzählen liegt in solchen narrativen Texten vor, in denen [...] es zwei oder mehrere Erzählinstanzen [...] gibt, die dasselbe Geschehen jeweils von ihrem Standpunkt aus in unterschiedlicher Weise schildern" (*Perspektivenstruktur* 18). As has already been pointed out in Chapter 3.1.1., the three perspectives of Oskar and his grandparents are presented alternately "in a repeating pattern" (Mason para 18) and are situated on the same narrative level (see Nünning and Nünning, *Multiperspektivität* 55-56).

Although the letters of Oskar's grandparents both comprise four parts and thus approximately have the same length, they turn out to be partly contradictory and therefore to some degree incompatible (see Nünning and Nünning, *Multiperspektivität* 56, 58, 64), at least as far as some events of the past are concerned. As has already been pointed out in Chapter 3.1.2.2. and 3.1.2.3., their accounts of how they first met each other in New York after having survived the bombings of Dresden partly contradict each other (see *ELIC* 28-34, 82-85) and consequently draw our attention to their unreliability as narrators (see Nünning, *Unreliable Narration* 28; Nünning and Nünning, *Multiperspektivität* 53-54). Moreover, we learn from the second part of the letter of Oskar's grandfather dated "5/21/63" (*ELIC* 108) that although he knew that he would leave his wife that day, he did not tell her but pretended to go to the airport as usual to get some magazines for her (see *ELIC* 132). Apart from the fact that, unlike his wife in her letter to Oskar, he does not mention her pregnancy, we get to read a few pages containing only single sentences at the end of this letter which we cannot really make sense of, because we do not know exactly who utters them (see *ELIC* 137-141). Our illusion is thus partly undermined because of the dialogue's incoherence (see Wolf, *Ästhetische Illusion* 397, 399). It is thus only later on in the course of the novel, i.e. in the second part of the letter written by Oskar's grandmother, that we understand the context of these sentences and realize that it was her who followed her husband to the airport and talked to him (see *ELIC* 179). Moreover, his wife writes to her grandson that although her husband did not tell her, she knew that he was about to leave her, be-

cause she “lifted his suitcase and it felt heavy” (*ELIC* 178). Even more importantly, she tells Oskar that his grandfather came back with her from the airport and left her only the next day: “He wrote, I want to go home. [...] We went straight to the jewelry store. He left his suitcase in the back room. [...] The next morning he went to the airport. I didn’t dare feel his suitcase. I waited for him to come home. [...] Years were passing through the spaces between moments” (*ELIC* 185). Their accounts of how Oskar’s grandfather left his wife in 1963 are thus also shown to partly contradict each other and therefore draw our attention to their unreliability (see Nünning and Nünning, *Multiperspektivität* 53-54; Nünning, *Unreliable Narration* 28).

Moreover, by becoming aware of the differences between their accounts we realize that we are unable to find out or reconstruct how certain things in the past really happened, especially the first encounter of Oskar’s grandparents and the day when his grandfather left his grandmother. As Surkamp points out,

die Leser [werden] darüber im Unklaren gelassen [...], welche der dargestellten möglichen Versionen des Geschehens jeweils als die ‚richtige‘ anzusehen ist. [...] Die Einzelwelten relativieren einander in ihrem Wahrheitsanspruch, ... [was] die Vorstellung von einer Wirklichkeit [...] in Zweifel [zieht] und [darauf hin] deutet [...], daß Wirklichkeit nicht objektiv wahrnehmbar, sondern nur subjektiv konstruierbar ist. (130-131)

The novel’s multiperspectivity can thus be said to partly undermine our illusion of the portrayed storyworld, because what is narrated to us through different perspectives cannot be related to some sort of objective truth (see Nünning and Nünning, *Perspektivenstruktur* 20, 30; Wolf, *Ästhetische Illusion* 418).

Although the two perspectives of Oskar’s grandparents turn out to be partly incompatible, their letters for the most part can be said to cohere with each other (see Nünning and Nünning, *Multiperspektivität* 58, 64). However, we get to read them at different points of the novel and thus not only have to switch between the various stages of the three different narrative strands, but also have to piece them together and try to make sense of the different perspectives, i.e. we have to narrativize them (see Fludernik, *Narratology* 45-46), which further complicates the reading process (see Nünning and Nünning, *Multiperspektivität* 52, 62-63, 73). Furthermore, by piecing together the information provided to us by both grandparents in the course of the novel we are able to reconstruct the related events, i.e. “die von den verschiedenen Perspektiventrägern entworfenen Versionen des Geschehens

[fügen] sich allmählich zu einem Gesamtbild zusammen[...]" (Nünning and Nünning, *Multiperspektivität* 58; see also Surkamp 128), at least as far as their perspectives do not contradict each other. Moreover, we become aware of their individual perceptions and personal feelings: "Die multiperspektivische Auffächerung der fiktiven Welt verlagert die Aufmerksamkeit des Rezipienten [...] auf die Subjektivität der Perspektiventräger" (Nünning and Nünning, *Perspektivenstruktur* 20, 30). By reading their different accounts of the past we thus not only get to know what is important for each of them, but – as will be shown in the course of this chapter – we also learn certain facts only through one of their perspectives.

As has already been pointed out earlier, the central event of the past for both grandparents is the night when Dresden was destroyed by the Allied forces in February 1945 (see Hoth 292; *Dresden: Geschichte* para 6). The memories of Oskar's grandfather of how he experienced and survived the bombings almost take up the whole of his second letter written on "4/12/78" (*ELIC* 208), in which we get to read his horrifying account of that night (see also Chapter 3.1.2.2.): "I can't stop thinking about that night, the clusters of red flares, the sky that was like black water, and how only hours before I lost everything, I had everything. Your aunt had told me she was pregnant, I was overjoyed, I should have known not to trust it, one hundred years of joy can be erased in one second" (*ELIC* 215). Moreover, it is important to mention that according to Oskar's grandfather, the father of Oskar's grandmother "survived the bombing and then killed himself" (*ELIC* 215). In contrast to what he writes to his son, Oskar's grandmother does not mention her father's suicide in her letter to Oskar. Her memories of the night of the bombings are not only more dispersed, and we therefore get to read them only gradually in the course of the novel (see also Chapter 3.1.2.3.), but also turn out to be partly contradictory and therefore to some degree unreliable. According to what she tells her grandson in the third part of her letter, i.e. that "[t]he morning [after the bombings her] ... father had [them] ... carve [their] ... names into the stump of the tree that fell away from [their] ... house" (*ELIC* 225), he must have survived the night of the bombings. In contrast to this, however, she writes in the last part of her letter that she "can't remember the last thing [her] father [ever] said to" her (*ELIC* 308) the night when their house was destroyed by the fire, which makes us conclude that he did not say anything to her after that night and therefore most likely did not survive. At this point, the reader thus again becomes aware not only of how the events of the past cannot wholly be reconstructed, but also of how the two perspectives of Oskar's

grandparents diverge from each other (see Nünning and Nünning, *Multiperspektivität* 57, 64). Another interesting and important instance of their different perspectives is Anna's pregnancy. As has already been pointed out in Chapter 3.1.2.2., Oskar's grandfather cannot tell his wife about it (see *ELIC* 216). Yet in contrast to what he had thought, his wife did know about her sister's pregnancy all the time. In the last part of her letter she writes to Oskar how her husband is finally able to tell her that "Anna was pregnant" (*ELIC* 310) when they sit together at the airport in 2003. It thus turns out that although each of them has thought that the other did not know about it, they both did know, but simply could not talk about it. We thus, again, become aware of the characters' isolation and their inability to talk about their traumatic experiences (see also Chapter 3.4.).

The novel's most central events, which are related to us through all three perspectives, are the terrorist attacks of 9/11 (see Hoth 287-291). As has already been discussed in Chapter 3.1.2.1., although Oskar in his narrative always comes back to that day, he cannot talk about what really happened until towards the end of the novel when he finds William Black and tells him about his secret, i.e. that when his father called for the last time he "couldn't pick up the phone" (*ELIC* 301). Since it is his perspective which is presented first, it is given the most prominent position within the novel (see Nünning and Nünning, *Multiperspektivität* 56; Surkamp 125; Hoth 287). Moreover, Oskar's narrative takes up the main part of the novel, and the reader is therefore most likely to identify with and to feel sympathy for him (see Nünning and Nünning, *Multiperspektivität* 56; Surkamp 125; Hoth 297). We thus not only become aware of the traumatizing effect that the attacks had on the child, but also of his "struggles to communicate [and talk about his] traumatic experience" (Caruth, *Recapturing* 156). Compared to Oskar, his grandmother's account can be said to be more coherent. Unlike her memories of the past, her account of the day of her son's death, which we get to read in the third part of her letter, is more continual and only at some points shortly interrupted by her thoughts of "the worst storm of [her] ... childhood" (*ELIC* 225), which she "remember[s]" (*ELIC* 225) while "writing [...] to [her grandson] ... from the airport" (*ELIC* 75) (see also Chapter 3.3.3.). The important difference between her and Oskar's perspective is that his grandmother provides the reader with information about what happened that day which Oskar has no knowledge of and therefore does not mention in his narrative. We thus become aware of the fact that, due to her age, her perspective is not only much wider but also more mature than that of her nine-year-old grandson

(see Nünning and Nünning, *Multiperspektivität* 57-58; Surkamp 126). Her account of that day also reflects how she experienced the horrifying events as repeated images “on the television” (*ELIC* 230) (see Hoth 285-286) (see also Chapter 3.3.3.). After having read the third part of the letter of Oskar’s grandmother, in which she writes about the day of the attacks, we finally get to read how Oskar’s grandfather experienced that day. We learn from his last letter written on “9/11/03” (*ELIC* 262) that he “was in Dresden’s train station when [he] ... lost everything for the second time” (*ELIC* 272) and that he also saw the attacks on the “the televisions” (*ELIC* 272) there: “I didn’t understand what I was seeing on the screen, was it a commercial, a new movie?” (*ELIC* 272). Apart from the fact that he realized that his son was killed only weeks after the attacks (see *ELIC* 272), his account of that day is only very short, i.e. it comprises approximately one page, especially when it is compared to his memories of the bombings of Dresden. Moreover, it can be said to reflect the distance between him and his son, to whom he writes a letter every day, but with whom he never really had a relationship.

Apart from the day of the attacks, the day of the funeral of Oskar’s father is also related to us by all three narrator-characters. Whereas Oskar mentions that day already in his first chapter in connection with his “first time” (*ELIC* 3) “in a limousine” (*ELIC* 3) (see also Chapter 3.1.2.1.), we get to read what his grandmother writes about it only towards the end of the third part of her letter (see *ELIC* 232-233), i.e. at a relatively late point of the novel. By comparing their different perspectives we find out that although Oskar mentions that “it was an incredibly sad day” (*ELIC* 7) and that he tried to “make [others] ... crack up, [so that his] ... boots could be a little lighter” (*ELIC* 5), he does not tell us anything about the funeral itself. It is thus only through his grandmother’s letter that we learn about it and, once more become aware of her wider and more mature perspective (see Nünning and Nünning, *Multiperspektivität* 57-58; Surkamp 126):

You made jokes to the driver, but I could see that inside you were suffering. Making him laugh was how you suffered. When we got to the grave and they lowered the empty coffin, you let out a noise like an animal. [...] You were a wounded animal. The noise is still in my ears. [...] Your mother took you to the side and held you. (*ELIC* 232-233)

Unlike Oskar and his grandmother, his grandfather did not take part in the funeral. He nevertheless writes about that day in his last letter, because it was the day when he arrived in New York for the second time. We thus find out that his account

partly overlaps with what his wife writes to Oskar, i.e. they both write about the grandfather's note which he "gave to [the] ... doorman" (*ELIC* 267). Moreover, we realize that both Oskar and his grandfather mention the note of Oskar's grandmother saying "'Don't go away'" (*ELIC* 70, 101, 267). Reading the last letter of Oskar's grandfather we retrospectively are thus able to make sense of what Oskar only briefly mentions about this note already at the beginning of his narrative, i.e. in his second and third chapter (see *ELIC* 70, 101). Again, by piecing together the information provided by the different narrator-characters at different points, the reader is able to reconstruct the events (see Nünning and Nünning, *Multiperspektivität* 58). On the other hand, however, since we find this information dispersed across the novel and we get to know it only at different points in the course of it, the reading process becomes more difficult and complicated (see Nünning and Nünning, *Multiperspektivität* 52, 62-63, 73).

The unsent letters of Oskar's grandfather to his son are also referred to by all three narrator-characters and thus once again show how the different perspectives overlap. They are first mentioned by Oskar's grandfather at the end of his second letter written on "4/12/78" (*ELIC* 208) (see also Chapter 3.1.2.2.). Oskar's grandmother writes about them in the third part of her letter to Oskar: "When your grandfather left me forty years ago, [...] I thought he would write. [...] For forty years not a word. Only empty envelopes" (*ELIC* 233). Shortly after this, we learn from Oskar how he found these "envelopes [...] tied together in bundles" (*ELIC* 235) in his grandmother's "dresser" (*ELIC* 235). "I saw from the postmarks that the envelopes were [...] mailed from Dresden, Germany, which is where she came from. There was one for every day, from May 31, 1963, to the worst day. Some were addressed 'To my unborn child.' Some were addressed 'To my child'" (*ELIC* 235). As far as the letters are concerned, the three different perspectives thus once again turn out to be compatible and to cohere with each other (see Nünning and Nünning, *Multiperspektivität* 58, 64).

Shortly after having found the empty envelopes, Oskar meets "the renter" (*ELIC* 8) in his grandmother's apartment. Although he briefly mentions him already in his first chapter in connection with his "second time in a limousine" (*ELIC* 7-8), and again also in his second and third chapters in connection with his grandmother (see *ELIC* 69, 100, 106), it is only in his eleventh chapter that we find out that "the renter" (*ELIC* 100), who lives in the "guest room" (*ELIC* 100), is actually Oskar's

grandfather. The important point about this is that we find out about his real identity even before Oskar does in his narrative (see Nünning and Nünning, *Multiperspektivität* 71). As has already been mentioned in Chapter 3.1.2.1., he recognizes his grandfather only at some point after having dug up his father's "empty coffin" (ELIC 259). Our attention is thus once again drawn to Oskar's limited perspective as a nine-year-old child, who lacks certain information which the reader receives in the course of the novel from the letters of Oskar's grandparents, especially from the last letter of Oskar's grandfather (see Nünning and Nünning, *Multiperspektivität* 57, 71). Moreover, as far as their first encounter is concerned, the perspectives of Oskar and his grandfather are also shown to diverge from each other. We thus learn only from his grandfather's letter that Oskar, when he first met him, was so much in despair, because "Mr. Black [had] told [him] ... he was finished" (ELIC 234) that he cried: "He started crying, my grandson was crying. [...] I didn't know how to hold him, [...] I wanted to build walls around him, [...] I wanted to touch him, to tell him that even if everyone left everyone, I would never leave him" (ELIC 280). As with his father's funeral, which we read about also in his grandmother's letter and which has already been mentioned above, Oskar is thus sometimes shown to hide his desperate feelings from the reader by not mentioning them in his own narrative.

The last letter of Oskar's grandfather written on "9/11/03", i.e. two years after his son's death, turns out to contain important information for the reader. He not only writes about how he and his wife "began [their] second life together" (ELIC 268), which Oskar's grandmother does not mention in detail, but also about some events due to which the reader retrospectively learns to see certain things in a different light. Having learned from this letter that, after his second arrival in New York, he "went to the art supply store to buy some clay" (ELIC 274) in order to make a sculpture of his wife, we realize that unlike what Oskar has told us at the beginning of his narrative, it was not Oskar's father who had "tested [...] art supplies" (ELIC 50) but his grandfather, who has the same name as Oskar's father: "I tested every sample, I wrote my name in blue pen and in green oil stick, in orange crayon and in charcoal, it felt like I was signing the contract of my life" (ELIC 275). Since at this point we retrospectively have to revise what we have learned from Oskar's

narrative¹²³, we once again become aware of his limited and unreliable perspective (see Nünning and Nünning, *Multiperspektivität* 53-54, 57; Surkamp 126). Moreover, in contrast to what we have thought up to this point, we learn that Oskar's father not only did receive one of his father's letters (see also Chapter 3.2.3.), but also met his father once in Dresden "pretend[ing] to be a journalist [...] doing a story about the survivors of Dresden" (*ELIC* 277-278). We thus realize that in contrast to what Oskar's grandmother writes in her letter, she knew that her husband once did send a letter to her son. Consequently her perspective at this point once again turns out to be partly unreliable (see Nünning and Nünning, *Multiperspektivität* 53-54; Nünning, *Unreliable Narration* 28). Finally, the most important point for the reader in this letter is that Oskar's grandfather followed his grandson all over the city: "For eight months I followed him and talked to the people he talked to, I tried to learn about him as he tried to learn about you, he was trying to find you, just as you'd tried to find me, it broke my heart into more pieces than my heart was made of" (*ELIC* 279). Since Oskar does not know that he was being followed by his grandfather, we do not get to read anything about it in his narrative and thus once again become aware of the differences between his and his grandfather's wider perspective (see Nünning and Nünning, *Multiperspektivität* 57; Surkamp 126). Furthermore, it is at this point that the reader realizes that the Blacks, whom Oskar visited, obviously were in contact with his mother. It is thus again before Oskar tells us about his revelation in his twelfth chapter (see *ELIC* 291) that we find out that his mother knew about his plan (see also Chapter 3.2.3.), which again draws our attention to the child's limited knowledge and perspective.

