

Talia E. Crockett

The Silence of Fragmentation

Ethical Representations of Trauma in Young Adult Holocaust Literature

Abstract: Holocaust literature is a challenging space in which to write, seeking to convey an event that cannot truly be represented in words: the systematic destruction of millions of lives, an estimated 1.5 million of which were children who were permanently silenced in the concentration camps. Young adult authors have the added challenge of creating texts that convey the trauma of the Holocaust in ways that are accessible to teenage readers, attempting to reconcile a moral duty to historical accuracy with the desire for an engaging, empathetic novel. This article addresses the evolving use of silence and fragmentation to represent the trauma of the Holocaust in three young adult novels from the last thirty-five years: Jane Yolen's Briar Rose (1992), Marianne Fredriksson's Simon och ekarna (Simon and the Oaks, 1985), and Sharon Hart-Green's Come Back for Me (2017). As this event recedes further into history, historical knowledge of it may be in decline, while anti-Semitism is still prevalent. The Holocaust is something about which we must continue to speak, but now we must do so in different ways. Building on the work of Lydia Kokkola and Leona Toker, this article demonstrates how silence has been used to represent the trauma of the Holocaust as we become increasingly removed from the event. If a traumatic event is understood as it returns to a victim in shards of memories, then fragmentation can be used to recreate the experience for a reader, representing the chaos as opposed to attempting to order it. By writing in a form rife with silent gaps in narrative, knowledge, and understanding, young adult authors can select that which they reveal to their readers according to present historical knowledge while simultaneously mimicking the chaotic, fractured experience of trauma itself. Ultimately, that which is not said becomes as powerful as that which is.

Keywords: trauma theory, young adult literature, Holocaust literature, fragmentation, fairy tales

Holocaust literature, whether for adults, children, or young adults, will always be a contentious space in which to write. Elizabeth Roberts Baer addresses the challenge when she states, “[Holocaust literature] calls upon us to recognize the seeming paradox of the Holocaust being at once ‘unspeakable’ and yet something that *must* be spoken about, not necessarily to make it meaningful but to make its reality imaginatively possible” (391). Not all theorists agree with Baer’s suggestion that it is imperative to write about the Holocaust, however, especially in a medium that moves from strict factual representation into the realm of fictionalization. Many are familiar with Theodor Adorno’s 1949 claim that “to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric” (34), and in 1975 Michael Wyschogrod firmly stated, “Art is not appropriate to the Holocaust. Art takes the sting out of suffering” (68). The concept of deriving aesthetic enjoyment, even entertainment, out of representation of the Holocaust is certainly problematic. Does fiction take the “sting” out of suffering to the degree that it is irresponsible to consume it, even to this day? Is silence the only ethical response?

Ruth Franklin suggests that we require Holocaust fiction not in spite of, but because of, the way it differs from non-fiction writing. She claims, “We need literature about the Holocaust not only because testimony is inevitably incomplete, but because of what literature uniquely offers: an imaginative access to past events, together with new and different ways of understanding them that are unavailable to strictly factual forms of writing” (13). Franklin touches upon the inevitable unreliability of Holocaust testimony while referring to aspects unique to fiction. It is possible that fiction may allow for deeper understanding of trauma than what we consider “factual” accounts, as it encourages us to engage, imagine, and empathize; fiction allows an author to create an experience that would otherwise be impossible.

Rachel Dean-Ruzicka argues that the question of writing Holocaust literature for young people specifically is irrelevant today. In *Tolerance Discourse and Young Adult Holocaust Literature: Engaging Difference and Identity* (2017), she states, “The Holocaust ... is actually one of the most written about, commented upon, and widely represented historical events in human history, and that proliferation extends to adolescent literature. [...] Regardless of the should/should not debate, the Holocaust *is* an integral part of twenty-first-century children’s and young adult literature” (14). Although the Holocaust occurred over seven decades ago, literature about it is still published today, and a discussion of anti-Semitism is unfortunately still highly

relevant. Deborah E. Lipstadt states in *Antisemitism: Here and Now* (2019), "Antisemitic events have been on the rise – particularly in Europe – since the beginning of the 2000s" (101), citing a 2013 study in Berlin that shows "a normalization of antisemitism unlike anything since the end of World War II" (105). She explains how even more recently, politicians such as Donald Trump may be "directly responsible for the legitimization of explicit hostility towards Jews" (46), citing the 2017 neo-Nazi riots in Charlottesville, Virginia, as an example. However, even as anti-Semitism is on the rise, historical knowledge of the Holocaust appears to be in decline, particularly among young people. According to the Holocaust Knowledge & Awareness Study conducted in 2018, 22 % of American millennials have not or were not sure if they have heard of the Holocaust, and 66 % cannot say what Auschwitz was (Astor). Studies in France, Canada, and Austria yield similarly disturbing results (Waxman).

