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“Happy-ever-after is a fairy tale notion, not History”: JANE YOLEN’S PRESENTATION OF THE HOLOCAUST THROUGH FAIRY TALE

“Sonsuza kadar mutlu yaşadılar, Tarihe değil, Masala ait bir kavramdır”: JANE YOLEN’İN MASAL YOLU İLE HOLOKOST ANLATIMI

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Abstract

When Art Spiegelman’s graphic novel *Maus* was published in 1980, he called attention to the necessity of narrative innovation in the Holocaust genre. He points to the ethical challenge that representing the Holocaust poses to authors and artists, emphasizing that Holocaust literature should never only be about what the text says but also how it says it. In 1992, a similar approach was demonstrated with the publication of *Briar Rose* by Jane Yolen, in which she merged a story of the Holocaust with the famous tale of *Sleeping Beauty* by the Brothers Grimm. This very juxtaposition of fairy tale and horrifying history places the reader in a position of ethical responsibility whereby through their own readings they are compelled to confront the primary atrocity of the twentieth century head-on. Notwithstanding the fact that the novel concentrates on Gemma’s remembering and recreating of her previous trauma, by recreating it, Gemma functions as an author, and by listening to her, Becca comes to function as a reader. The novel is thus created through a fiction in fiction, and by focusing on the metafictional quality of the novel, one comes to see that a major concern is on Becca’s discovery of Gemma’s Holocaust past, rather than merely Gemma’s own memory of it. Indeed, Gemma’s remembering of her past through a fairy tale allows Becca to act as an active reader and to fill in the gaps of her grandmother’s story. In this way, the memory of the Holocaust is not sealed by the death of her grandmother, but rather passed down the generations, leaving Becca compelled to contemplate its meaning and confront its horror, creating her own Holocaust experience. This paper will therefore scrutinize the novel not solely as a first generation holocaust story, but as a representation of the ethical call to remember that is faced by “the post-memory generation”, a term coined by Marianne Hirsch.

Keywords: Fairy Tale, post-memory, Holocaust, metafiction, Jane Yolen.

Öz

Art Spiegelman’ın 1980 yılında basılan çizgi romanı *Maus* yayınlandığında, Holokost türünde anlatının yenilenmesi gerekliliğine dikkat çekildi. Roman Holokost’un yazarlara ve sanatçılara yönelttiği ahlaki zorluğa işaret ederek Holokost edebiyatının sadece metnin söylediği şeyle değil, aynı zamanda nasıl söylediği ile de ilgili olduğunu vurgulamaktadır. 1992 yılında Jane Yolen’in *Grimm Kardeşler’in* ünlü masala olan *Uyuyan Güzeli* ile Holokost hikayesini birleştirdiği *Briar Rose* adlı romanında da benzer bir yaklaşım görülmektedir. Masal ve vahşet içeren tarihi bir olayı yan yana koyarak yazar, okuyucuyu yirminci yüzyılın

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başındaki en önemli zulüm ile yüzleşmek zorunda bırakarak okuyucuya etik bir sorumluluk vermiştir. Her ne kadar roman Gemma'nın geçmiş travmasını hatırlaması ve günümüze aktarması olarak görülse de, bu aktarma sayesinde Gemma hikayenin yazarı ve onu dinleyen Becca da okuyucu olarak görülür. Hikaye içinde yaratılan hikaye aracılığı ile romanın asıl üstünde durduğu Gemma'nın geçmişi nasıl hatırladığı veya bu hatıraları günümüze nasıl aktardığından çok, Becca'nın Gemma'nın geçmişini keşfederek, bu geçmişin nasıl bir parçası haline geldiğini görürüz. Bu makale, romanı yalnızca birinci nesil bir soykırım öyküsü olarak değil, Marianne Hirsch tarafından ortaya atılan bir terim olan “post-bellek kuşağı”nın karşı karşıya kaldığı ahlaki çağrının bir temsili olarak inceleyecektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Masal, post-bellek, Holokost, metakurgu, Jane Yolen.