Since Oskar's grandfather writes his last letter before he meets his grandson to "dig[...] up [his son's] ... empty coffin" (*ELIC* 259), he only briefly mentions this event at the beginning: "I'm writing as I wait to meet Oskar, [...] we'll be on our way to the cemetery" (*ELIC* 267). He therefore cannot tell his son anything about what happened there. Moreover, it seems interesting to mention that since he fills his son's coffin with all the letters addressed to him, i.e. with the "[t]hings [he] ... wasn't able to tell him" (*ELIC* 322), Oskar never gets to know the contents of these letters. Unlike the reader, Oskar at the time of his telling his story to us therefore has no knowledge of what his grandfather wrote to his father (see Nünning and Nünning, *Multiperspektivität* 71). Furthermore, Oskar's grandmother only shortly

¹²³ See the concept of 'primacy effect' and 'recency effect' discussed in Zerweck, *Cognitive Turn* 222-223; the concept of 'narrativization' in Fludernik, *Narratology* 31-32; storyworlds and the process of narrative comprehension in Herman 570.

mentions that night in the last part of her letter by remembering that she heard a “knocking [...] in the middle of the night” (*ELIC* 306) and that her husband’s “pants were covered in dirt” (*ELIC* 306). Since she was at home and therefore cannot write anything about what happened at the cemetery either, the events of that night are related to us only by Oskar. Although he mentions that day already in his first chapter and we therefore realize that it is important for him, we get to read his full account of what happened at “the cemetery” (*ELIC* 267) only towards the end of the novel in his very last chapter entitled “BEAUTIFUL AND TRUE” (*ELIC* 315). As has already been pointed out in Chapter 3.1.2.1., it is only after Oskar has “opened [his father’s empty] ... coffin” (*ELIC* 321) together with “the renter” (*ELIC* 321), whose real identity he discovers only later on, that he is able to talk about his father with his mother and, even more importantly, that he can “share[...] his grief with her” (Hoth 291).

Since we get to read the various events, only the most important of which have been analyzed above, not only through different perspectives but also at different points of the novel, we are able to reconstruct them only gradually in the course of the reading process. The novel’s multiperspectivity can thus be said to raise our suspense (see Nünning and Nünning, *Perspektivenstruktur* 29) as readers. Moreover, we have to coordinate the different and also partly diverging perspectives, which further complicates the reading process (see Nünning and Nünning, *Multiperspektivität* 52, 62-63, 66, 73). Furthermore, as I have tried to show, due to the grandparents’ partly contradicting perspectives, we realize in the course of the novel that some events of the past cannot wholly be reconstructed in objective terms, and we thus get no absolute truth about what really happened (see Nünning and Nünning, *Perspektivenstruktur* 20, 30; *Multiperspektivität* 43, 63-64; Surkamp 130-131). Our illusion of the portrayed storyworld is therefore partly undermined (see Nünning and Nünning *Perspektivenstruktur* 30; see also Wolf, *Ästhetische Illusion* 418). Moreover, as has already been pointed out above, the reader’s attention is drawn to the individual perspectives of the three narrator-characters: “Durch die Kontrastierung unterschiedlicher Perspektiven auf dasselbe Geschehen verlagert sich der Akzent von der Darstellung der fiktiven Welt auf die Perspektiventräger und ihre Relationen zueinander” (Nünning and Nünning, *Perspektivenstruktur* 19; see also Surkamp 120-122). Although the novel’s multiperspectivity partly undermines our illusion, we are mostly able to reconstruct what happened (see Nünning and Nünning, *Multiperspektivität* 58, Wolf, *Ästhetische*

Illusion 418) and to see that the different perspectives cohere with each other: “Entscheidend ist [...] die Frage, in welchem Maße sich die Perspektiven als synthetisierbar erweisen [bzw.] ... inwiefern die Perspektiven in einem Werk einen gemeinsamen Fluchtpunkt aufweisen” (Nünning and Nünning, *Multiperspektivität* 75; see also Surkamp 122, 127-129). As Hoth points out and as will be discussed in Chapter 3.4., “the [novel’s] dominant topics of ‘loss’ and ‘grief’ are [...] multiperspectively fanned out” (297) by drawing our attention to the traumatic experiences of all three narrator-characters.

3.2.2. The “Reconnaissance Expedition”

In addition to the novel’s multiperspectivity, which partly undermines our illusion of the portrayed storyworld, the reader becomes aware of the use of another anti-illusionistic technique which will be analyzed in the following. As has already been pointed out in Chapter 3.1.2.1., Oskar tells us about “the Reconnaissance Expeditions” (*ELIC* 8) he used to play with his father already in his first chapter: “For the last one we ever did, which never finished, he gave me a map of Central Park” (*ELIC* 8). Since he is given no further “clues” (*ELIC* 8) what to do with the map, Oskar uses his “metal detector” (*ELIC* 8) and a “hand shovel” (*ELIC* 9) and starts to dig up all sorts of things in the park – “just like a real archeologist” (*ELIC* 9) (see Kirn para 4). He not only marks the places where he has “found [the] things” (*ELIC* 10) on the map but also tries to “connect” (*ELIC* 10) them to words. However, he realizes that he can “connect them to make almost anything [he] ...want[s]” (*ELIC* 10) and, even more importantly, is unable to solve the riddle because of his father’s unexpected death. He therefore will “never know what [he] ... was supposed to find [which is] ... another reason [why he] ... can’t sleep” (*ELIC* 10). Since Oskar thinks again of the items he found in the park in the course of the novel, the reader’s attention is drawn to them. He mentions them in his fourth chapter in connection with his first Hamlet performance at school, when he sees “the Blacks that ... [he] had met in those twelve weekends” (*ELIC* 143) of his search for the lock: “[W]hat was weird was that they didn’t know what they had in common, which was kind of like how I didn’t know what the thumbtack, the bent spoon, the square aluminum foil, and all those other things I dug up in Central Park had to do with each other” (*ELIC* 143). Oskar mentions the items again at another point, i.e. when his father tells him about the Sixth Borough: “Do you think any of those things I dug up in Central Park were actually from the Sixth Borough?” (*ELIC* 223). Especially after having read Foer’s first novel, where the “REMAINS” (*EII* 151) of

Trachimbrod which Lista keeps in the numerous boxes reappear as “transform[ed] ‘found’ materials” (Baldick 42) in Jonathan’s invented family history (see Chapter 2.2.1.), the reader realizes that the items “dug up” (*ELIC* 143) by Oskar are also “‘objets trouvés[.]’” (*Collage* para 2) which reappear in the course of the novel (see also Hitchings, *Googlist* para 6).¹²⁴

Some of the items which Oskar finds clearly can be associated with Oskar’s father, as for example the “pen” (*ELIC* 9) which Oskar finds in the park: “Dad [...] was reading the *New York Times* [...] marking the mistakes with his red pen” (*ELIC* 9). Furthermore, the found “coat hanger” (*ELIC* 10) refers the reader to what Oskar tells us about his father’s “closet” (*ELIC* 36) and the night he found the “weird-looking key” (*ELIC* 37) there: “[I]t made my boots lighter to [...] touch stuff that he had touched, and to make the hangers hang a little straighter” (*ELIC* 36-37). Similarly, the “square aluminum foil” (*ELIC* 10) which he finds in Central Park can be said to resemble the “wrapper from a miniature Krackle” (*ELIC* 36) which Oskar also finds in his father’s “closet” (*ELIC* 36). Moreover, the “razor” (*ELIC* 10) found by Oskar reminds the reader not only of “how ... [Oskar’s father] always smelled like shaving” (*ELIC* 12) but also of the “three-dollar razor” (*ELIC* 102) which Oskar finds in his father’s “storage facility in New Jersey” (*ELIC* 102). Finally, the old “bent spoon” (*ELIC* 9) can be associated with what Oskar asks his mother in his sixth chapter: “‘How much do you cry?’ [...] ‘A spoonful? A cup? A bathtub? [...]’” (*ELIC* 171). Since the reappearance of the various items found by Oskar at the beginning of the novel indirectly refer the reader to the author behind the text, our illusion of the storyworld portrayed is clearly undermined.¹²⁵

In addition to the items referring the reader to Oskar’s father, there are others which clearly remind us of what Oskar tells us about the Blacks he visited. Thus, the “handful of paper clips” (*ELIC* 9) reappear again in connection with Mr. Black’s bed, to which “all sorts of fascinating metal things [were] glued” (*ELIC* 161). Mr. Black gives Oskar a “paper clip” (*ELIC* 162) to show him that it will fly “to the bed” (*ELIC* 162). The found “tag for a dog named Turbo” (*ELIC* 10) can be connected with Abe Black, who tells Oskar: “‘[...] I had a dog run away once. She was the best dog in the world [...]’” (*ELIC* 149). The “toy car” (*ELIC* 9) found by

¹²⁴ For the concepts of ‘objets trouvés’, ‘collage’ and ‘bricolage’ see also Waugh’s discussion in Waugh 143-145; Baldick 42; Voigts-Virchow 472-473; Kuester 73-74, and Britton 58-59.

¹²⁵ See Wolf’s discussion of implicit metafictional techniques in Wolf, *Ästhetische Illusion* 266-269; 276-278.

Oskar reappears again in his eleventh chapter, when he stands on “the observation deck of the Empire State Building” (*ELIC* 245) and tells us that “the cars look[ed] like little cars” (*ELIC* 245). Similarly, the “9V battery” (*ELIC* 10) which Oskar finds at the beginning of his narrative reoccurs twice in his story: Once he tells us that at “the storage facility in New Jersey” (*ELIC* 102) he “found [...] the old two-way radios from when ...[he] was a baby” (*ELIC* 102) and that he “put new batteries in” (*ELIC* 102) them so that he could use them to talk to his grandmother. The second time he mentions batteries is towards the end of the novel when “the batteries in the flashlight ran out” (*ELIC* 319) while he and his grandfather were “digging up ... [his father’s] empty coffin” (*ELIC* 259). By recognizing the various items in the course of the novel the reader gets the impression that the author has predetermined certain episodes and events, which clearly undermines our illusion of a realistically portrayed storyworld.

Unlike the items mentioned above, there are some others which cannot be associated with Oskar’s narrative but with what his grandparents write in their letters. Thus, “the chain from a lamp that you pull to make the light go on” (*ELIC* 9) alludes to what Oskar’s grandmother writes in the second part of her letter about the night when she told her husband that she was pregnant: “The apartment had never been darker. I turned on the lamp. It became bright around us” (*ELIC* 177). Similarly, the “extremely old pocket watch that was stopped at 5:37” (*ELIC* 10) clearly reminds the reader of a passage in the second letter written by Oskar’s grandfather telling his son about how he “invent[ed] future homes” (*ELIC* 208) for Anna and himself: “I imagined dozens of homes, some were magical (a clock tower with a stopped clock in a city where time stood still)” (*ELIC* 208-209). Another interesting link can be made between the “pair of rusty scissors” (*ELIC* 9) which Oskar digs up and the letters of both grandparents, namely “the tailor shop where ... [his grandfather] used to get ... [his] pants taken in” (*ELIC* 278) and a passage in his grandmother’s dream when “mothers who had lost children mended their black clothing with scissors” (*ELIC* 309). The reader thus gradually begins to realize that like Oskar’s father sends his son on a “Reconnaissance Expedition” (*ELIC* 8), the author wants the reader to recognize how the items dug up by Oskar reappear in the course of the novel. The game of “hide-and-seek” (Tani 44) between Oskar and his father thus also takes place between the reader and the real author outside the fictional world (see Chapter 4.1.).

In addition to the items already mentioned above, there are some which cannot clearly be associated with one single element or passage in the novel but with more than one. Thus, for example, the “refrigerator magnet for sushi” (*ELIC* 9) reminds the reader not only of Abby Black’s “refrigerator” (*ELIC* 94), because Oskar tells us that he “thought it was weird that there weren’t any menus or little magnetic calendars [...] on” (*ELIC* 94) it, but also of Oskar’s grandfather, who when “walking around the city” (*ELIC* 278) after his second arrival in New York finds out that “where there had been a butcher there was sushi” (*ELIC* 278). Another item calling forth an interesting association is the “tiny picture frame” (*ELIC* 10) which Oskar digs up in Central Park. Towards the end of the novel Oskar’s grandfather tells his son that when he “lived in the guestroom” (*ELIC* 274) his wife “started paying ... [him] short visits” (*ELIC* 274) and used to “straighten the picture frames” (*ELIC* 274) in his room, just like Oskar did with “the hangers” (*ELIC* 37) in his father’s “closet” (*ELIC* 36). Similarly, Oskar mentions that “[t]here were a bunch of picture frames on ... [William Black’s] desk” (*ELIC* 293) and “[a]ll of them were of Abby” (*ELIC* 300). Even more interesting is the “ring” (*ELIC* 10) which Oskar finds at the beginning of his narrative, because it can be associated with some of the relationships and marriages mentioned in the course of the novel. First of all, there is Oskar’s mother, who “put[s] her hand with the ring on it in her hair” (*ELIC* 35) and tells Oskar that “[...] Ron is [her] ... *friend*” (*ELIC* 35). Oskar himself “designed a set of wedding rings, where each one takes the pulse of the person wearing it and sends a signal to the other ring” (*ELIC* 106). Furthermore, Oskar’s grandmother mentions in the second part of her letter that “she didn’t notice [...] that [her husband was] ... still wearing his wedding ring” (*ELIC* 174). Finally, Oskar visits “Chelsea Black [, who] had a tan line around her ring finger, because she got divorced right after she got back from her honeymoon” (*ELIC* 239). The most interesting item found by Oskar are the “broken glasses for someone with incredibly bad eyes” (*ELIC* 9). They not only remind the reader of his grandmother, who pretends that her “eyes are crummy” (*ELIC* 30, 81), but they also reappear in the last letter of Oskar’s grandfather: “I went into a bookstore, [...] I saw a man who I thought might be Simon Goldberg, ... [f]ifty years later he wore the same thick glasses” (*ELIC* 279). Even more importantly, they refer the reader to Oskar’s father, who, as William Black tells Oskar towards the end of the novel, also “wore [...] thick glasses” (*ELIC* 298).

Of the items found by Oskar at the beginning of his narrative all but one, namely the “hair clip” (*ELIC* 10), can be related to some elements or passages in the course of the novel. It therefore seems plausible to link this item with Foer’s first novel and the numerous things in Lista’s boxes, especially because she also finds a hair clip in the box which had “REMAINS [...] written on it” (*EII* 151): “‘Here is a clip,’ [...] ‘that Miriam would keep in her hair so that it would not be in her face’” (*EII* 152). The author thus seems to draw the reader’s attention to his first novel by alluding to the remains of Trachimbrod (see also Chapter 3.3.2.), which have already been analyzed and discussed in Chapter 2.2.1.

Since this implicit metafictional technique clearly draws our attention to the way in which the author composes his novel and consequently makes us aware of the novel’s fictionality, it partly undermines our illusion of the storyworld portrayed and foregrounds the author behind the text (see Wolf, *Ästhetische Illusion* 226, 227-278, 293; Hutcheon, *Narrative* 7, 23). Indeed, the “game” (*ELIC* 8) that Oskar used to play with his father can be said to mirror the relationship between the reader and the author outside the fictional world (see Hutcheon, *Narrative* 71-76, 82-83). Like Oskar, who tries to interpret the clues given by his father in order to solve the complicated riddle of their last “Reconnaissance Expedition” (*ELIC* 8), the reader tries to recognize and find out how the found items reappear in the course of the novel (see also Chapter 4.1.): “The act of reading [...] is an act of interpretation, of following clues to the answer of a given problem” (Hutcheon, *Narrative* 72; see also Wolf, *Ästhetische Illusion* 277-278).

Another interesting and important point is the parallel which can be drawn between the author and Oskar’s mother. As Oskar points out: “My search was a play that Mom had written, and she knew the ending when I was at the beginning” (*ELIC* 292). We thus realize why his mother is the only family member who is not given a voice as a narrator-character. Like the real author outside the fictional world, she stays in the background and towards the end of the novel turns out to have known about her son’s secret plan all along. She thus can be compared to the author outside the fictional world as the one “manipulating [the fates of his] characters [...] like a puppet-master” (McHale 210) behind the scenes, who is

foregrounded only at certain points in the course of the novel (see also Chapter 2.1.2.1).¹²⁶

The items found by Oskar in Central Park are more or less randomly chosen by the author. As Waugh points out in her discussion of “*metafictional collage*” (Waugh 142), “like the parts of a mobile, the parts of the collage can be endlessly reassembled to produce infinite images” (144)¹²⁷. This becomes most evident when we consider that the author could have achieved the same effect on the reader by choosing other elements of his novel and letting Oskar find them at the beginning of his narrative. Like Oskar, who “could connect them to make almost anything ... [he] wanted” (*ELIC* 10), the author can have him find anything he wants and would still achieve the same effect on the reader’s side. This underlines the aspect of randomness, which is important in connection with how Oskar’s father died. As it turns out in the course of the novel, it was pure chance that he was in the towers when the terrorist attacks happened. Moreover, there is a parallel to the key which Oskar finds in his father’s “closet” (*ELIC* 36) and which turns out to have nothing to do with his father’s death but with the death of someone else’s father, i.e. William Black’s, who died of “cancer” (*ELIC* 296) (see also Chapter 3.1.2.1.).

