

# Lapis Lazuli

## An International Literary Journal

ISSN 2249-4529

[www.pintersociety.com](http://www.pintersociety.com)

---

GENERAL ISSUE VOL: 8, No.: 1, SPRING 2018

---

UGC APPROVED (Sr. No.41623)

---

BLIND PEER REVIEWED

---

About Us: <http://pintersociety.com/about/>

Editorial Board: <http://pintersociety.com/editorial-board/>

Submission Guidelines: <http://pintersociety.com/submission-guidelines/>

Call for Papers: <http://pintersociety.com/call-for-papers/>

Lapis Lazuli

All Open Access articles published by LLILJ are available online, with free access, under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Non Commercial License as listed on

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

Individual users are allowed non-commercial re-use, sharing and reproduction of the content in any medium, with proper citation of the original publication in LLILJ. For commercial re-use or republication permission, please contact

[lapislazulijournal@gmail.com](mailto:lapislazulijournal@gmail.com)

## Unfolding Trauma through Narration: An Analysis of *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*

Meera Prasannan

---

### Abstract:

Jonathan Safran Foer's novel *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* uses unusual typographic and visual devices; such narrative strategies, together with the specific use of language strongly influence the pace of the story as well as the core of the novel. In this novel the reader follows three different timelines and three different narrative voices. One takes place in New York in 2003, the next one is also set in New York City but the time is 1962/63, and the last one takes place in Dresden during the Second World War. In this study, the language of each protagonist is analysed in detail as well as the pace and the chronology of their narrations. This study aims to analyse the narrative techniques in Jonathan Safran Foer's novel *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* with an emphasis on visual techniques. It will analyse the methods of their employment and depict their role in the novel. Study focuses on the visual use of graphic representations in the narrative as a means to visualise meaning and how it captures the trauma of the nine year old boy Oskar Schell, his Grandma and that of Thomas Sr.

### Keywords:

Typographical devices, multi-textured and multi-voiced narration, visual aids, photographs, trauma through narration.

\*\*\*

Narrative is an extraordinarily complex term in literary and critical theory. In the twentieth century, structuralism generated some of the most rigorous analyses of narrative and its forms. The study of narrative is called Narratology. The study of narrative was greatly facilitated by structuralism. It systematized the study of plot, character, symbol and provided a formula for narratives. Thus narratology is a branch of structuralism. It is a term often used to describe the language of narrative. It is the study of how narratives make meaning. Narratology is not the reading and interpretation of individual stories, but the attempt to study the nature of 'story' itself, as a concept and as a cultural practice. According to narratologists, there is a basic distinction between 'story' and 'plot.' The 'story' is the actual sequence of events as they happen, whereas the 'plot' is those events that are edited, ordered, packaged, and presented in what we recognize as a narrative. The 'story,' being the events as they happen, has to begin at the beginning and then move chronologically, with nothing left out. The 'plot,' on the other hand, may well begin somewhere in the middle of a chain of events, and may then backtrack, providing us with a 'flashback' which might have happened earlier. The plot may also have elements which flash forward, hinting at events which will happen later.

*Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* is a novel where the reader follows three different timelines. One takes place in New York in 2003, the next one is also set in New York City but the time is 1962/63, and the last one takes place in Dresden during the Second World War. The story line from New York City in 2003 is intermediated by Oscar Schell, a nine-year-old boy of an exceptional intelligence and extreme inquisitiveness. He is a peculiar little boy who does not get along with his peers due to his specific way of thinking, oversensitivity and self-consciousness. The novel contains almost two parallel storylines. One is the story of Oskar and his quest to find the lock that the key opens, and the other is the story of Grandma and Thomas Sr. and their lives before and after World War II. These two storylines come together at the end of the novel, when Oskar meets Thomas Sr. and involves him in the search. The novel consists of 17 chapters in total, four of these are narrated by Grandma, and four of them by Thomas Sr. and the rest are narrated by Oskar. The novel begins and ends with chapters narrated by Oskar, whose narrative is also the one that is most recent in chronological time. In the first chapter, entitled *What the?*, we see an example of prolepsis when Oskar says the following: “I have only ridden in a limousine twice ever” (3). “I thought about that my second time in a limousine, when the renter and I were on our way to dig up Dad’s empty coffin” (7). Here Oskar is pointing forward to the very end of the novel, so it becomes clear that he is telling the story of what happened at some point after everything has happened.