Introduction

When Art Spiegelman’s graphic novel *Maus* was published in 1980, he called attention to the necessity of narrative innovation in the Holocaust genre. He points to the ethical challenge that representing the Holocaust poses to authors and artists, emphasizing that Holocaust literature should never only be about what the text says but also how it says it. In other words, how the text communicates an experience of inexplicable atrocity is the main paradox that Holocaust fiction should be compelled to handle. In 1992, a similar approach was demonstrated with the publication of *Briar Rose* by Jane Yolen, in which she merged a story of the Holocaust with the famous tale of Sleeping Beauty by the Brothers Grimm. For many intertwining a story of this fundamental trauma with a fairy tale that promises a happy-ever-after ending was seen “irresponsible” (Kertzer, 2002, p.156). This paper will argue that this very juxtaposition of fairy tale and horrifying history places the reader in a position of ethical responsibility whereby through their own readings they are compelled to confront the primary atrocity of the twentieth century head-on.

Briar Rose tells the story of a Jewish immigrant grandmother, Gemma, who, throughout her life, repeatedly tells the story of Briar Rose (Sleeping Beauty) to her three American granddaughters. On her deathbed, Gemma reveals that she is the Briar Rose and pleads with Becca--the youngest granddaughter, to find the castle where she was kissed back to life by two princes’. In the narrative, the mythical story of the Sleeping Beauty becomes entwined with a search for Gemma’s true identity, for Gemma remembers neither who she was nor where she was from before she was kissed back to life. The beginning of Gemma is thus the beginning of the fairy tale, but since she repressed the entire memory of it, her tale is full of gaps which only later take on meaning as Becca starts to discover her grandmother’s Holocaust past. With this plotline, the novel concentrates on Gemma’s remembering and recreating of her previous trauma. By recreating it, Gemma functions as an author, and by listening to her, Becca comes to function as a reader. The novel is thus created through a fiction in fiction, and by focusing on the metafictional quality of the novel, one comes to see that a major concern is on Becca’s discovery of Gemma’s Holocaust past, rather than merely Gemma’s own memory of it. Indeed, Gemma’s remembering of her past through a fairy tale allows Becca to act as an active reader and to fill in the gaps of her grandmother’s story. In this way, the memory of the Holocaust is not sealed by the death of her grandmother, but rather passed down the generations, leaving Becca compelled to contemplate its meaning and confront its horror, creating her own Holocaust experience. This paper will therefore scrutinize the novel not solely as a first generation holocaust story, but as a representation of the ethical call to remember that is faced by “the post-memory generation”, a term coined by Marianne Hirsch.

Discussion

Historically, critics of Holocaust literature have been uneasy about the use of imagination and fantasy when representing the Shoah. Lawrence Langer in *Using and Abusing the Holocaust* argues that Holocaust narratives with happy-endings, full recovery or a desire to survive “are marked by an absence of pain, a muting of anguish, a neglect of death” (2006, p. xii). Indeed, he goes on to criticize such efforts as Americanizations of the Holocaust genre, which has above all recognized the unique characteristic of the event being the “pursuit of death” by Jews. The legacy of survivor testimony and memoir, he argues, forces one to redefine survival as “the reactive one of fending off death” rather than “as the assertive idea of staying alive” (2006, p.1). Therefore he concludes that any Holocaust narrative that lacks pain or the desire to die “abuses” the reality of the Holocaust. On the publication of *Briar Rose*, Yolen faced similar criticisms. She defended the novel in aesthetic terms, reminding critics that “[t]his is a book of fiction. All the characters are made up. Happy-ever-after is a fairy tale notion, not history” (1992, p. 241), but nevertheless, many found the interweaving of fantasy and Holocaust unpalatable. Thus, parallel to Langer, Adrienne Kertzer in *My Mother’s Voice: Children, Literature, and the Holocaust* damns Yolen’s novel as “unthinkable and even irresponsible” since it “panders to the American desire for a happy ending” (2002, p. 156). Moving away from the techniques of literary realism so as to confront the Holocaust pain directly and using metafiction, arguably to confront it indirectly, was seen as a step too far in generic terms, and as potentially condemnable in its blurring of the distinction between reality and fantasy.

