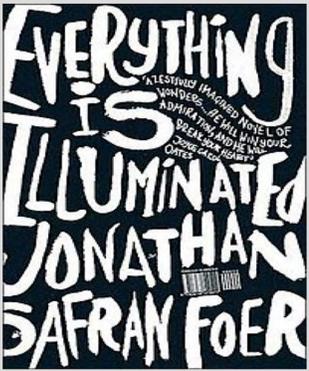


Trauma: Afterlife or Afterthought in Second- and Third-Generation Literature?

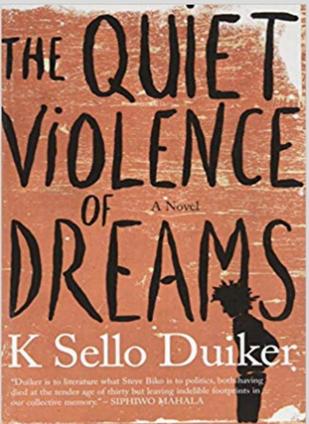
Substantial work has been done in the service of discovering the effect of a parent's traumatic past on children, primarily within the disciplines of psychiatry and psychoanalysis and in relation to the descendants of Holocaust survivors. Much of this research has liberally employed the term "trauma" in its descriptions of the emotional, behavioural and mental states of survivors' descendants: a semantic designation that has led to these groups being themselves defined as second- or third-generation "survivors". But does this risk the conflation of very different woundings? And what might literary texts offer to understandings of the need for specificity in evaluating, and differentiating between, intergenerational traumas?

My research explores these questions by examining the relationships between these authors and their respective family histories of violence as suggested by literary texts. Interestingly, each of these texts occupy a slightly different generic space: whilst Jonathan Safran Foer's fictional text *Everything is Illuminated* quivers on the boundary between fantasy and history and K. Sello Duiker's semi-autobiographical *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* is a Bildungsroman of sorts, Diogène Ntarindwa's autobiographical *Carte d'identité* harnesses the power of drama. Despite these variations, however, and the very different histories and cultural contexts these narratives are linked to, one narrative technique unifies them: vocal multiplicity. Why, and to what ends, do survivor's descendants write multi-voiced narratives? And what might this narrative strategy reveal about how these writers perceive, relate to – and are themselves affected or otherwise by – the traumatic events of previous generations?



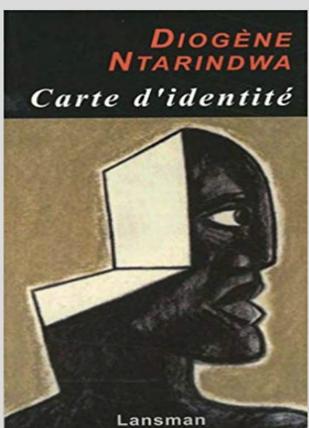
***Everything is Illuminated*, Jonathan Safran Foer**

Born in 1977 to a mother whose parents survived the Holocaust, Jonathan Safran Foer is an all-American third-generation writer. The polyvocality of his text is reflective of this positioning; in addition to giving voice to perpetrators of Holocaust violence – something not often seen in survivor-authored texts – his restrained presence in the novel suggests that Holocaust trauma is something that he somehow cannot fully know. The focus on this text is not Holocaust trauma itself, but the questions of identity that arise *from* it in an intergenerational context that blurs the lines of victimhood and perpetration whilst questioning who can testify to the traumas of the past. In many ways, this text refuses victimhood in a way that suggests Foer's movement beyond trauma.



***The Quiet Violence of Dreams*, K. Sello Duiker**

Duiker might well be defined as belonging to the "1.5 generation" as defined by Susan Suleiman: a generation that live in the direct aftermath of a violence that they experienced only as children. Like Foer, Duiker's generational situation is reflected by his polyvocal narrative strategy; however, Duiker's polyvocality functions in a very different way. The many personas of Duiker's protagonist gesture towards a depression borne out of a crisis of identity rather than the dehumanisation so inherently tied to apartheid-related trauma. Giving voice to a female protagonist in addition to characters representative of other racial and societal strands, Duiker moves beyond an individually-inflected testimony to violence to meditate on a South Africa which – whilst affected by the apartheid past – is grappling with new issues and conflicts in its present.



***Carte d'identité*, Diogène Ntarindwa**

Given the relative recentness of the 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi in Rwanda, second generation perspectives are still, to a large extent, waiting to emerge in full. To fixate on the genocide of 1994 in the context of intergenerational trauma, however, is to ignore the reality that Rwanda is no stranger to bloody conflicts. Ntarindwa was born in Burundi to Rwandan parents who fled the mass killings of 1959, deciding to join the RPF of his own accord when the genocide broke out. Playing his father, himself and various other victims and perpetrators of violence onstage, Ntarindwa's use of polyvocality considers how moments of violence can be linked despite generational distances. Like Foer and Duiker, Ntarindwa's play considers questions of identity – but it is his seeking out of links between the past and the present which most clearly suggest his ability to confront, and not be overwhelmed by, memories of violence.

Echoing Marianne Hirsch, Ruth Lijtmaer states that for the children of survivors, the unspoken past 'shape[s] their lives with [...] void, terror, and loss that defies all comfort.' In *Everything is Illuminated*, *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* and *Carte d'identité*, this is not the case. Whilst Hirsch argues for the fragmentary, haunting nature of the past, Foer, Duiker and Ntarindwa's protagonists actively seek theirs out; whilst the questions that these characters wrestle with are the *consequences* of past violence, they are not direct wounds *of* that violence. The distinction is subtle, yet important. As these texts demonstrate, the past is affecting in many ways – but the struggles of these writers are markedly different from those experienced by their parents and grandparents. In these polyvocal texts, the past is not something to be feared; it is to be interrogated, engaged with and used both as a foundation of identity and as a platform from which difficult and complex questions regarding the self in relation to history can be considered.