Clearly, not only is a discussion of these events still pertinent, but it is also still necessary. Kenneth Kidd states, "The Holocaust is simultaneously an event that we've moved beyond and one that we cannot and must not forget" (122), while Eric A. Kimmel warns us, "If the Holocaust remains incomprehensible, it will be forgotten. And if it is forgotten, it is certain to recur" (1). The refusal of onlookers to speak out and intervene in persecution was a part of what allowed the Holocaust to occur. Now, speaking about the event and what led to it may be the only way to ensure such an event never occurs again. This far removed, as fewer Holocaust survivors remain to tell first-hand accounts, it may be that young adult (YA) Holocaust literature is more important than ever. Dean-Ruzicka explains, "Soon, all knowledge of these events will be passed down solely from survivor's (grand)children or those who study history. The importance of learning this history places Holocaust literature written for young adults in an interesting position. [...] These narratives carry a significant responsibility" (14). If we accept the importance and even necessity of continuing to speak about the Holocaust, the question becomes not if it is ethical to write about the event in literature for young people, but how to do so in an ethically responsible manner. We must speak, but as Alvin H. Rosenfeld asks, "Physical injury, visual impairment, linguistic incapacity, the moral discouragements of listener lassitude and reader reluctance – what kind of literature can develop against such extreme countervailing forces?" (33). Rosenfeld goes on to answer his query: "A literature of fragments, of partial and provisional forms."

The Silence of Fragmentation

Fragmentation can allow authors to speak with the voice of silence, and leave unsaid that which cannot be depicted and understood. Lydia Kokkola writes extensively about the use of fragments, or silence itself, as an ethical means of representing trauma. She begins by admitting, “We must acknowledge that language may not be up to the task” (52), and asks, is an impossible task set before authors of Holocaust literature? How can we “challenge the problematics of speaking the unspeakable?” (40). Kokkola goes on to establish silence within a text as an ethical response. She explains, “A book that contains silence – informational gaps – can be more informative on an emotional level than a book which attempts to provide all relevant background” (56). Kokkola’s “dialogue with silence” forces readers to actively engage with a text: to think critically in order to re-order fragments and fill in gaps in knowledge. This active engagement often creates an empathetic response; when a reader is able to think as a character would, they are invited to align themselves with a character’s thoughts and feelings.

In her anthropologically focused paper on the silence of Holocaust survivors, Carol A. Kidron acknowledges the communicative power of silence, referencing “the phenomenon of silence as a medium of expression, communication, and transmission of knowledge in its own right or as an alternative form of personal knowing that is not dependent on speech for its own objectification” (7). Further, Leona Toker crafts a theory that allows silence to function as a communicative act within narrative. She lists strategies that authors can employ to bring silence into their texts, including chronological displacement, temporary suspension of information, and diffusion of information.

The following discussion will demonstrate how these strategies of silence can be used to create an ethically responsible representation of the trauma of the Holocaust in three YA novels from the United States, Sweden, and Canada: Jane Yolen’s *Briar Rose* (1992), Marianne Fredriksson’s *Simon och ekarna*¹ (*Simon and the Oaks*, 1985), and Sharon Hart-Green’s *Come Back for Me* (2017). The novels are presented in an order that builds on the discussion of silencing techniques, as opposed to chronologically. As young adult knowledge of the Holocaust has changed from the mid-80s to today, the ways authors use silence have evolved, as well. These novels provide three distinct examples of how narrative silence can be used in different ways to represent the Holocaust through an individual’s inability to understand

the traumatic event as it occurs, and their need to deconstruct and remake their worldview upon latent understanding of the truth, while simultaneously sparing the reader and acknowledging the limits of representation. If we accept that language cannot fully convey the Holocaust, then using the silence of narrative gaps as a means for representation may address the concerns of those calling for silence as well as those who have established the Holocaust as something about which we must continue to speak.