Nonetheless, in *The Uses of Enchantment* (1976) Bruno Bettelheim points to a significant feature of Holocaust survivors that lends support to Yolen’s attempts. Bettelheim argues that many survivors display behaviors that are akin to those observed in emotionally disturbed children. This reflection allows him to form a bridge between Holocaust survivors and the characters in fairy tales. For Bettelheim, indeed, it is possible for fairy tales to facilitate the acknowledgement of trauma but in an indirect way. In line with Bettelheim’s point, Donald Haase, a fairy tale scholar, proposes that “[c]hildren who have been displaced by violence may perceive affinity between the traumatic experience and utopian projects, on the one hand, and the landscape of the fairy tale, on the other” (2000, p.362) and therefore fairy tales “[have] the potential to become a template for the actual experience of human displacement and the perception of a defamiliarized geography” (2000, p. 363). In Freudian terminology, such affinity can thus serve to remember, repeat and work through survivors’ trauma. Viewing *Briar Rose* through this therapeutic lens, Patricia San Jose Rico argues that although Gemma escapes her traumatic past by blocking it with a fantasy, “those forgotten memories are bound to reappear” (2011, p. 303), a Freudian *return of the repressed*. Phyllis Lassner and Danny M. Cohen go further in their exoneration of Yolen, arguing that “[w]hile fairy tales *can* be transmuted to convey the horrors of Nazi atrocities” (emphasis mine) (2014, p. 175) offering a guarded and sanitized access to the brutality of the Holocaust past, rather “Yolen’s text argues that the symbols and themes of *Sleeping Beauty* can be altered to accentuate the impact of Nazi ideology and oppression of her characters” (2014, p.175). As a result they chase the key alterations in Yolen’s version of the fairy tale to conclude that the Holocaust pain is still there, only covered in “mist rather than gas” (Yolen, 1992, p. 16).

Briar Rose functions entirely metafictionally; its characters are at once readers and authors and are continuously involved in telling and re-telling stories. In Linda Hutcheon’s view “Metafiction [...] is fiction about fiction- that is, fiction that includes within itself a commentary on its own narrative and/or linguistic identity” (1980, p.1). Therefore, she suggests metafictional writing is always necessarily self-reflexive. Similarly, Patricia Waugh argues in *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-conscious Fiction* metafiction is “fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artifact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality” (1984, p. 2). Thus, what is important in metafictional writing is its focus on the process of the storytelling experience rather than the plot itself. As a result, Hutcheon calls these narratives “narcissistic” because they mirror their own process of construction. During this mirroring, the reader’s role is to bridge the gap between the fictionality and self-reflexivity; therefore the reader functions as the “co-creator” (1980, p.5) by actively participating in its recreation. From this perspective, Hutcheon counteracts the view that in metafictional writing real life experience is somehow reduced by suggesting in fact that real life itself is not a product but rather a process that can only be achieved through active participation. Indeed, for Hutcheon, it is metafictional narratives that promise such experiences.

Accepting fiction as a mimetic genre that mirrors the real product in its writing, metafiction then appears to be the imitation of imitation and has therefore not been welcomed in the realist tradition, accused, as it has been, as moving the reader away from the real.² Hutcheon counteracts this view arguing that the traditional realist writing encourages readers to be passive, since they are only required to identify the product’s similarity with the reality. She furthermore notes that “[s]ince no codes, no conventions for this procedure are acknowledged, the act of reading is seen in passive terms” (1980, 38). On the contrary, in the reading of metafiction, the reader is active, since

The reader must accept responsibility for the act of decoding, the act of reading [...] The novel no longer seeks just to provide an order and meaning to be recognized by the reader. It now demands that he be conscious of the work, the actual construction, that he too is undertaking, for it is the reader who, in Ingarden’s terms, “concretizes” the work of art and gives it life (Hutcheon, 1980, p.39).

What is fundamental in metafiction is that the reader is self-conscious of the work’s textuality as the fictionality of the narrative is evident from the beginning and he too undertakes a role as a creator, thus participating more actively than the traditional reader. While decoding the text, in other words bridging the gaps and linking separate sections, the work that is understood to be a product is now more rightly realized to be a

² The relationship between fiction and metafiction is akin to the opposition between Plato and Aristotle’s views on art as a mimetic form. Plato in *The Republic* argues that art is an imitation of reality, operating in the realm of the “idea” rather than that of truth, and, for this duplicity, advocates its banning. In stark opposition, Aristotle’s *Poetics* argues that imitation is in the nature of man, that he learns by imitating and takes pleasure in this process. Therefore the mimetic nature of art serves to develop the human experience in the world of ideas; moreover, by such imitation, the unrepresentable is located in a world of representation. In his *Physics*, Aristotle claims that “art partly completes what nature cannot bring to a finish” (199a), meaning that art goes beyond nature, and develops what nature has left unfinished.

process for the reader to undertake in order to identify with the experience that is presented in the work.