3.2.3. Other Anti-illusionistic Techniques

In addition to the implicit metafictional technique analyzed in the previous chapter, our illusion of the portrayed storyworld is partly undermined by some “chronological disruptions (Fludernik, *Narratology* 273) in the course of the novel (see also Wolf, *Ästhetische Illusion* 338-339, 347). Thus, for instance, due to the partly contradictory information provided to us by the different narrator-characters we are unable to reconstruct the exact age of Oskar’s father. According to the first letter of his grandfather, which is addressed to his “unborn child” (*ELIC* 16, 108), Oskar’s father must have been born at some time after “5/21/63” (*ELIC* 16, 108), i.e. after his grandfather left his pregnant wife. Consequently, Oskar’s father at the time of his death on 11 September 2001 must have been thirty-eight years old. This information corresponds with what we get to know at the beginning of Oskar’s first chapter. Since Oskar at this point tells us that “for [his] ... ninth birthday last year,

¹²⁶ See also the discussion the ‘author’s godlike role’ in Waugh 24-25.

¹²⁷ See also Deleuze and Guattari qtd. in Lucy 196; the concept of ‘bricolage’ in Britton 58-59, Kuester 73-74.

[his grandmother] ... gave [him] ... Grandpa's camera" (*ELIC* 3) and that he "was negative-thirty years old" (*ELIC* 3) when his grandfather left his grandmother, Oskar must have been eight years when his father died in 2001 at the age of thirty-eight. Consequently, his father would have been thirty-nine years at Oskar's ninth birthday, i.e. one year after the terrorist attacks of '9/11'. Yet in contrast to what we learn from the letter of Oskar's grandfather and from Oskar's first chapter, Oskar tells Aaron Black in his third chapter that his father was "[f]orty" (*ELIC* 90) when he died. If his father was really forty at the time of his death in 2001, then he cannot have been born in 1963, but must have been born in 1961. Yet this would mean that the date of his grandfather's letter to his "unborn child" (*ELIC* 16, 108) is incorrect, which seems rather unlikely. Moreover, Oskar's grandmother writes in the third part of her letter dated "12 September 2003" (*ELIC* 75) that his "grandfather left ... [her] forty years ago" (*ELIC* 233), i.e. this must have happened in 1963. Shortly after this, however, she mentions her "son's funeral" (*ELIC* 233), which – according to Oskar and his grandfather – took place in 2001: "For forty years not a word. Only empty envelopes. And then, on the day of my son's funeral, two words" (*ELIC* 233). We thus again become aware of a chronological inconsistency of two years. Since the day of her son's funeral was in 2001, she should have written, "For *thirty-eight* years not a word. Only empty envelopes [...]" (emphasis added). Since the contradictory information about the age of Oskar's father is not resolved in the course of the novel, it turns out that it "cannot be recuperated" (Fludernik, *Narratology* 270) and we are unable to reconstruct whether Oskar's father at the time of his death was forty or only thirty-eight years old.

Similarly, the year when Oskar's grandmother arrived in New York and the historical date of the bombings of Dresden in WW II, i.e. during "the nights of February 13 and 14, 1945" (Hoth 292; see also *Dresden: Geschichte* para 6), are partly contradictory. In the first part of her letter, Oskar's grandmother writes that she received a letter from a prisoner in a "Turkish Labor Camp" (*ELIC* 75), dated "14 January 1921" (*ELIC* 75), "fifteen years after it had been written" (*ELIC* 76), i.e. she must have received it in 1936. Shortly after this, she writes that "[s]even years later" (*ELIC* 79) she met Oskar's grandfather in New York, where she had been "for only two months" (*ELIC* 79). Accordingly, she must have come to New York in 1943. Yet this is impossible, since the bombings of Dresden took place in February 1945. Since she witnessed and survived the night of the bombings, i.e. when she "lost everything" (*ELIC* 80), she can only have emigrated some time after Feb-

ruary 1945. Consequently, this means that between receiving the letter from the prisoner and her emigration to the United States at least nine years must have passed. Again, there remains a “chronological disruption[...]” (Fludernik, *Narratology* 273) of two years. On the other hand, however, she writes that on “the morning of the bombing [she] ... decided to write back to the forced labourer” (*ELIC* 183) and does “not know why [she] ... waited for so long” (*ELIC* 183), i.e. maybe she really waited two years before answering the letter and merely does not explicitly mention how much time exactly passed between receiving and answering the letter. These time spans thus partly remain incoherent throughout the novel. The important point is that the reader gets the relevant information from the different perspectives of unreliable narrators at different points in the course of the novel, and it is thus quite complicated to logically reconstruct and “recuperate” (Fludernik, *Narratology* 270) a coherent chronology of the relevant events. Moreover, this contradictory chronological information partly undermines our illusion of a coherent storyworld (see Wolf, *Ästhetische Illusion* 338-339, 347; Fludernik, *Narratology* 273-274).

In addition to the partly incoherent chronological information the novel contains a number of typographic peculiarities which partly affect our illusion in the course of the reading process. As has already been pointed out in Chapter 3.1.2.1., we get the impression that Oskar tells his story to us rather than writes it down (see also Chapter 3.3.3.). However, at some points of his narrative the text is clearly foregrounded as written material (see Wolf, *Ästhetische Illusion* 379, 387-390; McHale 179-187; Waugh 60, 96-97). Thus, for instance, during one of his conversations with his grandmother on “the old two-way radios” (*ELIC* 102) Oskar invents a flash “device” (*ELIC* 72) for an “ambulance” (*ELIC* 72), the messages of which are printed in capital letters and bold type and are thus clearly foregrounded as written text (see Wolf, *Ästhetische Illusion* 387-388; McHale 179-184) indicating “the big [flashing] sign on the [ambulance’s] roof” (*ELIC* 72). Shortly after this, Oskar makes a list of people according to “how much [he] ... love[s] them” (*ELIC* 72) and conjugates the French verb ‘être’, because he cannot fall asleep (see *ELIC* 74), both of which are printed in the form of a list and in italics (see McHale 183). Moreover, in his ninth chapter he tells us about the conversation between Dr. Fein and his mother, of which he overhears only very short parts with the help of his “stethoscope” (*ELIC* 203) (see also Chapter 3.3.2.). The reader thus has to fill in the missing parts to understand and to reconstruct what they talk about

(see Wolf, *Ästhetische Illusion* 381). Finally, Oskar's chapters in the middle of the novel, i.e. his fifth to his eighth chapter (see *ELIC* 170-173), are not only extremely short compared to the rest of his narrative (see McHale 182), but we also get to read them one after the other without the usual alternation with one of the letters of his grandparents. Moreover, the headings of his fourth to his seventh chapter are unusual, because they are crossed out and replaced by a different one (see also Chapter 3.3.2.). Furthermore, his eighth chapter has no heading at all, since the crossed out "headline" (McHale 182) is not replaced, and the relatively short text is printed throughout in "upper-case type" (McHale 182). It thus becomes difficult for the reader to distinguish between the heading and the chapter's proper text, which again draws our attention to the written and printed quality of Oskar's narrative (see Wolf, *Ästhetische Illusion* 389-390; McHale 182).

Unlike the typographic peculiarities of Oskar's narrative, the last letter of his grandfather contains a number of elements which are much more anti-illusionistic for the reader, i.e. we have to decipher his phone call after his second arrival in New York (see Gessen 70; Deveson para 5). Already in his first letter written in 1963, he mentions that "on the phone ... [he would] dial the numbers – 2, 6, 6, 2 – so that the person could hear what ... [he] couldn't [...] say" (*ELIC* 16). In contrast to this short message, which consists of only one word and by which the reader is also made aware of the "palindromic[...]" (Waugh 142) nature of the name Anna (see also Chapter 3.1.2.2.), his phone call in his last letter is much more difficult to decipher, since it takes up two and a half pages. The reader therefore most likely can decipher and understand only the beginning of it, i.e. the first few numbers that he dials, especially because the question marks and the grandfather's comments help the reader to understand what he wanted to say: "'Hello' [...] 'Is it really you?' [...] 'Is it really you?' [...] 'Help!'" (see *ELIC* 269). In contrast to this, the rest of what he was trying to tell his wife cannot really be deciphered, because this passage only consists of numbers and is simply too long (see Almond para 13; Deveson para 5). Moreover, since Oskar's grandfather summarizes what he tried to tell his wife, i.e. "why ... [he had] left, where ... [he had] gone, how ... [he had] found out about ... [his son's] death" (*ELIC* 269), we do not really have to know the exact wording of the rest of his phone call. What is foregrounded here, however, is his inability to express himself and to make himself understood (see Gessen 70). His second call, again, is relatively easy to convert, since it is not only very short but also additionally consists of the question already contained in his first call, i.e. "'Is it really you?'"

(see *ELIC* 272). Moreover, we get to read what Oskar's grandmother says on the phone, and therefore his reply, i.e. "This is not a joke!" (see *ELIC* 272), can be deciphered relatively easily from the passage's context and the usual coherence of a telephone conversation. At this point of the novel, however, our illusion is clearly undermined, because the reading process is interrupted and the text is foregrounded as printed material (see Wolf, *Ästhetische Illusion* 379, 387-390, McHale 179-184). As Wolf points out, "[die] Kontrastierung [...] mit anderen [...] Zeichensystemen [...] kann [...] eine Demonstration des Ungenügens und der Ergänzungsbedürftigkeit literarischer Sprache bewirken (*Ästhetische Illusion* 384; see also Gessen 70). Moreover, it seems interesting to mention that this passage also reminds the reader of the bracelet which Oskar gave his mother after his father's death, for which he "converted Dad's last voice message into Morse code" (*ELIC* 35).

In addition to the phone call, this letter contains another unusual typographic element, i.e. "the kerning of the type keeps shrinking and shrinking until the letters overlap entirely and the page turns black" (Gessen 70; see also McHale 182-184). Thus, the last sentences that we are able to read in this letter are the following: "I know I won't be in his life, I won't be the grandfather he never had, he won't think of me or miss me, but there's nothing I regret about these past two months [...]" (*ELIC* 281). Like the numbers of his phone calls underline the grandfather's inability to express himself, the following black pages reflect that there is not enough room left in his "daybook" (*ELIC* 31): "There won't be enough pages in this book for me to tell you what I need to tell you" (*ELIC* 276). Both typographic techniques can therefore be said to "serve[...] a mimetic or iconic function" (McHale 183) and to "foreground[...] the presence and materiality of the book, and [consequently] [...] disrupt[...] the reality of the projected world" (McHale 181).

In addition to his last letter, the second letter of Oskar's grandfather dated "4/12/78" (*ELIC* 208) is also of interest here, because it is the only letter which is marked with a red pen, which we cannot really make sense of when reading it and which therefore again affects our illusion. Although the letter immediately reminds us of the newspaper article in Oskar's first chapter (see *ELIC* 9-10) and Oskar's father, who used to "mark[...] the mistakes [in the *New York Times*] with his red pen" (*ELIC* 9), according to what we are told by Oskar's grandparents, it cannot have been Oskar's father who marked this letter, because we are told that he never re-

ceived his father's letters (see also Chapter 3.1.2.2. and 3.2.1.). The letter thus again partly disrupts our illusion and draws our attention to the text as printed material (see Wolf, *Ästhetische Illusion* 379, 387-390; McHale 181-184). It is only when we get to read the last letter of Oskar's grandfather that we learn that in contrast to what we have thought up to this point, Oskar's father not only did receive one letter from his father but, moreover, that "[h]e was obsessed with it, always reading it" (*ELIC* 277). Due to this information provided to us at a relatively late point of the novel we are thus retrospectively able make sense of the marked passages in the second letter of Oskar's grandfather.¹²⁸ In contrast to what we have thought up to this point, it must have been Oskar's father who marked the "only letter" (*ELIC* 277) he ever received from his father, just like he used to do with the newspaper articles. Moreover, at the beginning of his first chapter, Oskar mentions what his father used to mark in these articles: "Sometimes they were grammar mistakes, sometimes they were mistakes with geography or facts, and sometimes the article just didn't tell the whole story" (*ELIC* 12). By retrospectively looking at what exactly is marked in the second letter of Oskar's grandfather, we find out that Oskar's father obviously marked the letter's spelling mistakes, as for instance in the words "actreses [sic]" (*ELIC* 208), "the alps [sic]" (*ELIC* 209) and "refugies [sic]" (*ELIC* 211). Moreover, the commas are marked throughout, which indicate that the grandfather wrote down his thoughts as they came to his mind without caring for or thinking of the correct punctuation (see also Chapter 3.3.3). Finally, some sentences are marked, because they obviously seemed interesting and important for Oskar's father, as for instance the following passages: "Life is scarier than death" (*ELIC* 215). [...] Anna's father "survived the bombing and then killed himself. Did your mother tell you that? Does she know it herself?" (*ELIC* 215). [...] "I lost a baby" (*ELIC* 216). [...] "I love you, Your father" (*ELIC* 216). Apart from realizing how important this letter must have been for Oskar's father and that he indeed seemed "obsessed with it" (*ELIC* 277), as Oskar's grandmother points out, the letter's typographic peculiarity, of which we can make sense only towards the end of the novel, partly undermines our illusion and again draws our attention to the text as printed material (see Wolf, *Ästhetische Illusion* 379, 387-390; McHale 181-184). Moreover, it seems interesting to mention the parallel between the marked letter and the name of Oskar's father which Oskar thinks to have found in "the art supply store" (*ELIC* 44) (see also Chapter 3.2.1). Not only do they both have to do

¹²⁸ See the concept of 'primacy effect' and 'recency effect' discussed in Zerweck, *Cognitive Turn* 222-223; the concept of 'narrativization' in Fludernik, *Narratology* 31-32; storyworlds and the process of narrative comprehension in Herman 570.

with Oskar's father, but also with how the reader has to revise and adjust the information provided to her/him at different points in the course of the novel. Whereas the name found by Oskar in "the art supply store" (*ELIC* 44) retrospectively turns out to have been written by Oskar's grandfather, the red marks in the second letter of his grandfather retrospectively turn out to have been added by his father.

Another important aspect partly undermining our illusion of the portrayed story-world is the way in which Oskar sometimes tells us about things that did not really happen, but which he merely imagines in his fantasy and would have liked to do (see Hoth 291). Thus, for instance, in his fourth chapter he tells us about the last Hamlet performance at school during which he becomes very aggressive and brutally beats Jimmy Snyder "unconscious" (*ELIC* 146), because shortly before the performance Jimmy imitated and made fun of Oskar's grandmother. The important point is that we get to read the scene on stage in which Oskar as Yorick "couldn't be dead any longer" (*ELIC* 145) as if it really happened and Oskar only afterwards mentions: "It would have been great" (*ELIC* 147). We therefore realize that what he has just told us did not really happen but was his mere imagination and fantasy (see also Hoth 291).¹²⁹ Similarly, in his ninth chapter Oskar gets very angry at Dr. Fein because of the latter's question: "'Do you think any good can come from your father's death?'" (*ELIC* 203). At this point he again tells us what he wanted to do as if it really happened: "I kicked over my chair, threw his papers across the floor, and hollered, 'No! Of course not, you fucking asshole!' *That was what I wanted to do.* Instead I just shrugged my shoulders" (*ELIC* 203 [emphasis added]). Finally, in his eleventh chapter, when Mr. Black tells Oskar that he is "finished" (*ELIC* 254) and no longer wants to help him with his search for the lock, Oskar tells us: "I got on my tiptoes and put my mouth next to his ear and shouted, 'Fuck you!' No. I shook his hand ..." (*ELIC* 254). Here again, he tells us about what he merely imagined or wanted to do as if it really happened, which draws our attention to his unreliability as a narrator (see Nünning, *Unreliable Narration* 27-28) (see also Chapter 3.1.2.1.). Moreover, our illusion of the portrayed storyworld is shortly disrupted at these points, because we can no longer distinguish between what really happened and what Oskar merely imagined in his fantasy, at least until Oskar tells us so (see Surkamp 115-116, 122). According to Surkamp's discussion of the

¹²⁹ See Surkamp's discussion of the 'possible-worlds theory' and the concept of multiperspectivity, especially a text's 'textual actual world' and 'the character's possible worlds' in Surkamp 113, 115-122.

“possible-worlds theory” (113), the novel’s “textual actual world” (113) and Oskar’s “wish world[...]” (117) can thus be said to shortly merge with each other, which underlines and draws the reader’s attention to their different ontological status (see Surkamp 115-116, 122; Wolf, *Ästhetische Illusion* 402; McHale 34).