In *My Mother's Voice: Children, Literature, and the Holocaust* (2002), Adrienne Kertzer relates a story her mother told Kertzer as an adult: a memory her mother has of feigning illness to avoid being raped by Russian soldiers after the concentration camp in which she had been imprisoned was liberated. After relaying the episode, Kertzer comments:

If this episode, like much of my mother's story, were in a children's book, I would dismiss it as incredible, unrealistic, too full of contrived lucky escapes – clearly, a book trying too hard to be a children's version of the Holocaust. What differentiates it from a children's book, however, are the gaps, the narrative disorder, the refusal of an overriding explanatory myth or possible moral vision. (Kertzer 38)

Here, Kertzer begins to shape a definition of children's Holocaust literature versus that for adult and young adult readers. Kertzer indicates the disorder – moments of silence and fragmentation – as that which differentiates writing for a mature, educated audience from that for children. There is much Kertzer's mother does not say – perhaps she has forgotten, or never knew, or chooses to omit – and these silences convey more than words ever could. Her mother's narrative does not tell an ordered story or teach a moral lesson, and this absence of didacticism differentiates it from a children's text and moves it into the realm of adult or YA. The novels examined here from the 1980s and 1990s did not need to teach history, as it was assumed that their educated readers had prior knowledge they could bring to the texts. In 2002, Kertzer claimed of YA literature, "In it, the writer, ironically freed of the need to reassure the reader in the face of such overwhelming historical horror since *it is too late for such reassurance*, can proceed to explore questions of knowledge and choice" (326, emphasis added). The same year, a study in Illinois found "substantial time was being devoted to Holocaust education," and "education about the Holocaust seemed thorough" (Ellison 145). However, these claims from nearly twenty years ago may now be

outdated. Although the 2017 novel may need to use its silence carefully in a time when we can no longer assume prior knowledge, aims of YA Holocaust literature still include raising questions, prompting active engagement, and creating empathetic identification through an increased understanding of the experience of trauma. Today, when knowledge of the Holocaust may be at an unprecedented low, these aims take on a new and particular sense of urgency.

Briar Rose

Becca, the protagonist of Yolen's *Briar Rose*, is a young adult living in the USA in the early 1990s. Becca grew up listening to her grandmother Gemma tell a warped version of the fairy tale Sleeping Beauty – or “Briar Rose.” When Gemma dies, Becca travels to Poland to investigate a suspected connection between her grandmother and the Holocaust. There she meets Josef, a gay man who is able to explain both Gemma's history and her obsession with Briar Rose: while imprisoned at the Chelmno extermination camp, Gemma was locked in a van along with many others, which was fed exhaust fumes to kill those inside. A group of partisans with whom Josef had been travelling found the pit of bodies, and Josef had been able to resuscitate Gemma: to bestow upon her the prince's kiss that wakes the sleeping princess. What Becca assumes to be a romantic kiss within the fairy tale narrative turns out to be a life-saving medical act that Josef administers to the dying woman, the only victim he was able to save. In reality, it is believed that two individuals escaped from Chelmno and two were found alive upon its liberation; all were men. By providing a rewritten Holocaust narrative in the guise of a fairy tale, *Briar Rose* demonstrates how fragmentation and subversion of expectation can combine to create an ethical “dialogue with silence.”

This text makes use of Toker's silencing technique of chronological displacement, where “a considerable portion of the *fabula* is first suppressed and then revealed in long narrative blocks” (15). Readers are aware when a section is missing, and the narrative often resembles a contemporary detective story, set long after the traumatic events and looking back, as opposed to historical fiction set in the time and place of the traumatic event. Becca's story is presented chronologically; it is the story of her grandmother that is suppressed and fragmented. Throughout the novel, Becca discovers hints of information in the warped retelling of Briar Rose that Gemma repeats. The text flashes back to italicized scenes wherein a rapt young Becca listens to her grandmother's fable. Although the story opens traditionally with a

familiar "*Once upon a time*" (9), we soon learn that this is not a standard retelling. Instead of the whole castle waking upon the prince's kiss, only the princess is woken, because it was only Gemma who survived the gassing and was brought back to life by Josef's resuscitation. Because Becca is familiar with this twisted version, however, she cannot see the troubling changes Gemma has made. Indeed, Becca does not begin to connect the fairy tale with her grandmother's past until after Gemma's death, when she discovers documents that lead her to Poland. At the opening, Gemma's history is entirely hidden: her family does not know her real name or birthplace. It is only in Poland that Becca hears the narrative of Josef, and the displaced information is revealed.

The technique of chronological displacement serves several purposes. It creates suspense, and an educated teenage reader, when presented with the clues within the narrative, can begin to piece together the puzzle; indeed, much of the draw of the novel comes from our ability to unravel the mystery. The technique also reflects Gemma's experience of trauma as she is unable to formulate her own story. It is unclear if Gemma has forgotten the details or is simply unable to speak of them in any way but as a fairy tale, and this is left ambiguous even after the conclusion. Since Gemma is only able to understand her experience in fragments, this is how it is relayed. Gemma speaks through her silence: what she is unable to say becomes more important than that which she does as the reader attempts to fill in the blanks.