Seen through this theoretical lens, *Briar Rose* encourages the readers to ask why such construction might be essential in Holocaust writing. In order to answer this question, it is necessary to look at the characteristics of fairy tales as they are used in the construction of this Holocaust story. In other words, what kind of Holocaust story can be established through a fairy tale?

Jack Zipes explains that

... (B)oth the oral and the literary forms of fairy tale are grounded in history: they emanate from specific struggles to humanize bestial and barbaric forces, which have terrorized our minds and communities in concrete ways, threatening to destroy free will and human compassion. The fairy tale sets out to conquer this concrete terror through metaphors (1991, p.xi).

Thus, despite their fantastical natures, fairy tales can in fact be understood as historical retellings. They recount the struggle between good and evil, but the terror in their plots is communicated though are hidden metaphors. Therefore, via the use of metaphors, the reader of the fairy tale is kept immune from the violence; nevertheless, s/he remains palpably aware of its presence.

Since all fairy tales start with “*Once upon a time...*”, stressing their interest in suspension in time and therefore they are capable of transmutation of any time of place, Donald Haase explains that such narratives are not driven by time and therefore are “timeless” (2000, p.362). Indeed, fairy tales are necessarily dehistoricised, with settings necessarily absent of time and geographical space. Max Lüthi suggests that the reason for their disinterest in time is due to the fact that “[t]ime is a function of psychological experience, and since the characters of the folktale are only figures who carry forward the plot and have no inner life, folktales must also lack the experience of time” (1985, p.21). He nevertheless observes the isolation and separation of the fairy tale heroes through time and space as fundamental themes of the genre which metaphorically express spiritual otherness, where the characters are “separated from their familiar people and familiar places and go out into the world as isolated individuals” (Lüthi, 1985, p.38). That is, the spatial separation of the character expresses a symbolic description of the hero or heroine’s inner journey of discovery.

In addition to providing spiritual otherness by suspending the narrative in timelessness and spacelessness the picturesque settings of fairy tales are also metaphorical:

In childhood, only the surroundings show, and nothing is explained. Children do not possess a social analysis of what is happening to them, or around them, so the landscape and the pictures it presents have to remain a background, taking on meaning later, from different circumstances (Steedman, 1986, p. 33).

According to Steedman, fairy tale as a genre relies on picturesque settings since children possess only the capacity to absorb their surroundings. They can scrutinize them, but not analyze them. Therefore, the picture that the child captures in reading or listening to a fairy tale only serves to show them the world in question, absent of social or cultural meaning. However, the meaning emerges later on, when the child possesses enough capability to interpret it. We can see that this function of fairy tales, that its meaning becomes clearer later, is akin to how trauma functions. Both fairy tales and traumatic events only present themselves as a picture – at times an elaborate illustration, but with

trauma more often just a flash of impression – which will later take on meaning. As a result, fairy tales that make the explicit implicit in the picturesque surrounding of the fairy tale, in fact fits perfectly in revealing traumatic experience. As Kenneth B. Kidd suggests, “[t]he fairy tale, in short, gives expression to trauma but in distorted form, offering psychological relief but at the expense of historical truth” (2011, p. 189).

In *Briar Rose*, the function of the fairy tale is twofold. At the beginning, *Sleeping Beauty* enables Gemma to remember her traumatic past without distress; later, it helps Becca to navigate her own journey into the foreign geography of the Holocaust environment undetermined, rather than be overwhelmed on her travels by the previous generation’s memories.

In the novel, Becca’s involvement with Gemma’s experience begins when Gemma recounts the story of Briar Rose.

“Once upon a time...” Gemma’s voice interrupted them...

“Which is all times and no times but not the very best of times,” the whispery voice continued, “there was a castle. And in it lived a king who wanted nothing more in the world but a child” [...] “Now one day, finally and at last and about time, the queen went to bed and gave birth to a baby girl with a crown of red hair.” [...] “The child’s face was as beautiful as a wildflower and so the king named her Briar Rose.” [...]