3.3. Language and Style

3.3.1. Metaphors

Like in *Everything Is Illuminated*, the author’s use of language partly undermines our illusion of the portrayed storyworld due to the use of a number of metaphors.¹³⁰ *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*, like Foer’s first novel, contains a number of metaphors for memory¹³¹, such as for instance “the storage facility in New Jersey where [Oskar’s father] ... kept the stuff he didn’t use anymore” (*ELIC* 102) and to which Oskar in his mind “kept going back to [...], like a salmon” (*ELIC* 106) (see also Chapter 3.3.2.). Moreover, Mr. Black’s “library card catalogue” (*ELIC* 156), i.e. his “biographical index” (*ELIC* 156) consisting of “tens of thousands” (*ELIC* 157) of “single-word filing cards” (Faber para 6), is another metaphor for memory (see Butzer 17; Ernst 299-300; Pethes 196-197), the important aspect of which is its permutation. As Ernst points out, “bereits eine einfache bibliographische Kartei eröffnet eine solche Menge von Anordnungs- und Kombinationsmöglichkeiten, dass sie eine manuelle Maschine bildet [, deren] Zettel [...] nach beliebigen Gesichtspunkten zugeordnet werden [können]“ (299-300). This seems especially interesting because the reader’s attention is thus again drawn to the items dug up by Oskar in Central Park and “the dots [which he can] ... connect [...] to make almost anything [he] ... wanted” (*ELIC* 10) (see also Chapter 3.2.2). Moreover, it reminds the reader of the Blacks whom Oskar visits in alphabetical order. In contrast to Mr. Black, Oskar uses the internet, which is important for him, because he wants to find out more about the attacks of 9/11 and his father’s death (see Hoth 289, 294-297) (see also Chapter 3.3.2.). This metaphor for memory¹³² thus refers the reader to Oskar’s inability to accept his father’s death and his wish to find out how exactly he died (see also Chapter 3.1.2.1).

¹³⁰ See the discussion of metaphors in Wolf, *Ästhetische Illusion* 290-292; McHale 133-135; Waugh 17-18.

¹³¹ For the discussion of metaphors for memory see Birk; Butzer; Pethes.

¹³² See Birk 91-92; Butzer 22; Pethes 198.

Moreover, when Oskar mentions his inability to talk about his feelings with his mother he tells us that he “buried it all inside [him]” (*ELIC* 35), just like his grandfather writes to his son in his second letter that although he “wanted to tell [Oskar’s grandmother] everything” (*ELIC* 216), he could not, because he “had buried too much too deeply inside [him]” (*ELIC* 216). Their inability to express their feelings is thus compared to the activity of burying something. The important point is that both characters towards the end of the novel decide to “dig up [the] ... empty coffin” (*ELIC* 8) of Oskar’s father, i.e. they are literally engaged in doing the opposite of burying the past. Even more importantly, they are both shown to finally be able to talk about their suppressed and hidden feelings – Oskar “opens up to his mother for the first time” (Hoth 291) and his grandfather fills his son’s coffin with the “[t]hings [he] ... wasn’t able to tell him” (*ELIC* 322) (see also Chapter 3.1.2.1. and 3.1.2.2.). Their struggle to communicate their feelings and to remember what happened can thus be said to be literally realized by their digging up the coffin: “In der Metapher des Ausgrabens [wird] ... bildlich gefaßt [...], wie vergangene Inhalte an die Oberfläche geholt und in die Gegenwart integriert werden” (Birk 89). This seems interesting especially because, as has already been discussed in Chapter 3.2.2., the author has Oskar dig up more or less randomly chosen items in Central Park at the beginning of the novel, “just like a real archeologist” (*ELIC* 9).

Another interesting metaphor is the hole which Oskar mentions in connection with his secret and the loss of his father: “I couldn’t tell [Grandma] ... what happened with the phone. That secret was a hole in the middle of me that every happy thing fell into” (*ELIC* 71). Besides Oskar, his grandmother also uses this metaphor to describe her traumatic experience and the loss of her family (see *ELIC* 83, 177). When reading the story about “THE SIXTH BOROUGH” (*ELIC* 217) we become aware of “the realization of [this] metaphor” (McHale 134) because Oskar’s father tells his son that where Central Park once used to be “there’s a gigantic hole” (*ELIC* 222) now. Similarly, when Oskar stands on the platform of the Empire State Building he mentions that he “could see [...] the gigantic hole where the World Trade Center was” (*ELIC* 245).

In another metaphor when writing about how he lost his words and his inability to express himself Oskar’s grandfather mentions that he “wanted to pull the thread [and] ... unravel the scarf of [his] ... silence” (*ELIC* 17). The use of this metaphor clearly refers the reader to Ariadne’s thread leading Theseus out of the labyrinth

(see Hagen 55; Pethes 196) (see also Chapter 2.3.1.). Moreover it is important, because it “eventually develop[s] into realit[y] within the fictional world” (McHale 134). Thus, the scarf that Oskar’s grandfather mentions in connection with his “silence” (*ELIC* 16) at the beginning of his first letter literally appears in Oskar’s narrative when the latter tells us about how he hid the phone with his father’s final messages. As has already been pointed out in Chapter 3.1.2.1., Oskar “wrap[s] up the old phone in the scarf that Grandma was never able to finish” (*ELIC* 68) and does not tell anybody about the messages. Each time he unwraps the hidden phone, he tells us about another of these messages, i.e. he literally “pull[s] the thread ... [and] unravel[s] the scarf of [his] ... silence” (*ELIC* 17), and we thus become aware of the fact that he can talk about what happened on “the worst day” (*ELIC* 12) only gradually in the course of the novel. At these points our attention is thus clearly drawn to the author’s use of language which undermines our illusion of the storyworld portrayed (see Wolf, *Ästhetische Illusion* 290-291; McHale 133-135).

3.3.2. Intertextuality, Intermediality

The concept of intertextuality, as defined in Chapter 2.3.1., is another anti-illusionistic technique which the author also makes use of in his second novel. As with the intertextual references in *Everything Is Illuminated*, only some of the most important instances can be discussed and analyzed in the following.

Like Foer’s first novel, *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* contains a number of “[a]llusions [which are] located in the internal system of communication” (Hebel 146), i.e. they “are accessible to the fictional characters and presented as part of the narrated world” (Hebel 146; see also Broich, *Markierung* 39-40). At the very beginning, Oskar’s narrative contains an explicit intermedial reference¹³³, i.e. he mentions the famous song “‘Yellow Submarine,’ [...] by the Beatles, who [he] ... love[s]” (*ELIC* 1). Moreover, he receives an answer to his letter from Ringo Starr, who “enclose[s] [a signed] ... *T-Shirt*” (*ELIC* 40) for him. Furthermore, after telling us about his appointment with Dr. Fein he refers to another song by the Beatles: “I turned on the radio and found a station playing ‘Hey Jude.’ It was true, I didn’t want to make it bad. I wanted to take the sad song and make it better. It’s just that I didn’t know how” (*ELIC* 207). Oskar thus uses the text of the famous song to de-

¹³³ See Wolf’s definition and discussion of different types of intermediality in Wolf, *Intermedialität* 167-182.

scribe his own rather desperate inner state after his father's death (see also Almond para 4). Apart from the intermedial references to one of the most famous pop groups, Oskar also refers to a well-known classical piece of music, i.e. to "The Flight of the Bumblebee,' by Nicolai Rimsky-Korsakov" (*ELIC* 3), which not only is his "most impressive song that [he] ... can play on [his] ... tambourine" (*ELIC* 2-3) but also "the ring tone [he] ... downloaded for [his] ... cell phone" (*ELIC* 3). Another intermedial reference in Oskar's narrative has to do with "Ada Black [, who] own[s] two Picasso paintings" (*ELIC* 149). Although Picasso is only briefly mentioned, this allusion nevertheless seems interesting, because his "paintings" (*ELIC* 149) can be associated with the portrayal from different perspectives and the technique of the collage (see Easthope 15-16; *Collage* para 2), both of which are employed by Foer in his novel (see Chapter 3.2.1. and 3.2.2.).

Apart from these intermedial references, Oskar refers to Stephen Hawking, whose *A Brief History of Time* (*BHT*) is his "favorite book" (*ELIC* 11). Oskar especially likes "the beginning of the first chapter, where Stephen Hawking tells about a famous scientist who was giving a lecture about how the earth orbits the sun, and the sun orbits the solar system, and whatever" (*ELIC* 11). By comparing this passage with the beginning of Hawking's first chapter entitled "OUR PICTURE OF THE UNIVERSE" (*BHT* 1) we realize that it is partly taken over verbatim by Foer, especially the comments of the "woman in the back of the room" (*ELIC* 1), who argues that "[...] it's turtles all the way down!" (*ELIC* 11; *BHT* 1). This allusion seems interesting, especially because it can be associated with "the author's god-like role" (Waugh 24) and his way of creating "a fictional universe" (Hutcheon, *Narrative* 28). By the author's use of implicit metafictional techniques undermining our illusion of the portrayed storyworld and thus influencing "OUR PICTURE OF THE" (*BHT* 1) "fictional universe" (Hutcheon, *Narrative* 28), which we create in the course of the reading process (see Hutcheon, *Narratology* 28), we become aware of the author behind the text as the one "manipulating [his] characters and events like a puppet-master" (McHale 210).

Like *Everything Is Illuminated*, Foer's second novel contains an allusion to "Shakespeare's tragedy *Hamlet* [*H*]" (Hoth 290), i.e. to "the famous 'gravedigger scene'" (Hoth 290). As Hoth points out, Oskar's "part of Yorick [...], whose skull the gravediggers find when digging Ophelia's grave [...] is introduced in order to accentuate the feelings of loss and hopelessness Oskar is suffering from" (290). Another in-

teresting aspect of Oskar's role is that Yorick was "the [old] king's jester" (*H* 219) and as such was supposed to entertain people and to make them laugh. Jimmy Snyder playing Hamlet thus asks Oskar/Yorick: "'Where are your jokes now, your games, your songs?'" (*ELIC* 145). Shortly after this, Oskar "taking over the scene" (Hoth 291) indeed makes the reader laugh, because he unexpectedly steps out of his silent role. Moreover, we are reminded of how Oskar "want[s] to make [people] ... crack up, because if [he] ... could make [them] ... crack up, ... [his] boots could be a little lighter" (*ELIC* 5). Furthermore, as Hoth also points out, "the 'grave-digger scene' [...] comes in at another crucial point in the story [, i.e.] [a]t the very end of the novel, [when] Oskar and his grandfather [...] start to dig up the empty coffin" (291) (see also Chapter 3.1.2.1.).

Like Foer's first novel, his second novel contains numerous intertextual references which "are located in the external system of communication" (Hebel 146), i.e. they "are unknown to the characters of the fictional world" (Hebel 146; see also Broich, *Markierung* 41-44). The author thus extensively refers and alludes to his first novel¹³⁴, of which only the most important instances will be pointed out in the following. Like Alex, who wants "to show [Jonathan] ... that he [...] too [can] ... be an American" (*EII* 28) and who dreams of emigrating to the United States (see Chapter 2.1.2.1.), Oskar's grandmother once "wanted to become a real American" (*ELIC* 79) and "wanted to talk like she was born" (*ELIC* 108) there by "learn[ing] idioms" (*ELIC* 79) and "American expressions" (*ELIC* 175). Another interesting allusion concerns the grandfathers of Alex and Oskar. Like the late wife of Alex's grandfather, whom he regularly dreams of, the first love of Oskar's grandfather, whom he cannot stop thinking of, is called Anna (see Chapter 2.2.3. and 3.1.2.2.). Moreover, as has already been pointed out in Chapter 2.3.2., the grandmother of Oskar Matzerath in Grass's novel *Die Blechtrommel* (*BT*) is also called Anna (see *BT* 12). Furthermore, when reading the first part of the letter of Oskar's grandmother telling us about how she "came upon [Anna and Thomas] ... kissing [...] in the field behind the shed" (*ELIC* 80), we are reminded of Lista and Safran, who once "kissed [...] behind the synagogue" (*EII* 155). Similarly, Oskar's grandfather asked Anna when they first met: "'Do you like music?'" (*ELIC* 113), just like Jonathan's grandfather asked the Gypsy girl on their first encounter in the theater (see *EII* 173), which is also an intertextual reference to García Márquez's

¹³⁴ See the discussion of an author referring to one of his own texts in Broich, *Einzeltextreferenz* 49-50.

novels (see Chapter 2.3.2.). Another interesting allusion concerns Oskar's great-grandfather, for whom "literature was the only religion [he] ... practiced" (*ELIC* 114). Like Lista's father "would command [his children] ... to kiss any book that touched the ground" (*EII* 185), Oskar's grandfather writes about Anna's father that "when a book fell on the floor, he kissed it" (*ELIC* 114).

In addition to the intertextual references concerning the grandparents, *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* contains numerous other allusions to Foer's first novel, such as, for instance, "the storage facility in New Jersey where [Oskar's father] ... kept the stuff that he didn't use anymore" (*ELIC* 102), which clearly refers the reader to Lista's house and the "many boxes, which were overflowing with items" (*EII* 147) collected by Lista after "the Nazi raid" (*EII* 59). This reference to Foer's first novel is additionally underlined by some of the items which Oskar finds there, such as "a box with old atlases [...] and souvenirs from business trips, like Russian dolls with dolls inside them with dolls inside them [...]" (*ELIC* 107). As has already been pointed out in Chapter 3.2.2., the hair clip which Oskar finds in Central Park can be said to be another allusion to the "REMAINS" (*EII* 151) of Trachimbrod. Moreover, Sammy Davis, Junior, Junior, the "mentally deranged" (*ELIC* 5) "Seeing Eye bitch" (*EII* 5) of Alex's grandfather, is also alluded to in the course of the novel. Thus, Abe Black's dog not only "was the best dog in the world" (*ELIC* 149) but also "got confused, and followed one thing and then another" (*ELIC* 149). Moreover, one of Oskar's numerous inventions involves a dog: "What if you trained Seeing Eye dogs to be bomb-sniffing dogs, so that they'd be Sniffing Eye Seeing Bomb dogs?" (*ELIC* 193).

Finally, the story about New York's "SIXTH BOROUGH" (*ELIC* 217) contains a number of allusions to Foer's first novel, especially to Jonathan's invented story about his ancestors living in the shtetl of Trachimbrod. Thus, when Oskar's father tells his son that "[...] you won't read about [the sixth borough] ... in any of the history books, because there's nothing – save for the circumstantial evidence in Central Park – to prove that it was there at all" (*ELIC* 217), the reader is reminded of the totally destroyed Jewish shtetl of Trachimbrod, which does not exist "anymore [, but] .. ended fifty years ago" (*EII* 154). Moreover, the passage can be said to allude to Alex's limited knowledge about his own country's anti-semitic past, which is not dealt with in Alex's formerly Russian "history books" (*EII* 62) (see Chapter 2.1.2.1.). Like the members of the Jewish shtetl celebrated "the [...]"

annual Trachimday festival" (*EII* 91), the inhabitants of "the Sixth Borough" (*ELIC* 217) had "a huge party" (*ELIC* 217) celebrating "the yearly leap" (*ELIC* 217) "from Manhattan" (*ELIC* 217) to the "island" (*ELIC* 217). Furthermore, the "New York referendum [...] to salvage the park" (*ELIC* 221) refers the reader to the "shtetl meeting [...] held [...] the morning after the bombs exploded [...] to discuss the implications of a war" (*EII* 261). Finally, the "tree [in Central Park] ... into whose trunk are carved two names" (*ELIC* 222) again alludes to Jonathan's imagined story about his grandfather's love for "[t]he Gypsy girl [who] carved love letters into trees, filling the forest with notes for" (*EII* 233) Safran. By recognizing the numerous and extensive intertextual allusions to Foer's first novel, only some of which have been mentioned above, the reader becomes aware of the author behind the text, and our illusion of the portrayed storyworld is thus clearly undermined (see Wolf, *Ästhetische Illusion* 280, 394-395).

In addition to the allusions to *Everything Is Illuminated*, the novel contains numerous references to other well-known literary texts, two of which have already been discussed as important pretexts for Foer's first novel in Chapter 2.3.2., i.e. García Márquez's novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (*OHYS*) (see Kakutani para 10) and Günter Grass's *Die Blechtrommel* (*BT*)¹³⁵. Oskar's grandfather writes about the night of the bombings in his second letter: "I had everything. [...] I should have known not to trust it, *one hundred years of joy* can be erased in a second" (*ELIC* 215 [emphasis added]). This comment clearly alludes to the title of García Márquez's famous novel. Moreover, as has already been mentioned above, the question of Oskar's grandfather addressed to Anna, "Do you like music?" (*ELIC* 113) not only alludes to Safran and the Gypsy girl, but again also to García Márquez's novels (see Chapter 2.3.2.).

Whereas Foer's second novel contains relatively few references to the novels of García Márquez, at least when compared to his first one (see Chapter 2.3.2.), the allusions to another famous novel written in the magical realist style, i.e. *Die Blechtrommel* by Günter Grass, are more extensive and obvious, especially because the protagonists in both novels are called Oskar¹³⁶ and they both "play[...] a musical instrument" (Kakutani para 3; see also Hitchings, *Googlist* para 3). Although the intertextual relations to yet another famous literary text, i.e. to Paul Aus-

¹³⁵ See Almond para 16; Deveson para 4; Faber para 7; Gessen 68, 70; Hitchings, *Googlist* para 3; Hoth 290; Kakutani para 3.