This technique also allows Yolen to choose what she will relay to the reader. Kertzer explains that fragmentation functions as "a strategy to protect Yolen's readers; we are distanced from the experience of being gassed, hearing it through [Josef] Potocki, a man himself persecuted by the Nazis, but someone on the periphery of Gemma's story" (70). The reader is never forced to listen to the grisly tale from Gemma herself, which may be near unbearable, but from the man who witnessed the event but was not directly targeted by it. The strategy used to represent the experience of trauma is simultaneously a device to spare the reader, moving us further away from the event.

At the close of the novel, Yolen makes it clear that her book is fiction, including a note of context that states, "Happy-ever-after is a fairy tale notion, not history. I know of no woman who escaped from Chelmno alive" (202). Yolen insists on emphasizing that happy endings belong only in fairy tales. As this is a novel for young adults and not children, who are generally considered to require an increased

degree of closure, Yolen is able to provide an ending that subverts closure with this final line; she creates an aura of silence around the true events, then shatters it. The text adheres to the narrative conventions that ask for closure on one level: Becca solves the mystery and Gemma is saved by the prince. However, the uncovered truth has horrific resonances. Becca now understands the trauma with which her grandmother was forced to live, which she kept silent and hidden from her family. Yolen's author's note further distorts closure as it reveals the happy ending to be entirely fictitious.

It eventually becomes clear that Gemma has suffered severe trauma, and has turned her experience into a fairy tale in an attempt to impose sense and order on that which can have no explanation. Donald Haase addresses the use of the fairy tale to represent trauma, explaining, "Some adults who have experienced the violence of war, exile, and the Holocaust as children map those experiences with the overlay of the fairy-tale landscape, attempting to transform trauma through desire for the reconstituted safety of home" (366). Fairy tales evoke comfort, closure, and a known, accepted ending. Gemma desperately attempts to fit her brutal story into this framework, repeating it in an urgent attempt to reach her family. Unfortunately, her story is only fully understood – the gaps in knowledge filled – after her death. And at the close of the book, Yolen reminds us that even the decidedly traumatic Holocaust narrative is, in fact, its own sort of fairy tale: in reality, even survival belonged to the world of fantasy.

Simon and the Oaks

Fredriksson's novel *Simon and the Oaks* depicts the after-effects of trauma on two young Jewish boys living in Sweden during and after World War II. Although the novel favours a degree of silence and never directly describes the Holocaust or the concentration camps, the effects of the Jewish persecution during this time is an unavoidable theme. Sweden is a particularly interesting setting for the novel, as prior to 1941, strict laws prevented the immigration of certain ethnicities as refugees, including Jews (see Rudberg). This novel was chosen because it presents an example of textual silence in the context not of a concentration, extermination, or forced labour camp, but from within a country where Jews were nonetheless targeted and considered an unwanted group.

Simon has no reason to believe he is anything other than the Protestant son of his loving parents Erik and Karin, until he discovers as a young adult that he is the illegitimate child of his reclusive aunt

Inga and a Jewish violinist with whom she shared a tryst. Isak is a psychologically scarred Jewish boy who fled to Sweden from Berlin with his father Ruben after a traumatizing episode at the hands of Hitler Youth soldiers, an experience that he has repressed. Over the course of the *Bildungsroman*, both boys must confront their specifically Jewish traumas – personal for Isak and cultural for Simon – in order to complete the coming-of-age narrative arc. Although the traumatized responses of the two boys are elicited by seemingly different events, the root causes of both the personal and collective traumas lie within the persecution of the Jewish people during the time of the Holocaust.

In a similar manner to *Briar Rose*, *Simon and the Oaks* contains elements reminiscent of a fairy tale. Simon is often visited by visions of a little man, and is shocked when, as a young adult visiting France, he sees a statue of the same man from his visions at the Louvre. While these fairy tale elements are not subverted as in *Briar Rose*, they are explained away using psychology – one of Simon’s adult friends suggests that he saw a picture of the statue as a young child and stored it in his subconscious – foreshadowing the revelation that Isak has repressed traumatic memories stored in his own subconscious mind.

Silence is a constant presence in this novel. Early in the narrative, when Ruben delivers news of the acts being performed against the Jews, “The boys were sent out of the kitchen, but Simon never forgot the expression in Erik’s eyes when he crept back in” (Fredriksson 26). Because the novel is focalized through the points of view of Simon and Isak, the reader only receives the information they did as young children, and is protected from the horror of the Holocaust as the parental figures attempt to shield the boys. The difference between this novel and one for children – and what made the style appropriate – is that it was presumed that the reader understood the implications of the adults’ conversation and could fill in the gaps left by the author.