Oskar’s narration begins with the trip to the funeral, and then moves back in time to the week before 9/11, when he went on a “Reconnaissance Expedition” with his father. Then he moves forward again to the day before, when his father tells him a bedtime story for the last time, before he moves forward again to 9/11, or “the worst day,” as Oskar calls it, when he listens to his father’s messages on the answering machine. In the next chapter, *Googolplex*, Oskar refers to the funeral again, and explains the significance of the bracelet he had made for his mother. At this point, the narrative has moved a year forward in time, and we learn about Ron, the key, the beginning of the search, and the renter. At the same time he refers back to 9/11, and explains how he replaced the answering machine with a new, identical one to prevent his mother from hearing his father’s messages. This chapter also contains prolepsis, where Oskar refers to the whole search as “those eight months” (52). “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” (52). Here, we also see that Oskar uses the usual modal ‘would’ to refer to an action that has been repeated within that period of time or else, Oskar’s chapters are for the most part devoted to narrating the search for the lock, and this is done in chronological order. He presents the people he meets on this quest in the order that he meets them, and each development in his search for the lock is presented chronologically. While telling the story of how he went around searching for the key, Oskar regularly points back in time, either to the time before his father’s death or to the months that followed. Thus, in each chapter, Oskar depicts his father and gives an impression of what their relationship was like through

anecdotes and by repeating conversations they had. The bedtime story that Oskar mentions in the first chapter is given a chapter of its own, titled "THE SIXTH BOROUGH" (217).

Grandma and Thomas Sr.'s chapters tell the story of how they came to meet each other and get married after they both escaped to the United States after World War II. We learn of how they meet by coincidence in a bakery in New York City seven years later and that they decide to get married. Each of their narratives also reveals what sort of relation they had to each other from the time before the war, and they both talk about their marriage with all its peculiar rules and dysfunctions. The last three chapters narrated by Grandma and Thomas Sr. are dedicated to more recent events, that is, 9/11 and the period after. In the end of the book we find that chronologically and in terms of actual events Oskar's narrative and those of his grandparents draw near each other. This is evident when Oskar finally meets his grandfather and lets him take part in the final stage of his quest.

In Oskar's narrative, the main story is the quest for the lock, while the repeated analeptic references to the time before 9/11 provides a background for that story. In Oskar's grandparents' narratives, the main story is the story of their post-war lives in America. Grandma and Thomas Sr.'s narratives run parallel to each other, and for the most part Thomas Sr. is in advance of Grandma, so that events he has told of in his chapters are narrated again in Grandma's subsequent chapters. Grandma and Thomas Sr. remember events differently. They have different attitudes and viewpoints, and they choose to emphasize different aspects of the events, and so the meanings of their stories and the connections between them appear gradually.

Thomas Sr.'s chapters are all letters or diary entries, and since they are dated, we see that they are at least chronological as regards the order in which they are included in the novel. The two chapters that are narrated by Thomas Sr. are titled WHY I'M NOT WHERE YOU ARE 5/21/63 (16), which probably means that they form part of the same letter/journal entry. It becomes clear from the text that this is the day that Thomas Sr. left Grandma. In the first chapter narrated by Thomas Sr., he opens his narrative by describing how he lost the ability to speak after he came to America. He explains about getting "yes" and "no" tattooed in the palms of his hands, and about his notebooks. We hear of Anna for the first time when Thomas Sr. says the following: "...I tried to tell the waiter, "The way you just handed me that knife, that reminds me of ..." but I couldn't finish the sentence, her name wouldn't come, I tried again, it wouldn't come, she was locked inside me, how strange, I thought, how frustrating, how pathetic, how sad, I took a pen from my pocket and wrote "Anna" on my napkin ..." (16). At this point, the reader does not know who the narrator of this chapter is, or who Anna is. Thomas Sr. also introduces Grandma in this chapter, as "your mother," and gives his version of how they came across each other in the bakery and how she suggested they should get married. "We met at the Columbian Bakery on Broadway, we'd both come to New York lonely, broken and confused..." (28-30).