¹³⁶ See Almond para 16; Deveson para 4; Gessen 68; Kakutani para 3.

ter's *The New York Trilogy*, will be analyzed further below, it seems interesting to mention at this point that Daniel Quinn in Auster's *City of Glass* (CG) writes about "[a] clarinettist [...] in front of [whom there] ... were two wind-up monkeys, one with a tambourine and the other with a drum" (109), which may serve as an explanation why Foer chose the "tambourine" (*ELIC* 2) for his protagonist. Apart from the "musical instrument" (Kakutani para 3), the two protagonists have other things in common, such as, for instance, the fact that they are both social outsiders. Just like Oskar Matzerath is bullied and made fun of by other children (see e.g. *BT* 121-123), Oskar Schell mentions his "unpopularity at school" (*ELIC* 43) and is occasionally made fun of by his schoolmates "cracking up in the bad way, which is at [him]" (*ELIC* 189; see also *ELIC* 190-192). Even more importantly, Oskar's mother gets very upset when Dr. Fein suggests her to put Oskar into a hospital: "*Who the hell do you think you are? [...] I can't believe we're talking about this. [...] absolutely now way hospitalize my son*" (*ELIC* 206-207). Similarly, Oskar Matzerath's alleged father, Alfred Matzerath, not only refuses to put Oskar into an institution but also gets very angry when talking about it to his second wife: "'Das geht doch nich. Man kann doch den eigenen Sohn nich. Selbst wenn er zehnmal und alle Ärzte dasselbe sagen. [...] Die haben wohl keine Kinder.' [...] 'Nein!' schrie er. 'Niemals!' und schlug mit der Faust auf den Tisch" (*BT* 474; see also *BT* 455). Apart from numerous other allusions to Grass's novel, the most important intertextual element can be said to be Oskar's part in the Hamlet performance, i.e. "the part of Yorick" (Hoth 290), which has already been mentioned above. The important aspect of Oskar playing Yorick is that Oskar Matzerath not only watches Hamlet performances at the theatre (see *BT* 571), but also compares himself to Yorick in the course of the novel (see *BT* 602-603), especially when digging up a woman's grave at the cemetery of "Oberaußem" (*BT* 598): "[...] und für den Vergleich, der mich zum Yorick machte und die Frau – halb noch unten, halb in der Zinkkiste – zum Manne Hamlet [...]. Ich aber, Yorick, fünfter Aufzug, der Narr, 'Ich kannte ihn, Horatio', erste Szene, ich, der auf allen Bühnen dieser Welt – 'Ach armer Yorick!' – seinen Schädel dem Hamlet ausleiht [...]" (*BT* 601). Moreover, at this point Oskar Matzerath mentions "Sir Laurence Olivier" (*BT* 601) playing Hamlet, which seems especially interesting, because on page 55 *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* contains "a picture of [this] ... actor playing Hamlet holding Yorick's skull" (Hoth 290).

As has already been mentioned above, another famous literary text often alluded to by Foer is Paul Auster's *The New York Trilogy* (see Adams para 6; Siegel para 13), especially as far as Oskar's search for the lock is concerned, which leads him through the whole city of New York. Thus, for instance, the fact that Oskar only wears white clothes (see *ELIC* 5, 40) reminds the reader of Peter Stillman jun. in Auster's *City of Glass* (see *CG* 15). Moreover, like Oskar, the son of the fictional character named Paul Auster has "a yoyo" (*CG* 101) (see *ELIC* 3). Apart from numerous other allusions to *City of Glass*, the most important intertextual element has to do with Oskar's last "Reconnaissance Expedition" (*ELIC* 8). As has already been mentioned in Chapter 3.2.2., Oskar marks the places where he has "found [the] things" (*ELIC* 10) in Central Park on the map and tries to "connect" (*ELIC* 10) them to words, just like in Auster's novel Daniel Quinn secretly following Peter Stillman sen. "sketch[es] a map of the area[s] [which] Stillman [has] ... wandered in" (*CG* 67) and finds out that they take the shape of letters. Yet unlike Auster's character, who "deciphers" (*CG* 71) Stillman's secret "message" (*CG* 71), Oskar can "connect [the dots] ... to make almost anything [he] ... want[s]" (*ELIC* 10) and thus is not "getting closer to anything" (*ELIC* 10). Moreover, Oskar's grandfather in his last letter mentions that he secretly "followed [his grandson] all over the city" (*ELIC* 278), like Daniel Quinn followed Peter Stillman sen., and that he "made a map of where [Oskar and Mr. Black] ... went, but [...] couldn't make sense of it" (*ELIC* 278).

The novel also contains allusions to Auster's *Ghosts*, the most important of which are the Blacks, whom Oskar visits (see Adams para 6). We are thus reminded of Auster's protagonist, the detective called "Blue, [who] ... follow[s] a man named Black" (*Ghosts* 137). Moreover, just like Blue moves in the "small apartment directly across the street from Black's" (*Ghosts* 138), Oskar's grandmother "lives in the building across the street" (*ELIC* 70), and like Blue watches Black through his window, sometimes with the help of his "binoculars" (*Ghosts* 139) Oskar watches his grandmother's window with his "binoculars" (*ELIC* 70). Furthermore, when the woman in the "art supply store" (*ELIC* 44) tells Oskar how people "test[ing] a pen [...] usually [...] write[...] the name of the color [they're] ... writing with, or [their] ... name[s]" (*ELIC* 46) we are reminded of the characters in *Ghosts*, who are named after colors. Apart from Blue and Black living on Orange Street, there are Brown and White, and some of Blue's former cases, like "the Redman affair" (*Ghosts* 141) or "the Gray Case" (*Ghosts* 141).

Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close also contains allusions to Auster's third novel of *The New York Trilogy*, i.e. to *The Locked Room* (LR), only some of which will be pointed out. When Oskar towards the end of the novel "dig[s] up [his father's empty] ... coffin (ELIC 321) and "lower[s] himself [...] into the hole" (ELIC 320), we are reminded of how young Fanshawe once "lowered himself into [a freshly dug] ... grave" (LR 221-222). Moreover, both Fanshawe's and William Black's father died of cancer (see LR 219; *EII* 296). Finally, it seems interesting that the narrator in *The Locked Room* towards the end of the novel talks to Fanshawe, who has locked himself into a room and does not allow him to enter. He nevertheless tries to open the doors: "I grabbed hold of the door knob and shook the doors in frustration" (LR 305). Similarly, Oskar's grandfather writing about the night of the bombings mentions that he "grabbed the doorknob [of their house]" (ELIC 211).

Finally, *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* contains intertextual references to Kurt Vonnegut's famous novel *Slaughterhouse-Five* (SF), especially because of the dream of Oskar's grandmother (see ELIC 306-313), in which time is running backwards¹³⁷: "In my dream [...] [t]he fire went back into bombs, which rose up and into the bellies of planes whose propellers turned backward [...]" (ELIC 306-307). Similarly, in Vonnegut's novel Billy Pilgrim watches a "movie backwards [, which was] ... about American bombers in the Second World War" (SF 63): "The formation flew backwards over a German city that was in flames. The bombers opened their bomb bay doors, exerted a miraculous magnetism which shrunk the fires, gathered them into cylindrical steel containers, and lifted the containers into the bellies of the planes" (SF 64). Apart from the dream of Oskar's grandmother, Oskar's dream and his "flip-book" (Deveson para 7) at the end of the novel, which will be discussed further below, can also be associated with Vonnegut's anti-war novel.

In addition to the numerous references to literary texts, the novel alludes to an important non-literary text, i.e. to Ihab Hassan's famous essay entitled "POSTmodernISM" (see Klepper 188, 365; Hutcheon, *Poetics* 14). In his essay Hassan writes: "Soon the day may come when there will be more people alive than ever lived. [...] [W]ill history reverse itself?" (27). Similarly, when telling us about what he got for his "ninth birthday last year" (ELIC 3) Oskar mentions: "Anyway, the fascinating thing was that I read in *National Geographic* that *there are more people alive now*

¹³⁷ See Faber para 10; Gessen 72; Mason para 20.

than have died in all of human history. In other words, if everyone wanted to play Hamlet at once, they couldn't, because there aren't enough skulls!" (*ELIC* 3 [second emphasis added]). As has already been pointed out in Chapter 2.3.2., the numerous and extensive intertextual allusions, which are playfully integrated in the course of the novel (see Broich, *Intertextuality* 251-252), draw the reader's attention to the author's use of language and consequently undermine our illusion of the portrayed storyworld (see Wolf, *Ästhetische Illusion* 280, 394-395).

Unlike Foer's first novel, *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* contains a number of pictures and photographs, which can be related to the concept of 'pluri-mediality' as defined by Werner Wolf:¹³⁸

[W]erkinterne *Plurimedialität* [besteht] ... dort [...], wo verbale Texte zusammen mit anderen Medien verwendet werden. [...] Dies ist beispielsweise in Erzählwerken gegeben, bei denen [...] Binnenillustrationen [...] mit dem Text kombiniert werden, diesen erhellen oder kommentieren und umgekehrt von diesem her ihren Sinn erhalten. (*Intermedialität* 181-182)

The important aspect of the pictures and photographs contained in the novel is that the coherence of the narrated text does not depend on them: "Ein für die Illusion unbedenkliches Abgehen von der Autarkie des sprachlichen Mediums ist [...] nur dort möglich, wo die Illustrationen parallel neben dem sprachlichen Text herlaufen, ohne daß [...] der Leser auf sie für sein Textverständnis angewiesen wäre" (Wolf, *Ästhetische Illusion* 386). Although the pictures are thus additionally "incorporate[ed]" (Hoth 294), the reader nevertheless has to try to make sense of them, i.e. we have to narrativize them (see Fludernik, *Narratology* 45-46; Hoth 286) by trying to relate them to what is told to us in the course of the novel (see Hoth 286; 294-297; McHale 187-190).

The first photograph is the picture of a doorknob contained in the first letter of Oskar's grandfather (see *ELIC* 29). As has already been pointed out above, the coherence of the letter does not depend upon this picture. Yet the reading process is nevertheless interrupted, because we want to make sense of it and try to relate it to what Oskar's grandfather writes to his son. However, since the grandfather's first letter does not contain anything that could be related either to this or to the second or third picture of a doorknob contained in the following part of his letter (see *ELIC* 115, 134), the pictures of the "doorknobs [remain] inscrutable" (Ma-

¹³⁸ See Hoth's analysis of the novel's intermedial elements.

son para 17) to us until we get to read the second part of the letter of Oskar's grandmother. It is only at this point that we are able to make sense of the photographed doorknobs, because Oskar's grandmother writes to her grandson that her husband "took a picture of every doorknob in the apartment" (*ELIC* 175) and "taped [a] ... set into his daybooks" (*ELIC* 175). Thus the concept of multiperspectivity "help[s] [us] to narrativize" (Fludernik, *Narratology* 314) these pictures. Oskar's grandfather himself mentions a doorknob only in his second letter dated "4/12/78" (*EII* 208) when he writes about his traumatic experience of the bombings of Dresden. According to this letter "the last time ... [he] saw ... [his] parents, he "grabbed the doorknob [of their house] and it took the skin off ... [his] hand" (*ELIC* 211) and then he left them, because he "had to go find Anna" (*ELIC* 211). We thus retrospectively realize why he photographed the doorknobs in his apartment, i.e. because they obviously reminded him of the night of the bombings and the last time he saw his parents.

Moreover, and more importantly, the reader has to try to narrativize the pictures and photographs "incorporate[ed]" (Hoth 294) into Oskar's narrative. Thus, for instance, his second chapter contains four pictures of writing pads (see *ELIC* 45, 47-49), which we can easily make sense of, because shortly before we get to see the first picture Oskar tells us about how he visited "the art supply store" (*ELIC* 44) and was shown "a pad of paper" (*ELIC* 44) people write on to "test[...] a pen" (*ELIC* 46). Similarly, most of the pictures and photographs can easily be related to what Oskar tells us about his search for the lock, because most of them directly refer the reader to the relevant passages of the written text, i.e. to what we have read about only shortly before (see also *Interview with JS Foer* para 9). Moreover, Oskar tells us that he took "pictures [...] with his grandfather's camera on his quest through New York" (Hoth 294), which are contained within the relevant passages of the novel. Thus, for instance, we not only get to see the picture which Oskar took of Abby Black's house (see *ELIC* 92), but also of the "photograph of [the] ... elephant" (*ELIC* 94) in her kitchen (see *ELIC* 95) and of Abby Black herself (see *ELIC* 98). Since these "pictures illustrate what Oskar is occupied with and what is important to him" (Hoth 294), they additionally underline the realistic aspect of his narrative (see Wolf, *Ästhetische Illusion* 386).

However, in contrast to these above-mentioned photographs contained within the relevant passages of the written text, some of the pictures in Oskar's second chap-

ter (see *ELIC* 53-67) cannot be narrativized so easily (see Fludernik, *Narratology* 45-46), because they cannot be related to what we have already read about but refer to ensuing passages of the written text. Consequently, like the pictures of the doorknobs in the letters of Oskar's grandfather, their coherence remains unclear, and we can make sense of them by relating them to Oskar's narrative only at a relatively late point. Thus, for instance, the photograph of a French astronaut on page 67 relates to a passage in Oskar's eleventh chapter when he tells us about his "research on the Internet" (*ELIC* 243) about "Ray Black [, who] ... murdered two kids after he raped them" (*ELIC* 243): "I printed [...] out [the pictures] ... and put them in *Stuff That Happened to Me*, right after the picture of Jean-Pierre Haigneré, the French astronaut who had to be carried from his spacecraft after returning from the Mir space station" (*ELIC* 243). It is thus only at a relatively late point that we retrospectively can make sense of this picture on page 67 by Oskar's short comment about the astronaut which we get to read only on page 243. As has already been mentioned above, although the coherence of the written text does not depend on the pictures, the narrativisation of the pictures themselves (see Hoth 286) further complicates the reading process, because we want to make sense of them and find out how they relate to Oskar's narrative (see Wolf, *Ästhetische Illusion* 386).

Another important point about the pictures contained in Oskar's second chapter (see *ELIC* 53-67) is that they refer the reader to "*Stuff That Happened to Me*, [i.e. to his] ... scrapbook of everything that happened to [him]" (*ELIC* 42) (see Hoth 294; Mason para 16). As the author himself pointed out in an interview, these pictures [not only] ... provide context to [Oskar's] ... life, [but also] ... show [...] what Oskar's eyes might see, [i.e.] they show his eyes" (*Interview with JS Foer* para 9). However, although the pictures "are meant to mimic the ones Oskar slips into his scrapbook" (Mason para 16), the picture on page 66 turns out to be problematic, because it cannot be related to one single element or passage of Oskar's narrative. By trying to narrativize this picture showing a primeval couple walking on sand in a desert-like landscape we find out that unlike the other pictures it obviously refers to various different passages of the novel. Thus, the primeval couple itself retrospectively can be associated with what Walt Frazer says to Oskar, i.e. that "[...] people like ... [him] are a dying breed" (*ELIC* 39), because Oskar still uses keys instead of "electronic" (*ELIC* 39) devices. Furthermore, since the couple is walking on sand, it reminds us of what Oskar and his father talked about "the night before the worst

day" (ELIC 12), i.e. about "what would happen if ... [Oskar] in the middle of the Sahara Desert ... [would] pick[...] up a single grain of sand" (ELIC 86). Moreover, the couple's footprints can be related to one of Oskar's inventions, i.e. to the "Nature Hike Anklet, which leaves a trail of bright yellow dye when you walk" (ELIC 106), just like the tiny elephants in the picture's background can be related to the picture of an elephant in Abby Black's kitchen (see ELIC 95). This picture can thus be said to be a collage of different elements of Oskar's narrative (see McHale 187) and as such also refers the reader to the above-mentioned intertextual allusion to the paintings of Picasso. The important point is that we cannot make sense of this picture until the very end of the novel, because it is only then that we realize that it obviously is "collaged from" (McHale 187) different elements and passages. Even more importantly, the peacocks in the picture's background can be associated with what Oskar's grandfather writes in his second letter dated "4/12/78" (ELIC 208), i.e. that he "imagined dozens of homes" (ELIC 208) for Anna and him, such as "a bourgeois [sic] estate in the country with rose gardens and peacocks" (ELIC 209). Since this passage is the only instance when peacocks are mentioned in the course of the whole novel, we realize that the picture on page 66 obviously also mirrors a passage in one of the letters of Oskar's grandfather. However, since Oskar has no knowledge of what his grandfather writes in his letters, as has already been pointed out in Chapter 3.2.1., the picture turns out to be a "*meta-fictional collage*" (Waugh 143) of different elements of the novel and thus clearly foregrounds the author behind the text (see McHale 187-190). Whereas most of the incorporated pictures and photographs help us to imagine what Oskar experienced in the course of his search for the lock, since they refer the reader to his scrapbook called "*Stuff That Happened to Me*" (ELIC 42) (see Hoth 294; Mason para 16), the picture on page 66 shows how the author makes use of a non-verbal device as an implicit metafictional technique to undermine our illusion. By alluding to and making the reader aware of the way in which the author composes his novel, this picture reminds us of the "[o]bjets trouvés" (Waugh 143) found by Oskar in Central Park (see Chapter 3.2.2.). It therefore clearly undermines our illusion of the storyworld portrayed and "foreground[s] the [novel's] ontological structure" (McHale 190), although the coherence of the text itself is not affected, since the picture is additionally provided.