“Rebecca?” Gemma’s whispery voice seemed stronger. “Rebecca!”

“Here I am, Gemma.”

The old woman opened her eyes. “I was the princess in the castle in the sleeping woods. And there came a great mist and we all fell asleep. But the prince kissed me awake. Only me.”

“Yes, Gemma” Rebecca replied, soothingly.

[...]

“That castle is yours. It is all I have to leave you. You must find it. The castle in the sleeping woods. Promise me.” [...]

“I promise, Gemma” (Yolen, 1992, pp.13- 16).

The castle clouded in the sleeping mist is the great elision that is Gemma’s experience of the Holocaust. Her use of the fairy tale can be seen as her inability to communicate her trauma directly, and thus the framework of the tale allows her to express her experience with the necessary gaps. Therefore, the missing information that calls for the attention of the reader, in this case Becca, is bequeathed to Becca as a personal legacy. The function of fairy tale in the novel is thus to encourage Becca to decode what is enciphered in the tale so that she too will be a part of the construction and thus the experience. She no longer is a passive reader, but an active one accepting “responsibility for the act of decoding”. By finding the castle, Becca will be able to give life to Gemma’s tale.

The text also captures the reader in a project of reconstruction by Gemma’s alterations to the original fairy tale. In the Brothers Grimm story of the *Sleeping Beauty*, by the Brothers Grimm while the king and the queen celebrate the birth of their child by holding a party, an uninvited fairy foresees that the baby girl will die when she comes to the age of fifteen after pricking herself on a spindle. Another attempts to lessen the curse,

foretelling that she will not die but she and the entire court will fall asleep. On the fulfillment of the curse, the princess and the court fall into a deep slumber which is only broken after many years when a prince finds and kisses her. Then she, along with the entire court, awakes. In Gemma's version, "the good people and the not-so-good people" (Yolen, 1992, p. 43) fell asleep in a great mist that covered the entire kingdom, but only she woke up, by the kiss of not just one but two princes - Josef and Avenger. After she was found by them, lying among thousands of "shadows of arms, of legs, of heads thrown back, mouths open in silenced screams" (Yolen, 1992, p. 206) nearly dead and revived by breathing into her mouth, she tried to explain to them how she had come to Chelmno³. She and her family had been brought from Lodz ghetto to Chelmno by truck. For a while they served Germans, but when their labor was no longer necessary, she and her daughter were sent into a van and gassed to death, and that was the last time she saw her daughter. When Josef and others asked her about her life before the camp, what her name was, where she came from or who had been with her, she replied;

'I do not know. I have no memories in my head but one.'

'What one?' Holtz- Wadel asked.

'A fairy tale.'

'What fairy tale?' Joseph asked.

She shrugged. 'I do not know its name. But in it I am a princess in a castle and a great mist comes over us. Only I am kissed awake. I know now that there is a castle and it is called 'the schloss⁴.' But I do not know for sure if that is my castle. I only remember the fairy tale and it seems, somehow, that is my story as well (Yolen, 1992, p. 211).

Gemma's sole remembrance of her past that only consists of a castle, a prince and herself as a princess, but an inclusion of mist as the Holocaust reality shows that "certain parts of the repressed material have escaped this repression process, have remained accessible to memory and occasionally reappear in consciousness, but even then they are isolated, a foreign body without any connection with the rest of the mind" (Freud, 1939, p. 121). Even though Gemma is aware that she is recounting the story of Briar Rose to her granddaughter as a fairy tale, or a bed time story, she is sure that "it is not a silly story at all" (Yolen, 1992, p. 151), yet unable to locate what makes this story so important to her. One can conclude that these alterations are the proof that even the story of a famous traditional fairy tale is self-reflexive-- a construction, that the reader -- in this case Becca, is responsible for decoding in order to bridge the gap between self-reflexivity and fictionality. In other words, the gaps in Gemma's story are Becca's access to the past that she can actively co-create a route to gain access. Here, the novel demonstrates how a post-memory generation continues to grapple with the ethical compulsion to face the Holocaust, and that it is in this act that self-reflexivity and the creativity required to gain access to the meaning of the Holocaust is so necessary.