Throughout the novel, Fredriksson makes use of Toker’s silencing technique of diffusion of information, where “a great number of separate pieces of information are suppressed, thus creating numerous small gaps” (15). Indeed, much of the pertinent information within this text is initially withheld and then revealed with little warning. The reader – and indeed, Simon himself – spends the first few chapters believing that Erik and Karin are Simon’s birth parents. However, the fifth chapter relates the story of Inga and her affair. Finally, it is revealed that Simon is not only adopted, but also Jewish, forcing us to reconsider our prior assumptions. The reader can assume that Simon is living a relatively safe life in neutral Sweden as a Protes-

tant, even during World War II, and it is only when the information of his heritage is revealed that we realize the extent of danger he is in. When Simon is finally told he is Jewish as a young adult, the text shifts into free indirect discourse and reveals, "Everything that was happening was beyond reality" (Fredriksson 121). Simon is momentarily unable to cope with the shocking information that will force him to rewrite his personal mythology, so he temporarily shifts it into the realm of the fairy tale, beyond his reality.

Information about Isak is similarly diffused throughout the novel. At first the reader only knows that Isak is Jewish and a bit odd, from Simon's experiences with him at school, but the truth is gradually revealed. We learn that Isak was sexually abused by a group of Hitler Youth soldiers when he was living in Berlin. Isak has repressed the memory, however, and lives with a terror he cannot define; the gap in the reader's understanding mimics the very gap in memory that Isak cannot fill. According to trauma theorist Cathy Caruth, "Trauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations, flashbacks, nightmares, and other intrusive phenomena" (12). The traumatic event was not fully grasped as it occurred, so Isak suffers from hyper-realistic flashbacks as his psyche attempts to relive and reorder – to make sense of – the event he was not able to process. On the day ten Norwegian ships are attacked by the German navy, Isak suffers a traumatic flashback and the novel reveals the repressed memory. When Karin tries to comfort Isak, he clutches his crotch and cries, "It hurts!" (Fredriksson 50). Finally, due to Karin's patience, Isak is able to recall and relive the repressed event: "Isak realized that he had to go down into the depths of his horror. He had to see and experience it yet again" (50).

As Kolář et al. explain in their text on trauma in post-war literature, "Repression as a defence mechanism is reflected in deliberate omissions, muteness, and silence ... the fragmentary nature of many texts can be explained as a disorder of memory, a symptom so emblematic of PTSD" (13). Isak attempts to repress his traumatic memories of abuse as a coping mechanism, and Fredriksson uses information diffusion to mimic this experience for the reader. When information is belatedly revealed, it is done so within fragmented chapters that break the linear flow of the narrative, interrupting the reader in their attempt to move forward in the text as trauma interrupts one's struggle to move on. We cannot fully progress to the next stage of the narrative until elements of the past are explored, explained, and

properly worked through, just as Isak must relive his trauma before he can begin to heal.

Simon and the Oaks diffuses information to protect its reader while simultaneously disorienting them in an effort to demonstrate the chaotic effects of trauma. As Kokkola explains, "The effect [of diffusion of information] is to delay or suppress pattern recognition, thus readers find creating a coherent sense of the narrative difficult" (73). Readers are unable to find the patterns they desire or construct the coherence they crave, mimicking the effects of Isak's personal trauma and the cultural trauma that Simon has inherited. We learn crucial facts that have been repressed within the text in the same way these memories return to Isak: painfully and without warning. Once these pieces are revealed, a reader must re-evaluate their understanding of the text, attempting to make sense of it in light of new information combined with prior historical knowledge.

This text also directly references the impossibility of truly understanding trauma through Iza, Ruben's niece and the only character to have survived a concentration camp. When Iza tells Ruben, "I don't want to remember," he attempts to respond with empathy, saying, "I can understand that" (Fredriksson 109). However, "Her reply came like lightning. 'No! You understand nothing'" (110). Here the novel acknowledges its own limitations and concedes the impossibility of truly understanding the traumatic experience second-hand, even as it attempts to ethically portray it through its use of silence, diffusion, and gaps in narrative understanding.