Another important aspect of the novel's intermedial elements is that some of the pictures, especially the flip-book at the end of the novel, directly refer the reader to

Oskar's traumatic experience, i.e. the totally unexpected loss of his father (see Hoth 294-297). Towards the end of his last chapter Oskar tells us about "the pictures of the falling body" (*ELIC* 325), which he found on the Internet, some of which we already get to see at earlier points (see *ELIC* 59, 62, 205). Oskar tells us that he "ripped the pages out of [his scrapbook] ... and reversed the order, so [...] [w]hen [h]e ... flipped through them, it looked like the man was floating up through the sky" (*ELIC* 325). Moreover, like his grandmother in her dream, which has already been mentioned above in connection with Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*, he imagines that time is running backward so that his father finally "would have been safe" (*ELIC* 326). As Hoth points out, "the incorporation of the flip-book underlines the vehemence of the protagonist's desire to undo what happened on September 11, 2001" (297). By watching the man's body "falling upward" (Gessen 72) the reader is made aware of Oskar's traumatic loss, and thus "the relief of its backward respooling [indirectly] suggests the pain of its actual occurrence" (Gessen 72). Moreover, the incorporated pictures serve another important function, i.e. "they ground the reader in the very real world of 9/11" (Mason para 16; see also Hoth 294), especially because "September 11 was the most visually documented event in human history [, and] [w]hen we think of those events, we remember certain images" (Mudge para 7; see also Hoth 298) (see also Chapter 3.4.).

3.3.3. Individual Style

In contrast to the two narrator-characters in *Everything Is Illuminated*, Oskar is not explicitly introduced as a writer of his story (see Chapter 3.1.2.1.). Although he does not explicitly address the reader, like Alex does (see Chapter 2.1.2.1.), we nevertheless clearly get the impression that he tells his story to us, especially because of the questions at the very beginning of his narrative (see Chapter 3.1.2.1.): "[Der] Ich-Erzähler [...] wendet sich nicht direkt an den Leser, sondern an einen von ihm imaginierten und postulierten *listener*, dem er die Ereignisse mündlich, in unmittelbarer Kommunikationssituation, erzählen will" (Volk 155). Like Alex's story, Oskar's narrative clearly portrays features of oral storytelling and therefore can also be related to the concept of 'skaz', as defined in Chapter 2.3.3. The regular use of the word "anyway" (*ELIC* 2), especially in his first three chapters, which indicates the switch to another episode or thought of his and which is printed in an extra line (see e.g. *ELIC* 2, 11, 38, 87), suggests that his "narrative is to be understood as being 'spoken' rather than written down" (*Skaz* 309-310). Moreover, Os-

kar regularly uses colloquial expressions¹³⁹, which we become aware of already in his first chapter, such as, for instance, in the following sentences:

[E]ven after everything I'm still wearing heavy boots, and sometimes it helps to play a good beat. (*ELIC* 2)
 I couldn't tell if [Gerald] ... liked me or not, so I told him, "Your sunglasses are one hundred dollars." (*ELIC* 5)
 Gerald shook his head and cracked up a little, but not in the bad way, which is at me. (*ELIC* 5)
 In the middle of all of that glass was a little envelope, about the size of a wireless Internet card. *What the?* I opened it up, and inside there was a key. *What the, what the?* It was a weird-looking key, obviously to something extremely important. (*ELIC* 37)

The use of expressions and phrases like the ones quoted above, in addition to the numerous dialogues contained in his narrative, create "the illusion of spoken language" (Goetsch 413) and thus clearly draw the reader into what Oskar tells us in the course of the novel. As Nünning points out,

der Eindruck der Erzählillusion ... [wird] oft durch die Erzählweise [verstärkt], sofern diese von [...] Assoziationen der Erzählinstanz geprägt ist und sich der Erzählstil durch kolloquiale Elemente und Merkmale des mündlichen Erzählens auszeichnet. Folglich ist die Wiedergabe des Geschehens in der Regel sprunghaft, episodenhaft und fragmentarisch. (*Mimesis* 30)

Another interesting aspect of Oskar's narrative is that he sometimes creates his own 'language', especially because he is "not allowed to use curse words" (*ELIC* 5). He therefore invents a "repertoire of idiosyncrasies" (Hitchings, *Googlist* para 6), which he uses instead, like the following utterance, with which he tries "to make [Gerald] crack up" (*ELIC* 5) on their way to the cemetery: "Succotash my Balzac, dipshiitake" (*ELIC* 5). When Ron takes his "yo-yo off [his] ... desk" (*ELIC* 3), Oskar gets "incredibly angry" (*ELIC* 3) and tells him, "Yo-yo *moi!*" (*ELIC* 3) instead of something like "Fuck you!" (*ELIC* 254). Similarly, Oskar uses the word "Jose" (*ELIC* 2) whenever he wants to say "No way ...!" (*ELIC* 150), and the phrase "[w]hat the?" (*ELIC* 2, 8), which is also the title of his first chapter, without using the word 'hell' or 'devil' at the end.

Although Oskar's narrative reveals typical features of oral storytelling, by which we are clearly drawn into what is being told to us, the regular and extensive use of the adverbs 'extremely' and 'incredibly' throughout his narrative, especially in connec-

¹³⁹ See e.g. Hitchings, *Googlist* para 4, 6; Kakutani para 5; Mason para 14, Thomas para 1.

tion with the adjectives “loud” (*ELIC* 293) and “close” (*ELIC* 97, 295), has a slightly ambiguous effect. On the one hand these adverbs further enhance “the illusion of spoken language” (Goetsch 413), but, on the other hand, they indirectly draw the reader’s attention to the title of the novel and thus also to the real author outside the fictional world (see also Chapter 3.4.).

Oskar’s use of foreign words and expressions, like, for instance, “pacifist” (*ELIC* 2), “atheist” (*ELIC* 4), “hypothermia” (*ELIC* 5) and “homophobic” (*ELIC* 87), is one of the reasons why the portrayal of his character was also criticized, for instance by Hitchings, who argued that Oskar “doesn’t sound much like a nine-year-old” (*Googlist* para 8)¹⁴⁰. As has already been pointed out above (see Chapter 3.1.2.1. and 3.3.2.), we not only get to know Oskar as a social outsider, who is made fun of by his schoolmates (see *ELIC* 189-192; see Hoth 295), but also as a “highly intelligent” (Hoth 296) child, whose “brain is unusually sharp for a nine-year-old” (Mason para 15). Moreover, Oskar is shown to be a typical child of our computer age, who “turns to the Internet as his main source of information” (Hoth 289). However, although he “has fields of information at his fingertips” (Saval para 5)¹⁴¹, he is shown to be unable to understand and cope with the loss of his father. Oskar’s language can thus be said to further underline the discrepancy between his intellectual abilities and his emotional suffering. As Hoth points out, he is shown to “lack[...] the emotional maturity to manage and digest” (296) the traumatic experience of the sudden and unexpected loss of his father (see also Chapter 3.1.2.1.).

In contrast to Oskar’s narrative, the letters of his grandparents clearly are a written form of narrative (see Chapter 3.1.2.2.). As has already been pointed out in Chapter 3.1.2.2., the letters of Oskar’s grandfather contain his memories of the past, to which he keeps going back and which he cannot let go of. His letters are thus written in a style which underlines the portrayal of his consciousness (see Adams para 10; Fludernik, *Narratology* 48), i.e. “[t]he continuous flow of ... [his] thoughts, feelings, and memories in [...] his mind” (*Stream of Consciousness* 318). For instance, he begins the second part of his first letter by writing about his marriage with Oskar’s grandmother (see *ELIC* 108-111), but interrupts his thoughts and mentions “[t]he beautiful girl” (*ELIC* 113) whom he asks for the time at the airport from where he writes his letter. Since this girl obviously somehow reminds him of

¹⁴⁰ See e.g. Almond para 6; Mason para 15; Myers 118-119; Saval para 4.

¹⁴¹ See also Hitchings, *Googlist* para 6; Hoth 289, 294.

Anna, his thoughts wander back to the past, and he writes about how he first met Anna at the age of “fifteen” (*ELIC* 113). Then, his memories are interrupted again, because he again mentions the person whom he asks for the exact time at the airport. Since this man reminds him of himself, he carries on with writing about his marriage and Oskar’s grandmother. His thoughts then again wander back to the past, and he remembers “[t]he first time Anna and [he] ... made love behind her father’s shed” (*ELIC* 126).

In the first part of his first letter he writes about how he lost his words and how he expressed himself by using the opposite of what he wanted to say: “[I]f I was hungry, I’d point at my stomach and say, ‘I am the opposite of full,’ I’d lost ‘yes,’ but I still had ‘no,’ so if someone asked me, ‘Are you Thomas?’ I would answer, ‘Not no,’” (*ELIC* 17). Moreover, he tells his son that he “went to a tattoo parlor and had YES written onto the palm of ... [his] left hand, and NO onto ... [his] right palm, ... [so that] when [he] rub[s] ... [his] hands against each other in the middle of winter ... [he is] warming ... [himself] with the friction of YES and NO” (*ELIC* 17). The reader’s attention is thus drawn to “the polarity of [...] binary oppositions” (Barry 74), just like in Jonathan’s story when the latter makes use of paradoxical phrases and expressions (see Chapter 2.3.3.). At this point it is interesting to briefly mention that he tells his son that for him, “every book [...] is the balance of YES and NO” (*ELIC* 17). Since he has the words YES and NO written on his palms, this statement draws the reader’s attention to the cover of the novel showing one hand on the front and another on the back cover. Moreover, when we get to see the photographs which Oskar takes of his grandfather’s hands in his eleventh chapter (see *ELIC* 260-261), our attention is again drawn to the hands portrayed on the novel’s cover.

In Oskar’s grandfather’s second letter, we get to read his account of the night of the bombings (see *ELIC* 208-216). As has already been pointed out in Chapter 3.2.3., this letter differs from the others, not only because it is marked with a red pen, but also because of its punctuation, i.e. the commas, which indicate that the grandfather wrote down his thoughts as they came to his mind without caring for or thinking of the correct punctuation. The grandfather’s emotional involvement when writing about the bombings is thus further underlined by this typographic device, which seems interesting, especially because it can be compared to the “breathless

monologue” (Ribbat 213) of Alex’s grandfather about his traumatic experience of the past in *Everything Is Illuminated* (see Chapter 2.3.3.).

Like the letters of Oskar’s grandfather, the style in which his grandmother writes her letter primarily portrays her consciousness, i.e. her wandering thoughts and her memories of the past (see also Chapter 3.1.2.3. and 3.2.1.). In contrast to Oskar’s grandfather, her memories of the past are related to us in shorter and more dispersed passages in the course of the novel (see also Chapter 3.2.1.). The third part of her letter is interesting because of the way in which she writes about the attacks: “I was watching television and knitting you a white scarf. [...] I didn’t feel anything when they showed the burning building. I wasn’t even surprised. I kept knitting for you [...]” (*ELIC* 224-225). After a call from Oskar’s mother telling her that her son “had a meeting in that building” (*ELIC* 225), however, she “ran to the toilet, and vomited” (*ELIC* 225). “When [Oskar] ... fell asleep [...], [she] ... turned on the television” (*ELIC* 239) again and describes what she saw there:

The same pictures over and over.
Planes going into buildings.
Bodies falling.
People waving shirts out of high windows.
Planes going into buildings.
Bodies falling.
Planes going into buildings.
People covered in gray dust.
Bodies falling.
Buildings falling.
Planes going into buildings.
Planes going into buildings.
Buildings falling.
People waving shirts out of high windows.
Bodies falling.
Planes going into buildings. (*EII* 230)

Although this passage was criticized by Myers, who argued that “[e]ven the most submissive readers will skim [it]” (120), it nevertheless seems interesting, because it calls forth the typical “images of ‘9/11’ [...] which inscribed themselves into our collective knowledge of the event” (Hoth 285-286; see also Mudge para 7) and, even more importantly, “the never-ceasing iteration of these pictures” (Hoth 286). The repetition of these very short sentences (see also Deveson para 6), not only in this passage, but throughout the rest of this part of her letter, with which Oskar’s grandmother describes verbally what she saw on her television screen, can thus

also be linked with the pictures of the falling body contained in Oskar's narrative (see *ELIC* 59, 62, 205, 327).

3.4. Themes

The central events portrayed in the novel are the terrorist attacks of 9/11 and the totally unexpected death of Oskar's father, who died in one of the towers of the World Trade Center (see Chapter 3.1.2. and 3.2.1.). Due to the novel's multiperspectivity, the reader gets to know how each of the three narrator-characters experienced the day of the attacks and how each of them "tries to cope with the [traumatic] loss" (Hoth 287) of a family member (see Chapter 3.2.1.). "[T]he terrorist attacks are [thus] depicted less as an historical or political event; '9/11' is primarily a personal event" (Hoth 287). Since "the main focus lies on" (Hoth 297) Oskar's perspective (see Chapter 3.2.1.), the reader becomes aware of how the attacks affected the life of the nine-year old boy, who "struggle[s] to come to terms with [his father's] violent death" (Hoth 287). As has already been pointed out in Chapter 3.1.2.1., Oskar's decision to go on a quest for the lock that fits the "weird-looking key" (*ELIC* 37) reflects the boy's attempts to overcome his traumatic experience, especially because he thinks that he will thus be able to find out more about his father's horrible death. Oskar's quest for the lock, however, turns out to be in vain, i.e. he does not find out anything about his father. Instead, he discovers that the key belonged to the father of somebody else, i.e. to William Black's father, who died in the same year as Thomas Schell Jr. (see also Chapter 4.1.), i.e. that other people have suffered loss as well.

Another important effect achieved by the novel's multiperspectivity is that we become aware of the characters' emotional isolation, because they are shown to be unable to talk about their traumatic experiences and to express their feelings (see Chapter 3.1.2.1. and 3.2.1.). The novel thus portrays the distance between the family members and the secrets they keep from each other. As has already been pointed out in Chapter 3.1.2.1., Oskar is shown to be unable to talk about his father's last phone calls and thus keeps them a secret from his mother as well as his grandmother. Moreover, he does not tell them anything about his search for the lock. Similarly, Oskar's mother turns out to have her secrets as well. Apart from the fact that she pretends not know anything about her son's activities, she tells Oskar that her husband "called ... [her] from the building that day" (*ELIC* 324) only towards the end of the novel. We get to know from the letter of Oskar's grandmother

that when Oskar asked his mother “if ... [his father] was in the building for a meeting” (*ELIC* 229) on “the worst day” (*ELIC* 12) his mother did not tell him the truth. Apart from Oskar and his mother, his grandparents are also shown to have secrets from each other. Since they “never talk about the past” (*ELIC* 108), Oskar’s grandfather tells his wife that “Anna was pregnant” (*ELIC* 310) only towards the end of the novel, although Oskar’s grandmother turns out to have known about it all along (see Chapter 3.2.1.). Moreover, since Oskar’s grandmother does not talk to her grandson about her past, Oskar tells us that he does not know much about her (see also Chapter 3.1.2.3.). The secrets kept by the various members of the Schell family thus partly remind the reader of the family secrets in *Everything Is Illuminated* (see Chapter 2.4.).

The emotional distance between the novel’s characters is also pointed at in the novel’s title (see also Chapter 3.3.3.). As the author explains in an interview, the novel contains “many things [which] are silent and far away [, such as Oskar’s grandfather, who] ... travels halfway around the world to be distant from those ... [he] love[s]” (*Interview with JS Foer* para 10). On the other hand, Foer mentions that “things in the novel are loud and close [, like] [w]ar [...] and [...] “the World Trade Center attacks” (*Interview with JS Foer* para 10) and “Oskar’s relationship with his father [, which is] ... simultaneously loud and silent, and close and far away” (*Interview with JS Foer* para 10).

As has already been pointed out earlier (see Chapter 3.3.2. and 2.3.3.), the novel reflects how the attacks of 9/11 “unfolded in real time, with millions of people around the globe watching ... [them] on their television screens” (Hoth 285; see also Mudge para 7; Rothberg 14). “Many people witnessing the attacks in front of their televisions actually doubted the pictures’ accuracy and thought they were watching a Hollywood film” (Hoth 286). This is exactly how Oskar’s grandfather learned about the attacks, i.e. he first thought that he was watching “a commercial” (*ELIC* 272) or “a new movie” (*ELIC* 272) (see Chapter 3.2.1.). The novel thus also points to our regular confrontation with brutality and aggressiveness by the media due to which we have become emotionally dulled (see Hoth 286). As Oskar’s grandmother tells her grandson, she “didn’t feel anything when they showed the burning building” (*ELIC* 224) (see also Chapter 3.3.3.). Moreover, her account of how she experienced “the worst day” (*ELIC* 12) draws our attention to another important aspect, i.e. the repetition of the same pictures and scenes on television,

“which [therefore] inscribed themselves into our collective knowledge of the event” (Hoth 286) (see Chapter 3.3.3.). This aspect is additionally underlined by the incorporation of pictures and photographs into the novel, which has already been analyzed in Chapter 3.3.2.

As Mackenzie points out, “Foer parallels [the] contemporary event[...] [of 9/11] with events of the near past” (para 27; see also Hoth 292). Oskar’s grandparents not only experienced the terrorist attacks in New York but also survived the firebombing of Dresden in February 1945. As with the event of the present, the novel depicts this traumatic historical event of the past by individual and subjective memories, which we get to read in the course of the grandparents’ letters (see Hoth 292) (see Chapter 3.2.1.). Moreover, the reader realizes that the past can only be reconstructed by personal memories (see Chapter 3.2.1.), just like in Foer’s first novel (see Chapter 2.2.1.). However, since the memories of Oskar’s grandparents partly contradict and diverge from each other, the reader is unable to reconstruct certain events of the past in reliable and objective terms, which is another parallel to *Everything Is Illuminated* (see also Chapter 4.).