While the readers are aware of these alterations while reading the novel, Becca, as the reader of Gemma's tale, can only become aware of them in recalling her grandmother's tale shortly after her death. "And then, all at once, Becca's childhood question was

³ Chelmno was a lesser-known Nazi Camp, conceived solely for extermination where 320.000 people were gassed in vans and dumped in mass graves. Only 4 men- no women, survived to tell of the horror which took place there.

⁴ In German "schloss" means castle.

answered. “It’s not the sleeper who minds. It is the ones left behind, awake” (Yolen, 1992, p. 38). She concludes that the oddness of this alteration, that in the original tale, the entire kingdom awakes, but in Gemma’s version it is only Gemma that wakes up with the kisses of two princess, means that the sufferings of the ones that woke up continued. This belatedness, akin to the temporal delay of trauma, allows the adult Becca to make sense of the tale and begin to investigate the meaning of missing parts.

What Jane Yolen demonstrates here with these alterations is the fact that Holocaust fiction’s departure from the narrative realism and its alliance with a more imaginative form of writing is not a threat to the atrocities and terror of the Holocaust since it “sets out to conquer this concrete terror through metaphors” (Zipes, 1999, p. 2). As stated previously, these conversions are not only serving to the listener’s comfort, in this case it is Becca and her older sisters, but to Gemma’s because she truly does believe that she is Briar Rose, and not a traditional survivor who feels haunted and guilty that they were able to survive.

When Gemma dies, Becca finds a box of personal papers and objects that once belonged to her grandmother and feels it her responsibility to decipher her untold story as coded in the fairy tale and travels to Poland. This part of the novel directly focuses on Becca and her journey into the Holocaust environment. By her metaphorical devotion to locating the castle that her grandmother continuously mentioned in her tale, Becca finally discovers the truth about Gemma’s past, which is really the history of her family. From then on, Becca acts as an example of “the postmemory generation”. Marianne Hirsch coins the term to define children of survivors. Beginning her discussion by focusing on theory’s multitude of “posts”- such as post-modernism or post-colonialism, she argues that

Postmemory shares the layering of... other “posts” and their belatedness, aligning itself with the practice of citation and mediation that characterize them, marking a particular end-of-century/turn-of-century moment of looking backward rather than initiating new paradigms. Like them it reflects an uneasy oscillation between continuity and rupture. And yet postmemory is not a movement, method, or idea; I see it rather as a structure of inter- and trans-generational transmission of traumatic knowledge and experience. It is a consequence of traumatic recall but (unlike post-traumatic stress disorder) at a generational remove (Hirsch, 2012, p.106).

As I previously argued in *Identity, Memory and Identification: Jewish American Women’s Narrative of the Holocaust* (Sabancı, 2016, p. 76), according to Hirsch, postmemory is characterized not as a supplementary experience to the original one but rather as a mimetic construction. As a result it is secondary, but “a powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object is not through recollection but through imaginative investment and creation” (Hirsch, 1997, p. 22).

In Hirsch’s perspective, postmemory is in between history and memory. It is not as distant as history because of its personal connection through the investment of imaginative creation, but neither is it as personal as memory because it is not directly experienced. Despite this, familial and emotional connections can render its outcomes as authentic as the primary experience. Besides, in Hirsch’s perspective “postmemory” is thus a way of transmitting the experience. The concept of postmemory thus is concerned with the transmission and response to such trauma – it’s continued and continuing processing. Produced in this this transition, the term “post” does not signify the end of the past but rather is its continuous proliferation.

Hirsch, however, is aware of the pitfalls of the phenomenon of transmission:

To grow up with such overwhelming inherited memories, to be dominated by narratives that preceded one's birth or one's consciousness, is to risk having one's own stories and experiences displaced, even evacuated, by those of a previous generation (2012, p. 107).

Growing up with Holocaust-dominated narratives, the children of the survivors are thus overwhelmed by such stories. This can work to lessen, or to somehow deauthenticate the lived experience of the post-Holocaust generation, or indeed burden that generation with an irresolvable sense of guilt that their ancestors had to go through such atrocity while they enjoy the freedom of life unthreatened by mass extermination. One or two generations away from the Holocaust past, it remains a prevailing feature of the present, causing feelings of displacement, estrangement and a life pregnant with the potential for identity crisis. One may conclude that the post-generation are expected to decode something that they are not a direct part of, and this responsibility is their ultimate burden.