Come Back for Me

Hart-Green's *Come Back for Me* is a recent text especially concerned with the experience of trauma, using silence differently as fragments of stories demonstrate the far-reaching effects the Holocaust had on a wide range of individuals. The novel makes use of Toker's theory of temporary suspension of information – where "a crucially important separate piece of information is first suppressed and later analeptically revealed" (15) – to create a mystery that both the protagonist and reader seek to solve together. *Come Back for Me* alternates between the story of Suzy, a Toronto teen in the late 1960s hoping to unearth the secret of her uncle Charles' death, and that of Artur, a Hungarian Holocaust survivor searching for his lost sister Manya. Whereas Suzy's mother immigrated before the war, in 1944 her father and aunt would have been among the fortunate few to immigrate to Canada from Europe, as only five thousand Jewish refugees

were permitted between 1933 and 1947 in reality. The novel switches perspective with each chapter until the two stories collide in the final pages. By constantly switching perspective and including a story from the other side of the world, this text provides an example of the cultural effects of trauma, even decades after the event and on those not directly affected, as well as the world-wide scope. The interrupted fragments of stories represent the nature of trauma through form as well as content.

There are many traumatized individuals in this novel, in both the Holocaust narrative and that set in Toronto. Suzy's aunt Bella is greatly affected by her husband Charles' death; she suffers panic attacks and her personality changes drastically. Bella exhibits signs of trauma, experiencing delusions and withdrawing in an effort to protect herself from the outside world. Suzy touches on the persistence of cultural trauma within her own community when she notes, "Yet, strangely enough, all of my parents' friends were Jewish, most of them having fled Europe just after the Nazis came to power. Who knows - after that trauma, maybe they would never get over their fear of persecution" (Hart-Green 75). Here Suzy references the cultural trauma that the elder generation feels, even those who were able to flee Europe and avoid the camps. In their work on cultural trauma and collective identity, Jeffrey C. Alexander et al. define cultural trauma as that which "occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways" (1). We can understand the trauma from which Suzy's parents, their Jewish friends, and even Suzy herself suffer as the cultural trauma that has been created by the "horrendous event" of the Holocaust, which they continuously struggle to work through many years later.

First-hand trauma exists in the more explicit Holocaust story, as well. Artur is traumatized after his time hiding, fleeing, and working in a forced labour camp, which we experience through his past-tense recollections and flashbacks. In Artur's present, after the war while he is searching for Manya, he has terrible dreams, which may be Artur's psyche's way of attempting to work through the loss of his sister, which he cannot achieve while he does not know her fate. In addition, although Suzy and the reader are initially led to believe that Charles died from a heart attack, we eventually learn it was suicide. The reality of Charles' past in Auschwitz is initially suppressed; we do not learn of it until near the end of the book when the reader discovers that Artur is actually Charles' brother.

Artur travels to Canada to meet Charles' family and release Bella from her religious obligation to marry him – unsuccessfully, as they have fallen in love over the phone, and the book ends with the two fragmented stories coming together symbolically in the joint chapters and literally in marriage. While visiting the family, Artur addresses Charles' death. He explains, "My brother was all of fifteen when he was compelled to do the worst job imaginable – to cart the dead bodies from the gas chambers to the crematoria. [...] No one, not a single living person, could lead a normal life after that" (Hart-Green 271). Suddenly, the information that was temporarily suspended – that Charles' death was due to suicide and his traumatic past in Auschwitz, not a heart attack – is revealed. This new information rewrites much of what came before, and explains aspects of Charles' character, such as his comments that Suzy reminds him of somebody named Manya.

According to Roger Luckhurst, the "structure of belated or retrospective narrative understanding is of course perfect for conveying the afterwardness of post-traumatic affect. It extends beyond the capabilities of the subjective traumatic flashback" (190). By temporarily suspending information and allowing for this significant belated revelation, Hart-Green represents Luckhurst's structure and demonstrates how it can reflect a traumatic experience that can only be latently understood. The text mimics the experience of trauma not only by presenting its story in fragments, but also by revealing some of these fragments to be incorrect. This does affect our understanding, but cannot come close to the shattering of self Charles experienced in the camp. Dominick LaCapra explains, "One function of these interruptions or disruptions is to introduce into the account a muted dosage or form of trauma that – at some degree of distance allowing for critical thought and working-through – reactivates, but does not simply reincarnate or make live again, the trauma of the past" (107). The traumatic experience is mimicked, yet to a much lesser degree, just as the author's note at the conclusion of *Briar Rose* does not traumatize but does force us to re-evaluate the happy ending.

When Bella and Artur marry, their stories receive the closure that Artur's murdered sister Manya and traumatized Charles will never achieve. There is a hint of closure for Suzy, as well, as she develops a crush on one of Artur's sons and makes the seemingly rash decision to move to Palestine because of it. There is no overt fantasy element in this novel, and although elements of the romantic ending do appear somewhat like a fairy tale, they are shadowed by memories of death and brutality. The text's use of suspended information, narra-

tive fragments, and belated revelations creates a silence that ethically represents the experience of trauma – first-hand and inherited.