In addition to the firebombing of Dresden, the novel depicts another traumatic historical event of the Second World War, namely “the detonation of the first atomic bomb over [...] Hiroshima ... [on] August 6, 1945” (Hoth 292). In the interview with Ms. Tomoyasu, which we get to read within Oskar’s narrative (see *ELIC* 187-189) and which is based on a real interview which can be found on the Internet¹⁴², the woman, who survived the bombing, remembers the cruel and painful death of her daughter Masako. Her personal account of that day partly reminds the reader of how Oskar’s grandfather experienced the firebombing of Dresden, not only because both survivors lost a beloved person, but also because they both recount the horrible scenes after the bombings, which they witnessed while running through the cities in search of these persons.

“The [...] dominance of the topics of ‘grief’ and ‘loss of beloved ones’” (Hoth 290) is not only portrayed in the emotional suffering of the three narrator-characters, but “is extended across nearly all the characters in the book” (Hoth 290). During his search for the lock, Oskar thus “discovers different sorts of human catastrophe” (Mackenzie para 26), because the Blacks whom he visits are all shown to have

¹⁴² See Faber para 3; *Interview with JS Foer* para 8; *Testimony of Kinue Tomoyasu*.

suffered a kind of loss (see also Hoth 290). In addition to Abby Black, who leads an unhappy marriage and therefore divorces her husband, just like Chelsea Black, Oskar meets Mr. Black, who lost his wife, and Ruth Black, who lost her husband. Aaron Black is “very sick ... [and therefore] hooked up to all sorts of machines” (*ELIC* 90), and the woman who lives in Agnes Black’s apartment is confined to a wheelchair. Even more importantly, Oskar finds out that Agnes Black “had been a waitress at Windows on the World” (*ELIC* 195) and therefore died in the World Trade Center, just like his father did.

4. Comparison

4.1. Postmodern Detective Stories

As Alex tells us at the beginning of his story, Jonathan comes to Ukraine because he wants to find information about his grandfather's past (see Chapter 2.2.1. and 2.4.). By setting out to find Augustine and Trachimbrod, he hopes to learn how his grandfather escaped the Holocaust. Like in Foer's first novel, the main character in *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*, the nine-year old Oskar, is shown to be in search of something: By attempting to find the lock he hopes to find out how his father died in the World Trade Center. Oskar, like Jonathan, therefore embarks on a quest, which becomes his main concern and which he relates to us in the course of his narrative. This basic plot displayed in both novels can be compared to the "general pattern" (Hutcheon, *Narrative* 31) of a detective story, which "implies the presence of at least three invariable elements: the detective [, i.e. Jonathan and Oskar], the process of detection [, i.e. their quest], and the solution" (Tani 41).¹⁴³ By comparing the detective to an "archeologist" (47) Tani points out that "both the detective and the archeologist 'dig out'" (47) and both are involved in "a reconstruction of the past" (45). Indeed, in *Everything Is Illuminated* Jonathan is concerned with "a reconstruction of the past" (Tani 45), and Alex for his part unintentionally alludes to archeologists by his regular misuse of the verb 'to excavate' (see Chapter 3.3.3.). Similarly, in *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* Oskar compares himself to a "detective" (*ELIC* 41) when he finds the key in his father's closet. Moreover, he refers to himself as an "AMATEUR ARCHEOLOGIST" (*ELIC* 99) on his card and compares himself to an "archeologist" (*ELIC* 9) in connection with the last "Reconnaissance Expedition" (*ELIC* 8) and the things he digs up in Central Park (see Chapter 3.2.2.).

The important point, however, is that the characters in both novels are shown to be unable to find what they have been looking for; their hopes thus remain unfulfilled and their efforts turn out to have been in vain (see also Chapter 2.2.1., 2.4. and 3.1.2.1.). Instead, their quests leads them to the unexpected discovery of something else: Jonathan does not find out anything about his own grandfather's past,

¹⁴³ For a discussion of the postmodern detective story see also Hutcheon, *Narrative* 31-32, 71-76; Hutcheon, *Poetics* 20-21; Waugh 79, 81-84; Bertens, *Detective* 197-201; Broich, *Intertextuality* 253.

but unintentionally discovers the traumatic past of somebody else's, i.e. Alex's, grandfather. Similarly, Oskar does not find out anything about his own father's death, but instead discovers that the key belonged to somebody else's, i.e. William Black's, father, who incidentally died in the same year as Oskar's father. Since in terms of a detective story the detectives in both novels are thus shown to be unable to "solve the mystery" (Tani 46), both novels display typical features of an "anti-detective novel" (Tani 37), in which "the solution becomes nonsolution" (Tani 42): Since "[t]he solution is the most important element ... [, it is to the solution that the anti-detective novelist devotes his attention; he anticipates [it] ..., fulfills it only partially [...], denies it [...], nullifies it [...], or parodies it" (Tani 41-42). The author can thus be said to "exploit[...] and subvert[...] conventional detective-novel techniques" (Tani 151). In contrast to a traditional detective story, in which "the reader enjoys the triumph of justice and the restoration of order" (Waugh 82), the anti-detective novel "neither implies the punishment of the culprit nor the triumph of justice" (Tani 44). This aspect turns out to be crucial especially in connection with Foer's first novel, which, as Eaglestone points out and as has already been discussed in Chapter 2.4., "illuminat[es] [...] a grey zone, where neither history nor moral judgments are simple" (130).

Another important aspect of "the anti-detective story" (Tani 42) is that "[t]he detective [...] no longer has the detachment of a M. Dupin [, but instead] ... gets emotionally caught in the net of his detecting effort" (Tani 42). Thus, Jonathan's quest for the past involves the search for his own roots and his own identity (see Chapter 2.4.). Similarly, Oskar's quest for the lock reflects his attempts "to come to terms with ... [the] violent death" (Hoth 287) of his father, whose role model was important for the nine-year old boy's identity (see Chapter 3.1.2.1.): "Die Suche nach dem Anderen draußen (sei es Täter oder Opfer, Vater [...] oder Freund) ist dabei immer gleichzeitig eine Reise ins Innere, eine Suche nach der eigenen Identität" (Klepper 251; see also Tani 77). The author can thus be said to make use of a highly conventionalized "popular form" (Waugh 79) of literature¹⁴⁴ as "a vehicle [...] for conveying present [...] insecurities" (Waugh 79), i.e. the main characters' "quest for identity" (Tani 77). In *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* this aspect is additionally underlined by the intertextual references to Paul Auster's famous anti-detective novels (see Chapter 3.3.2.), in which there not only is no solution but in

¹⁴⁴ See Waugh's discussion of 'popular forms in metafiction' in Waugh 79-86; Hutcheon's concept of 'covert narcissistic forms' in Hutcheon, *Narrative* 73; her discussion of 'popular art forms' in Hutcheon, *Poetics* 20-21; Broich, *Intertextuality* 253; Suerbaum 74; Tani 46.

the course of which the characters' identities seem to dissolve and the roles of the detective and the 'criminal' can no longer clearly be distinguished¹⁴⁵.

In both novels the author can thus be said to "play[...] with ... [the] genre conventions" (Broich, *Intertextuality* 253) of the detective story: "If a postmodernist text employs the genre conventions of [...] detective literature, the author does not want to fulfill the readers' genre expectations and he does not want to stabilize the meaning of his text by making it appear as part of an accepted literary genre" (Broich, *Intertextuality* 253). As Hutcheon points out, "postmodernist [...] texts are ... [thus] specifically parodic in their intertextual relation to the tradition and conventions of the genres involved" (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 11). Parody in this connection, however, does not mean "to exclude seriousness and purpose" (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 27), but rather is to be understood as a typical "postmodern form, [which] ... paradoxically both incorporates and challenges that which it parodies" (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 11) (see also Chapter 4.2.).

Both novels can also be discussed in terms of metafictional detective stories, in which "the detection is present in the relation between the writer who deviously writes ('hides') his own text and the reader who wants to make sense out of it (who 'seeks' a solution)" (Tani 43-44). The author can thus be compared to the criminal and the reader to the detective. As Hutcheon points out, "[t]he logical deductions demanded of the reader place him [...] in the shoes of the detective" (*Narrative* 73), and "the act of reading ... [, which] involves the interpretation of clues," (Hutcheon, *Narrative* 76) consequently corresponds to the "process of detection" (Tani 41). Since in Foer's first novel the narrator-characters of Alex and Jonathan are both introduced as writers and simultaneously also as readers of their stories (see Chapter 2.1.1. and 2.1.2.1.), *Everything Is Illuminated* "presents a relation between writer and reader *outside* and *within* the fiction" (Tani 44 [emphasis added]). As has already been discussed in Chapter 2.1.2.1., Alex's letters depict him as a "fictional reader[...] trying to make sense out of" (Tani 44) what Jonathan writes in his imagined story about Trachimbrod. The numerous explicit metafictional comments about Jonathan's story, which have been analyzed in Chapter 2.1.2.1., can thus be referred to as part of Alex's "detecting effort" (Tani 42), which mirrors "the act of reading" (Hutcheon, *Narrative* 76) outside the fictional world.

¹⁴⁵ See the discussion of Auster's *New York Trilogy* in Bertens, *Detective* 200-201; Bertens, *Theory* 140-141; Klepper 251, 255-256; Kondoyanidi 76-77, 88-89.

Moreover, the implicit metafictional techniques employed in both novels (see Chapter 2.2. and 3.2.; see also Chapter 4.2.), by means of which our illusion is undermined and the real author outside the fictional world is foregrounded, can be referred to as “clues” (Hutcheon, *Narrative* 76), with the help of which the reader is able to take up the ‘criminal’s’, i.e. the author’s, trail and gradually begins to realize how the author composes his novels: “The reader’s attention [thus] begins to focus on *how* the code is constructed, *how* mystery is produced” (Waugh 83). For instance, the author’s use of “[o]bjets trouvés” (Waugh 143) in both novels (see Chapter 2.2.1. and 3.2.2.) creates a typical “‘hide-and-seek’ relation” (Tani 44) between an author and a reader. In *Everything Is Illuminated* we are challenged to find out how Jonathan transforms his experience of his trip in his invented family history, i.e. we have to look for “clues” (Hutcheon, *Narrative* 76) and find the parallels and reflections between Alex’s ‘realistic’ and Jonathan’s imagined story, the most important of which have been analyzed in Chapter 2.2.1.. In *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*, the use of this technique has an even stronger anti-illusionistic effect, since Oskar’s narrative, unlike Jonathan’s story, is not an imagined tale written by a fictional character but a ‘realistic’ account of his personal experience. Although the various items which Oskar digs up in Central Park at the beginning of his narrative also reappear in the course of the novel (see Chapter 3.2.2.), they are not transformed by a fictional writer-character but directly by the real author himself. The game of “hide-and-seek” (Tani 44) in Foer’s second novel therefore takes place on a different level, i.e. between the reader and the real author outside the fictional world. Similarly, the picture of the medieval couple walking in a desert-like landscape in *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* (see *ELIC* 66), which has been discussed in Chapter 3.3.2., can be interpreted as another “clue[...]Narrative 76) for the reader, which we have to try to make sense of and which turns out to be a metafictional collage undermining our illusion and referring us to the way in which the author composes his novel. The numerous intertextual references contained in both novels (see Chapter 2.3.2. and 3.3.2.) have to be sorted out as well, i.e. the reader has to recognize the “intertextual threads” (Marshall 182)¹⁴⁶ between the various texts and thus again becomes aware of how the author composes his texts: “In metafictional anti-detective fiction the writer is [...] part of his text [...]. He keeps reminding us that what we are reading is only fiction

¹⁴⁶ See also Broich, *Einzeltextreferenz* 51; Tani 44.

and that he is the conjuror in this magic game, which has no reality but its own" (Tani 114).

4.2. Human Experience – Postmodern Techniques

The first two criteria of Zerweck's model for the analysis of contemporary fiction, upon which my comparison will be broadly based (see Chapter 1.) concern the creation of a novel's aesthetic illusion and its references to the reality outside the fictional world (see Zerweck, *Postmodernes Erzählen* 54; see also Zerweck, *Synthese* 16, 38-42, 103-105). In this respect, both novels clearly can be said to display a strong realistic tendency. The "aesthetic illusion as the impression of being re-centered in a ... [fictional] world as if it were (a slice of) life" (Wolf, *Aesthetic Illusion* para 1) is primarily achieved by the novels' narrator-characters: "Fiction with a teller figure evokes situational real-life equivalents of telling and their characteristic constellations" (Fludernik, *Narratology* 47)¹⁴⁷. As has been discussed in Chapter 2.1.2. and 3.1.2., the individual first-person narrator-characters of Alex in Foer's first novel and of Oskar and his grandparents in *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* are all "invoked as [...] full-fledged human entit[ies] whose act of narration corresponds to familiar storytelling scripts or storytelling frames" (Fludernik, *Metanarrative* 3; see also Nünning, *Mimesis* 26). Since they all "relate[...] back to ... [their] personal experience" (Fludernik, *Narratology* 47)¹⁴⁸, their stories clearly gain and display an authentic and realistic quality (see also Fludernik, *Narratology* 168). In this respect Jonathan's story about Trachimbrod forms an exception, since it turns out to be imagined and to never have happened in realistic terms. However, as has been shown in Chapter 2.2.1., his imagined family history "can [...] be recuperated" (Fludernik, *Narratology* 36) by the reader, who realizes how Jonathan transforms his personal experience of the trip into "an invented fictional fantasy" (Fludernik, *Narratology* 37). Moreover, the illusion of oral storytelling and of spoken language created in both novels (see Chapter 2.1.2.1., 2.3.3., 3.1.2.1., 3.3.3.) further enhances our impression that the individual accounts correspond to a "real-world experience" (Fludernik, *Narratology* 35), which additionally draws the reader into the text world (see Nünning, *Mimesis* 25-26). Another important aspect shared by the narrator-characters in both novels is their unreliability. Whereas Alex's account turns out to be unreliable primarily because of his unrealistic and naïve ideas about America (see Chapter 2.1.2.1.), Oskar's unreliability as a narrator-character

¹⁴⁷ See also Fludernik, *Metanarrative* 3; Hutcheon, *Narrative* 92; Nünning, *Mimesis* 20-22.

¹⁴⁸ See Fludernik's concept of 'experientiality' in Fludernik, *Narratology* 28-30, 70.

basically is a matter of age (see Chapter 3.1.2.1.). Although the individual perspectives of his grandparents are shown to be wider and more mature, their accounts also prove to be partly unreliable (see Chapter 3.2.1.).

The realistic dimension in both novels is achieved by another important element, i.e. by the numerous references to the reality outside the fictional worlds. As I have discussed in Chapter 2.2.2., Alex's story about his trip through Ukraine is set within a realistic context, as are the three narrative strands in *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*. The numerous places and persons as well as the historical events mentioned in both novels refer the reader to the real world: "Die Referenzillusion tritt in solchen Romanen in den Vordergrund, in denen der Bezug auf spezifische reale Gegebenheiten, Orte oder Personen dominiert" (Zerweck, *Synthese* 51). This realistic aspect is underlined by the novels' intertextual and intermedial references which are "located in the internal system of communication" (Hebel 146) (see Chapter 2.3.2. and 3.3.2.). In *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* we additionally get to see the pictures and photographs which Oskar takes with his grandfather's camera during his quest through New York City (see Chapter 3.3.2.). Jonathan's imagined family history again forms an exception in this respect. Although it is set in Trachimbrod, i.e. in a shtetl which once really existed, it contains numerous fantastic elements and thus turns out to be told in the magical realist style, which emphasizes the distance between the 'realistic' present and the imagined past of the shtetl-world (see Chapter 2.2.2.).

Although both novels depict the personal accounts of individualized first-person narrator-characters, which evoke the illusion of "real-world experience" (Fludernik, *Narratology* 35) and which are set within a realistic context, the author uses a number of metafictional techniques, which Zerweck subsumes under the criterion of narrative self-reflexivity (see Chapter 1.), by means of which our illusion of a realistically portrayed storyworld clearly is undermined in both novels, although – as will be shown in the following – by partly different strategies and to different degrees. The most evident difference is the use of explicit metafiction in *Everything Is Illuminated* (see Chapter 2.1.2.1.). Compared to the numerous explicit metafictional comments which partly undermine our illusion, Alex's metaleptic addresses of the real author outside the fictional world in the second half of the novel are much more anti-illusionistic (see Chapter 2.1.2.1.). Similarly, Jonathan's comment about the fact that he has invented his story (see Chapter 2.1.2.2.), due to which

the reader realizes that the history of his ancestors exists only in his fantasy, heavily affects our illusion of the shtetl-world. Even more anti-illusionistic is the incoherence between Alex's and Jonathan's stories, which the reader is confronted with in the second half of the novel (see Chapter 2.2.1). Finally, the various ontological instabilities, as discussed in Chapter 2.2.3., partly undermine and also disrupt our illusion. The most anti-illusionistic implicit metafictional instance certainly occurs towards the end of the novel, when the reader realizes the metaleptic mise-en-abyme of the passage contained in the letter of Alex's grandfather (see Chapter 2.2.3.). Thus, the author's use of explicit as well as implicit metafictional techniques, especially in the second half of the novel, undermines and disrupts our illusion of realistically portrayed storyworlds.