In the second part of the novel named "Castle", Becca arrives in Poland, she gets help from a Polish woman, both in translation and in transportation. Together, they manage to locate Josef, one of the princes who kissed Gemma awake. What the reader's see here with the help of another woman is that the construction of the past depends of collaboration, both in terms of language and geography, parallel to what metafictional writing promises: Collaboration of the reader and the writer. From this moment on, Josef begins telling his personal story of the Holocaust, which included Gemma's own history. The persecution of the homosexuals began in 1933 and Josef was informed on by his landlady and was sent to a Gestapo immediately. In the camp, when the "guards began to drink riotously" Josef "flung himself up and over the wire" (Yolen, 1992, p.179) and by the morning he was somewhere in a forest. Joined to the other partisans in the forest, they dedicated themselves to liberate as many prisoners as they can. They heard that there was "a camp on wheels" (Yolen, 1992, p.198), and the prisoners were transferred from the *schloss* towards a forest by vans. When one day the bodies were cleared out the forest, they found one body moving, and that was Gemma. What is revealed by Josef is that when Gemma told her story with gaps, she was not recounting a personal story. Absence thus was the key metaphor governing her story. It lacked actual villains and the listener's and narrator's personal attachment with the story that discourages any emotional connection. This distance allows Yolen to restrain Becca from identification with the victim, and thus relieves the character from what is considered to be the major burden of the post memory generation -- "growing up with such overwhelming inherited memories" (Hirsch, 2012, p. 107). Here, indeed, fairy tales enable to postmemory generation to confront the event while protecting themselves from the lure of survivor guilt. It also insulates the third generation from Holocaust trauma, introducing a break in its transmission while insisting on the imperative to consistently remake the memory. What we see in the novel is the resolution of such burden, without omitting the Holocaust experience of the first generation. Gemma's retelling of her past through a fairy tale can be seen as Becca's safe and protected navigation of the Holocaust environment alongside the fairy tale's promise of a happy ending. Using the same mechanism, the character of Gemma too is able to escape her trauma, as she recreates it through an experience slightly different to her own.

The change of tone, from mystical to real, also places another check on Becca’s ability to fully identify herself with the victim, because this time the narrator of the story is Josef, a non-Jewish “homosexual, a pink triangle” (Yolen, 1992, p.176). According to Doris Bergen

[i]n addition to people of Jewish descent, the Reich systematically targeted, sterilized, incarcerated, tortured, raped, and/or murdered Africans, alcoholics, so-called asocials, Communists, criminals and so-called criminals, dissenting Christian clergy, the mentally and physically disables, Freemasons, male homosexuals, Jehovah’s Witnesses, lesbians, pacifists, Poles, political dissidents, prostitutes, Gypsies, Slavic and so-called Asiatic peoples of Soviet Union, Soviet prisoners of war, and trade unionists (2003, p. 41).

Yolen’s inclusion of a homosexual non-Jew extends the mainstream of Judeocentric Holocaust narrative to all victims of the Nazi regime. This disruption in the narrative creates a counterpoint to Gemma’s narration and to Becca’s emotional distance to the Holocaust experience; the readers are allowed to empathize more deeply with Josef’s story since it is his personal experience that he is recounting.

What the reader manages to see through Josef’s story is substance lurking in the sleeping mist -- the gaps in Gemma’s story -- and therefore Gemma is once again saved by Josef. It is because of Josef that she was “resurrected by a kiss of life” (Yolen, 1992, p. 206) and also as a result of Josef’s recounting that her story, as a part of her identity, becomes clear, both to Becca and to the reader.

Conclusion

Our reading of *Briar Rose* serves to answer those who criticized the novel for undermining the reality of the Holocaust experience in interweaving it with a happily-ever-after fairy tale. Rather, it serves to cover the Shoah with mist rather than with gas, arguably making it both accessible and a story that is tellable from one generation to another. Yet this time, by calling on her granddaughter to discover her own past, Gemma allows Becca to find her own relationship with her family’s history rather than internalizing what is not a part of her. And as Yolen states “[...] it is not the expectation of a happy ending that carries us on. Rather it is the unraveling of the story itself; it is the travelling not the destination.” (Yolen, 1981, p. 71)

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