Come Back for Me is the most recently published novel in this study, appearing over thirty years after *Simon and the Oaks*. This book appears at a time when young adult readers are more removed from and may have less prior knowledge of its subject matter, and therefore must use its silence carefully. Whereas Yolen can displace information and Fredriksson can diffuse it, confident their readers can fill in the gaps, Hart-Green chooses to convey silence through temporary suspension, placing her reader in the position of her protagonist who eventually explains the mystery. Prior historical knowledge is not necessary for a full understanding of this text, which uses silence not to create gaps for the reader to fill, but to show the effects of belated revelation. Anastasia Maria Ulanowicz writes about the “second-generation memory” that Suzy experiences, stating, “By prompting their audience to perceive uncanny associations between the past and the present, [these texts] potentially allow for their readers’ engagement with historical structures of injustice that survive within the present” (13). As publication dates move further from the historical event itself, a shift to greater focus on second-generation memory and inherited cultural trauma appears natural. Stories about young adults dealing with past traumas may allow contemporary readers to make connections with and ask questions about issues such as anti-Semitism that still exist in the present.

Conclusion: Fractures and Fairy Tales

According to Kokkola, “Since no one can ever really know about the Holocaust, learning to ask appropriate questions and recognize that parts of the Holocaust are ‘unspeakable’ is as much as we can really expect from any text, fiction or otherwise” (93). No text will be able to represent the Holocaust in full, and any attempts to explain it will ultimately fall short. Instead of representing the Holocaust itself, authors are able to represent the unspeakable nature of the Holocaust by engaging in a dialogue with silence.

Fairy tale modes appear often in these novels, and may be related to YA literature’s relationship with narrative closure. Young adult readers, existing in the space between childhood and adulthood, may long for the nostalgic comfort of closure. Although all three novels present closure on one level, none attempt to resolve the atrocity of the Holocaust. The mystery in the fragmented novel is solved, but the reality is worse than the protagonist imagined. This

level of closure does not suggest that issues have been resolved; the reader understands that closure for those affected by the Holocaust is impossible. Closure is ethically responsible as long as it is incomplete, and by subverting the familiar form of the fairy tale, attention is drawn to this incompleteness. These novels use elements of the fairy tale in an attempt to rewrite trauma in a safe manner, but are ultimately subverted when the truth is eventually revealed. The constant reworking of the fairy tale draws our attention to the impossibility of representation through accepted literary modes, and reminds us that a new way of telling stories is now necessary in a post-Holocaust world.

Toker's theory of silence as a communicative act explains how authors can speak through their silence; how narrative gaps can "open upon mirrors that the novels hold up to the audience" (5). By writing in a fractured form rife with gaps in narrative, knowledge, and understanding, YA authors are able to select what they reveal to their readers while simultaneously mimicking the chaotic, fragmented experience of trauma. If a traumatic event can only be understood as it returns to a victim in fragmented memories, then nonlinear narrative temporality is used to recreate the experience, representing the chaos as opposed to attempting to order it. The authors of *Briar Rose*, *Simon and the Oaks*, and *Come Back for Me* use different techniques of narrative silence to demonstrate the traumatic experience, but all represent the inability of an individual to make sense of it, be it through the repressed gaps in their traumatized memory or the belated understanding that forces one to rewrite their personal mythology.

LaCapra explains, "These gaps not only make oblique reference to the devastation and trauma of the Holocaust. They also leave room for the reader to think of other historical cases ... to raise alternative possibilities" (88). If a reader is aware that a story is fragmented, they implicitly understand that there are shards they do not see: the information that would fill the gaps in narrative knowledge. An author is able to use silence to shield a reader, not only from the harshest brutalities and possible secondary traumatization, but also from the grotesqueness of attempting to represent in full that which we cannot convey. Narrative gaps force a young reader to seek out more information and actively engage with a text, and invite them to make connections with other events, historical or recent, or even their own experiences. In an age when historical ignorance appears to be a serious issue, especially among younger populations, YA literature exploring the trauma of the Holocaust in new ways may be more important than ever.

Biography: Talia E. Crockett is a second-year PhD researcher at the Victoria University of Wellington with a passion for children's literature. She received her HonBA in English from the University of Toronto before working in the Canadian young adult publishing and film criticism industries. Her upcoming doctoral dissertation will focus on ethical representations of trauma within young adult Holocaust, postcolonial, and parental abuse and abandonment literature.