As I have tried to show in Chapter 2., *Everything Is Illuminated* contains a number of ambiguities and "rifts" (*Interview with JS Foer* para 21) on various levels¹⁴⁹: On the level of the fictional characters we not only become aware of Alex's divided opinions towards his own country and towards America (see Chapter 2.1.2.1.), but also of Jonathan's divided attitude towards his grandfather. On the way from Lvov to Lutsk, when talking about his grandfather and the woman who "saved ... [him] from the Nazis" (*EII* 61), Jonathan tells Alex: "Part of me wants him to have loved her, and part of me hates to think it" (*EII* 61). As has been shown in Chapter 2.4., the identities of Alex's grandfather and of Lista partly remain ambiguous and unclear throughout the novel. The ambiguities in Alex's story are reflected in Jonathan's invented family history (see Chapter 2.2.1. and 2.2.2.). On the level of the plot, the reader is confronted with Lista's unreliable and blurred memories of the past and is thus left in the dark about what really happened to Jonathan's grandfather. On the level of language we become aware of Alex's misuse of certain expressions and of Jonathan's paradoxical and self-contradictory phrases (see Chapter 3.3.3.). Most important, however, are the novel's "unresolved thematic contradictions" (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 47), which have been discussed in Chapter 2.4., due to which *Everything Is Illuminated* turns out to be a novel which offers no "[f]inal [s]olution" (Rothberg 14) (see also Chapter 4.1). It can thus be said to be a postmodern text which "calls into question notions of closure, totalization, and uni-

¹⁴⁹ Compare Hutcheon's discussion of John Fowles's *A Maggot* in Hutcheon, *Poetics* 47; see *Interview with JS Foer* para 21.

versality" (Hutcheon, *Politics* 67)¹⁵⁰. In contrast to this "postmodern impulse ... [which does] not seek any total vision [but] ... merely questions (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 48), Lucy points out that "[t]he Third Reich's 'solution' to the Jewish 'problem' [...] is completely goal-oriented and therefore closed, intolerant and totalizing" (69). As I have tried to show in Chapter 2.4., both Lista's and the grandfather's account portray the irrationality and the inconceivably destructive power of the Holocaust, due to which no other outcome than the total destruction of the Jewish community was possible.¹⁵¹ *Everything Is Illuminated* thus displays "a structure that foregrounds the conflicts between truth and lies, [...] facts and beliefs, and truth and illusion ... [, and thus] works to problematize such binary certainty" (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 47).¹⁵²

The metafictional techniques applied in *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* clearly differ from those used in Foer's first novel. Since Oskar is not introduced as a fictional writer-character, but rather tells his story to us (see Chapter 3.3.3), and since his grandparents do not comment on the writing of their letters as fictional accounts, Foer does not make use of any explicit metafictional strategies in his second novel. Unlike his first novel, *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* neither contains any metaleptic disruptions, i.e. the fictional characters do not address the real author outside the fictional world, nor any metaleptic mises-en-abyme. Moreover, the ontological instabilities of Oskar's narrative (see Chapter 3.2.3.) clearly are less anti-illusionistic than in Foer's first novel. Instead, Foer uses the concept of multiperspectivity (see Chapter 3.2.1.) and a number of typographic devices, especially in the letters of Oskar's grandfather, to partly undermine our illusion of the story-world portrayed (see Chapter 3.2.3.). Although the pictures and photographs additionally incorporated mainly underline the "reality effect" (Fludernik, *Narratology* 270) of the novel (see Chapter 3.3.2.), the concept of pluri-mediality is also used to achieve exactly the opposite effect, i.e. as an implicit metafictional technique which foregrounds the real author behind the text (see Chapter 3.3.2.). On the whole, Foer's second novel turns out to be less anti-illusionistic than his first one, especially because of the lack of incoherent storylines and of any metaleptic mises-en-abyme, by means of which our illusion clearly would be destroyed.

¹⁵⁰ See Hutcheon's discussion of 'totalizing narrative representation' in Hutcheon, *Politics* 59-67; Hutcheon, *Parody* 226-229, 234; Sicher's comment on 'postmodernist fiction' and 'second-generation writing' in Sicher, *Future* 84; Tani 39-40.

¹⁵¹ Cf. Behlman's discussion of Holocaust facts enclosing fiction in Behlman 57-58.

¹⁵² See the concept of 'deconstruction' as discussed in Barry 65-79.

Despite the above-mentioned differences, there are a number of similarities between the various implicit metafictional techniques used in both novels. Thus, for instance, both narrative strands in *Everything Is Illuminated* turn out to display a circular structure. At the beginning of Alex's story Jonathan arrives at the train station in Lvov and at the end, after his three-day trip, he leaves the country from exactly the same place yet without having found out anything reliable about his grandfather's past (see also Chapter 4.1.). As has been analyzed in Chapter 2.2.2., the end of Jonathan's invented family history is reflected and foreshadowed in the story's beginning. Whereas the circular structure in Alex's story can be said to be realistically motivated, the circular structure of Jonathan's story clearly underlines the fantastic nature of his invented shtetl-world (see Chapter 2.2.2.). Yet another effect is achieved by the aspect of circularity in the two narrative strands of Oskar and his grandfather in *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*. Here, the formal device is used to reflect and emphasize the characters being caught up within their traumatic experience, which is additionally underlined by the use of palindromic names (see Chapter 3.1.2.1 and 3.1.2.2.). Furthermore, both novels contain incoherent chronological information which partly undermines our illusion of the storyworlds portrayed. In *Everything Is Illuminated*, the reader is confronted with incompatible time spans in Jonathan's invented family history (see Chapter 2.2.2.), and in *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* we are provided with contradictory information about the age of Oskar's father and his grandmother's arrival in New York (see Chapter 3.2.3.). The difference, however, is that in Foer's second novel the reader partly gets the incoherent information from different narrator-characters due to the novel's multiperspectivity, and the effect on the reader therefore can be said to be less anti-illusionistic. Another important parallel which the reader is able to detect between the novels is the fact that the past cannot be reconstructed in objective terms. In *Everything Is Illuminated*, we are left in the dark about what happened to Jonathan's grandfather because of Lista's unreliable and blurred memories (see Chapter 2.2.1.), and in *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* some of the events of the past turn out to partly remain unclear as well (see Chapter 3.2.1). Again, it is the concept of multiperspectivity in Foer's second novel, which is responsible for the difference between the two novels. In *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* we get to read two different accounts of the past, i.e. the diverging memories of Oskar's grandparents.

The most evident implicit metafictional technique which the author uses in both novels is the technique of collage and the use of 'objets trouvés' (see Chapter 2.2.1. and 3.2.2.). The effect achieved by the use of this technique, however, is a different one in each of the novels (see also Chapter 4.1.). In *Everything Is Illuminated* this technique "can [...] be recuperated" (Fludernik, *Narratology* 36) by the reader because of the fictional writer-character of Jonathan, who transforms his experience and memories of his trip in his invented family history. In contrast to this, the transformed reappearance of the items found by Oskar in Foer's second novel directly draws our attention to the author outside the fictional world and makes us aware of how he composes his novel.

The last and fourth criterion of Zerweck's model comprises the novels' intertextual and intermedial references (see Chapter 1.). As has already been pointed out above, the references "which are accessible to the fictional characters and presented as part of the narrated fictional world" (Hebel 146) underline the realistic illusion evoked in both novels (see Zerweck, *Synthese* 105). On the other hand, the numerous intertextual references which "are located in the external system of communication" (Hebel 146) refer the reader to the author behind the text and are thus used to achieve exactly the opposite effect, i.e. to undermine the realistic context in both novels (see Chapter 2.3.2. and 3.3.2.). In *Everything Is Illuminated* Foer refers to two of García Márquez's novels and to Günter Grass's *Die Blechtrommel*. Apart from the extensive allusions to the author's own first novel, i.e. to *Everything Is Illuminated*, the second novel contains references to Paul Auster's anti-detective novels and to Kurt Vonnegut's anti-war novel *Slaughterhouse-Five*. In *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* the author additionally uses the concept of pluri-mediality to invoke and at the same time to undermine the novel's realistic context (see Chapter 3.3.2.). As has been analyzed in Chapter 4.1., the concept of intertextuality serves an important function in yet another respect, i.e. in the author's use of the highly conventionalized genre of the detective story to convey new contents. As I have tried to show, by being "plac[ed] [...] in the shoes of the detective" (Hutcheon, *Narrative* 73) the reader is assigned an important role, i.e. he "becomes [...] an acknowledged fully active player in ... [this postmodern] conception of literature (Waugh 42). As Hutcheon points out with respect to the

reader's role, "[r]eading is an active, creative, and demanding process" (Hutcheon, *Narrative* 98).¹⁵³

Foer's novels on the one hand clearly have a realistic tendency, primarily because of their first-person narrator-characters and their strong references to the reality outside the fictional world. At the same time, however, the realistic illusion in both novels is undermined by the use of various metafictional techniques and by extensive intertextual allusions to other literary texts, which draw the reader's attention to the author behind the text. Both novels thus display typical elements of what Waugh has termed "[m]etafictional novels" (6): They are "constructed on the principle of a fundamental and sustained opposition: the construction of a fictional illusion (as in traditional realism) and the laying bare of that illusion" (6). They can thus generally be related to the concept of postmodernism as defined by Hutcheon: "[P]ostmodernism is a fundamentally contradictory enterprise: its art forms [...] at once use and abuse, install and then destabilize convention in parodic ways, self-consciously pointing both to their own inherent paradoxes and provisionality" (*Poetics* 23). The various postmodern anti-illusionistic techniques and devices, which have been criticized as "gimmicks" (Almond para 12) (see Chapter 1.), thus indeed prevent the reader from remaining in a "continuous dream" (Almond para 12). In this connection Almond, in his review of Foer's second novel pointed out that "[w]e don't need gimmicks to keep our attention; we just need the truth" (para 12). Yet as I have tried to show in my analysis, this is exactly what the author does not intend to provide us with (see Chapter 4.1.): "The postmodern impulse is not to seek any total vision. It merely questions" (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 48). It was exactly this impulse which I personally found interesting and fascinating, especially in connection with the personal traumatic experiences portrayed in both of the novels.

¹⁵³ See also Hutcheon's discussion of the reader's role in Hutcheon, *Narrative* 138-145; Barry's discussion of the reading process in Barry 69.

5. Bibliography

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7. Appendix

Abstract 1

The publication of *Everything Is Illuminated* in 2002 marked Jonathan Safran Foer's international breakthrough as a young Jewish-American writer. Although his second novel, *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* (2005), was also very successful, the critical reactions to it were clearly more controversial, especially because of the author's use of various postmodern anti-illusionistic techniques. This thesis thus focuses on a detailed and close analysis of the use of and effects achieved by the various postmodern techniques and devices in both of the two novels to show whether and to what degree they are similar and to what degree they differ from each other. The basic parameters for my analysis and comparison will broadly be based on the four criteria of Zerweck's model according to which contemporary fiction can be ranged between the poles of realistic and experimental writing (see Chapter 1.): the creation of an aesthetic illusion, a text's reference to the reality outside the fictional world, its narrative self-reflexivity (especially its metafictional elements) and the various intertextual and intermedial references.

On the one hand, both novels clearly display a strong realistic tendency, primarily achieved by the novels' highly individualized first-person narrator-characters, who all relate back to their personal experience. The realistic and authentic dimension in both novels is furthermore underlined by the illusion of spoken language and by a strong reference to the reality outside the fictional world.

On the other hand, the realistic illusion in both novels is undermined – and at least in Foer's first novel partly also destroyed – by a number of metafictional and intertextual elements. In contrast to Foer's second novel, *Everything Is Illuminated* contains numerous explicit metafictional comments, which draw the reader's attention to the fictionality of the two embedded novels. The various implicit metafictional techniques and devices turn out to be even more anti-illusionistic for the reader, especially the incoherence between Alex's and Jonathan's storylines. Moreover, the real author's metaleptic address by a fictional character and the mises-en-abyme of various passages on different levels of the text result in a number of ontological instabilities due to which the aesthetic illusion is completely undermined towards the end of the novel.

The implicit metafictional devices contained in *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* turn out to be less anti-illusionistic for the reader, especially because of the lack of any metaleptic disruptions and mises-en-abyme. In contrast to *Everything Is Illuminated*, some of the events in Foer's second novel are related through different perspectives. The typographic peculiarities as well as the pictures and photographs additionally incorporated are partly used to undermine the novel's aesthetic illusion. Furthermore, the technique of collage and 'objets trouvés' are clearly anti-illusionistic for the reader. Unlike in *Everything Is Illuminated*, where the author's use of these techniques draws the reader's attention to a fictional writer-character, in Foer's second novel the reader is directly referred to the real author outside the fictional world.

In addition to the various metafictional techniques, both novels contain numerous intertextual elements, which partly undermine our illusion of the storyworlds portrayed. The concept of intertextuality plays an important role on yet another level, i.e. on the level of the genre. As I have tried to show, both novels contain typical elements of postmodern anti-detective novels and can also be discussed in terms of 'metafictional detective stories'.

Abstract 2

Mit dem Erscheinen seines ersten Romans *Everything Is Illuminated* im Jahr 2002 wurde Jonathan Safran Foer als junger jüdisch-amerikanischer Autor international gefeiert. Obwohl sein zweiter Roman *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* (2005) ebenfalls außerordentlich erfolgreich war, löste er doch weit heftigere kritische Reaktionen aus, vor allem wegen der Verwendung verschiedener postmoderner (Erzähl-)Techniken. Durch detaillierte Einzelanalysen beider Romane, in denen eben diese postmodernen illusionsstörenden Techniken genau untersucht und diskutiert werden, will die Arbeit in einem abschließenden Vergleich zeigen, inwieweit sich diese Techniken in Foers Romanen miteinander vergleichen lassen bzw. inwieweit sie sich voneinander unterscheiden. Dabei werden als grundlegende Analyseparameter die vier Kriterien von Zerwecks Modell für die Beschreibung postmoderner Erzählprosa herangezogen (siehe Kapitel 1.): die Art der Illusionsbildung und des Wirklichkeitsbezugs, die verschiedenen Erscheinungsformen von Metafiktion und schließlich die intertextuellen und intermedialen Bezüge.

Zum einen zeigt sich in beiden Romanen eine klare realistische Tendenz, hervorgerufen vor allem durch die stark individualisierten Ich-Erzählfiguren, deren persönliche Berichte über ihre Erlebnisse im Leser den Eindruck von realer und authentischer Wirklichkeit erzeugen. Diese realistische Tendenz wird in beiden Romanen weiters durch fingierte Mündlichkeit und intensive Bezugnahme auf die außerliterarische Wirklichkeit regelmäßig verstärkt.

Zum anderen jedoch wird in beiden Romanen die realistische Illusion durch die Verwendung von Metafiktion und Intertextualität unterminiert und, zumindest in Foers erstem Roman, zum Teil auch durchbrochen. Im Unterschied zu *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* enthält *Everything Is Illuminated* zahlreiche explizite metafiktionale Erzählerkommentare. Des Weiteren verwendet der Autor in seinem ersten Roman eine Reihe impliziter metafiktionaler Techniken, die sich für den Leser als weitaus illusionsstörender erweisen, vor allem die Inkohärenz zwischen den parallel nebeneinander herlaufenden Erzählsträngen. Indem sich z.B. eine fiktionalen Figur im Laufe des Romans direkt an den realen Autor wendet und einzelne Textpassagen auf verschiedenen Erzählebenen als gespiegelt erscheinen, werden die ontologischen Grenzen zwischen den einzelnen Ebenen verwischt und dadurch die realistische Illusion gegen Ende des Romans durchbrochen.

In *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* erweisen sich die verschiedenen impliziten metafikionalen Techniken insgesamt als weniger illusionsstörend, da der Roman keine narrativen Kurzschlüsse enthält. Im Unterschied zu *Everything Is Illuminated* werden in Foers zweitem Roman jedoch Teile des Geschehens aus verschiedenen Perspektiven geschildert. Sowohl die typographischen Besonderheiten als auch die im Roman enthaltenen Bilder und Fotografien werden teilweise dazu verwendet, um die realistische Illusion zu unterminieren. Des Weiteren erweist sich die Technik der Collage und die Verwendung von 'objets trouvés' als anti-illusionistisch. Im Gegensatz zu Foers erstem Roman, in dem diese Techniken ebenfalls verwendet werden, wird die Aufmerksamkeit des Lesers im zweiten Roman jedoch nicht auf eine innerfiktionale 'Schriftstellerfigur', sondern direkt auf den realen Autor außerhalb der Textwelt gelenkt.

Schließlich wird die realistische Illusion in beiden Romanen durch zahlreiche intertextuelle Bezüge unterminiert und das Genre des Detektivromans – vor allem durch die Nichterfüllung der erwarteten 'Problemlösung' – parodiert, sodass beide Romane Merkmale eines postmodernen Anti-Detektivromans aufweisen. Da der Leser sich in beiden Romanen auf die Spuren des realen Autors außerhalb der Textwelt begibt, können Foers Romane zusätzlich auch als 'metafictional detective stories' bezeichnet werden.

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