Works Cited

Adorno, Theodor W. *Prisms*. Translated by Samuel Weber and Shier-ry Weber Nicholse, MIT Press, 1983.

Alexander, Jeffrey C., et al. *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*. University of California Press, 2004.

Astor, Maggie. "Getting Facts Wrong on the Holocaust." *The New York Times*, April 13 2018.

Baer, Elizabeth Roberts. "A New Algorithm in Evil: Children's Literature in a Post-Holocaust World." *The Lion and the Unicorn*, vol. 24, no. 3, 2000, pp. 378-401, [doi.10.1353/uni.2000.0026](https://doi.org/10.1353/uni.2000.0026).

Caruth, Cathy. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. John Hopkins University Press, 1996.

Dean-Ruzicka, Rachel. *Tolerance Discourse and Young Adult Holocaust Literature: Engaging Difference and Identity*. Taylor & Francis Group, 2017.

Ellison, Jeffrey A. "From One Generation to the Next: A Case Study of Holocaust Education in Illinois." 2002. Florida Atlantic University, PhD dissertation.

Franklin, Ruth. *A Thousand Darknenses: Lies and Truth in Holocaust Fiction*. Oxford University Press, 2010.

Fredriksson, Marianne. *Simon and the Oaks*. Translated by Joan Tate, Orion, 1999.

Haase, Donald. "Children, War, and the Imaginative Space of Fairy Tales." *The Lion and the Unicorn*, vol. 24, no. 3, 2000, pp. 360-377, [doi.10.1353/uni.2000.0030](https://doi.org/10.1353/uni.2000.0030).

Hart-Green, Sharon. *Come Back for Me*. New Jewish Press, 2017.

- Kertzer, Adrienne. *My Mother's Voice: Children, Literature, and the Holocaust*. Broadview Press, 2002.
- Kidd, Kenneth. "'A' is for Auschwitz: Psychoanalysis, Trauma Theory, and the 'Children's Literature of Atrocity.'" *Children's Literature*, vol. 33, 2005, pp. 120-149, doi.org/10.1353/chl.2005.0014.
- Kidron, Carol A. "Toward an Ethnography of Silence: The Lived Presence of the Past in the Everyday Life of Holocaust Trauma Survivors and Their Descendants in Israel." *Current Anthropology*, vol. 50, no. 1, 2009, pp. 5-27, doi.org/10.1086/595623.
- Kimmel, Eric A. "Confronting the Ovens: The Holocaust and Juvenile Fiction." *The Horn Book Magazine*, February 1997.
- Kokkola, Lydia. *Representing the Holocaust in Children's Literature*. Routledge, 2003.
- Kolář, Stanislav, et al. *Reflections of Trauma in Selected Works of Postwar American and British Literature*. Pavol Jozef Šafárik University, 2010.
- LaCapra, Dominick. *History and Memory After Auschwitz*. Cornell University Press, 1998.
- Lipstadt, Deborah E. *Antisemitism: Here and Now*. Schocken Books, 2019.
- Luckhurst, Roger. *The Trauma Question*. Routledge, 2008.
- Rosenfeld, Alvin H. *A Double Dying: Reflections on Holocaust Literature*. Indiana University Press, 1980.
- Rudberg, Pontus. *The Swedish Jews and the Holocaust*. Routledge, 2017.
- Toker, Leona. *Eloquent Reticence: Withholding Information in Fictional Narrative*. University Press of Kentucky, 1993.
- Ulanowicz, Anastasia Maria. *Second-Generation Memory and Contemporary Children's Literature: Ghost Images*. Routledge, 2013.
- Waxman, Olivia B. "A Surprisingly Large Percentage of Young French People Don't Know About the Holocaust, Study Finds." *Time*, January 22 2020, time.com/5767184/holocaust-remembrance-france-survey. Accessed 6 May 2020.
- Wyschogrod, Michael. "Some Theological Reflections on the Holocaust." *Response: A Contemporary Jewish Review*, vol. 9, no. 1, 1975, pp. 64-68.
- Yolen, Jane. *Briar Rose*. T. Doherty Associates, 1992.

Notes

¹ Since I have accessed this Swedish novel in its English translation, I will be referring to *Simon och ekarna* by its English title, *Simon and the Oaks*. In Sweden, *Simon and the Oaks* is not categorized as YA literature specifically. However, due to its coming-of-age theme and focus on the lives of two adolescents, as well as the strategies I discuss that allow the author to avoid the central horror of the Holocaust, the English version of this novel has been marketed alongside canonized YA texts such as *The Book Thief* (Markus Zusak, 2005). All novels in this study have potential crossover appeal, but are discussed here in regards to their use of YA literary strategies.