Grandma gives her own version of this event in her first chapter entitled MY FEELINGS (75). She introduces Thomas Sr. as “a childhood friend,” and says that “He and my older sister, Anna, were friends” (80). Although all the chapters that are narrated by Grandma are titled *My Feelings*, the first chapter is dated 12th September 2003. This date points forward to the final chapter narrated by Grandma, where she goes to the airport and talks to Thomas Sr. out of leaving once again. She opens the chapter by saying “Dear Oskar, I am writing this to you from the airport. I have so much to say to you. I want to begin at the beginning...” (75). This indicates that she has begun writing this narrative after Oskar has met Thomas Sr., and that the purpose of her letters to Oskar therefore is to finally answer his questions about what his grandfather was like and why he left her and Thomas Jr. We might say that this way of opening the chapter is prophetic since it refers to the situation in which she is writing before she goes on to tell the story of her life from the beginning.

Thomas Sr. also moves back and forth in time in his narration, between his life in Dresden and his recent life in New York with Grandma. He tells the story of how he and Anna fell in love, and he also describes his marriage with Grandma and its quirks and dysfunctions and also makes several references to the present situation he is in at the same time, like, sitting in the airport in 1963, writing this letter to Thomas Jr. “I’m sitting in an airport trying to explain myself to my unborn son, I’m filling the pages of this, my last day book...” (113).

Grandma’s fourth chapter opens with the sentence “I was in the guest room when it happened” (224). It soon becomes clear what ‘it’ refers to, and that Grandma has moved forward in time to 9/1, from the description of her marriage years ago in the preceding chapter. Grandma describes what she does that day after she finds out that Thomas Jr. was at the World Trade Centre. She moves forward in time again, when she says “Remember when we went skating a few months ago and I turned around, because I told you that watching people skate gave me a headache? I saw rows of bodies under the ice” (231). Grandma also describes the grief she struggles with when she says “Planes going into buildings.... Bodies Falling”... (231-232).

Thomas Sr.’s final chapter tells the story of why and when he came back, and how he went about contacting Grandma, and how she allowed him to live with her again. We learn of how he spies on Oskar and Mr. Black, and he also describes meeting Oskar “He was in the apartment, it was just the two of us, grandfather and grandson... “Are you the renter?” I went back into the room and got this daybook from the closet, this book that is nearly out of pages” (280). Thomas Sr. runs out of space in his daybook, the text grows more and more dense, until it becomes impossible to read at the bottom of the page. The last thing we are able to read on the page before the text fades into darkness is “...he said, “I want to dig up his grave”, I’ve seen him every day for the past two months, we’ve been planning what’s about to happen, down to the smallest detail,

we've even practiced digging in Central Park..."(281). The text grows even denser until it is a black square (Fig.1).

Oskar's narrative starts to overlap with Thomas Sr.'s at the point where they meet. In the chapter ALIVE AND ALONE (234), Oskar describes meeting the renter and telling him about his mission to find out what the key is for "A man stood there without saying anything... "My name is Thomas." "That was my dad's name. It's pretty common. He died" (237). In Oskar's two final chapters A SIMPLE SOLUTION TO AN IMPOSSIBLE PROBLEM, and BEAUTIFUL AND TRUE (285, 315), Oskar takes over the narration of the trip to the graveyard.

The narrative strategy of presenting the same event as it is focalized by different character-narrators has several functions. In some cases, these events provide the readers with a chronological orientation and give them a better understanding of when the events have happened in story time. It also shows how the characters interpret each other's behaviour and how they relate to each other. The chronology of the text is constantly moving back and forth. It might be argued that events which are focalized by more than one narrator function as chronological fix points for the reader. One of the events that may be seen as quite significant is when Grandma and Thomas Sr. meet each other for the first time after the war. At this point, neither of them was aware that the other had survived, or that they had both escaped to the United States. Thomas Sr.'s narration of this event comes first. Thomas Sr. does not explicitly state that he already knows Grandma, or that he recognizes her, but he hints at it as he says "We'd both come to New York lonely, broken and confused," (28). And he also states, "There are worse things," she said, "worse than being like us. Look, at least we're alive," I could see that she wanted those last words back ..." (30).

Events that are focalized through more than one character-narrator's discourse help the reader to keep track of the natural chronology of the narrative, especially in a novel such as this one, where the narration of these events are separated by so much space. Oskar and Grandma narrate some of the same events, such as for example the limousine ride to the funeral. When Oskar narrates the trip to the funeral in his first chapter as "...even though I was trying hard for it not to, it was annoying me how Grandma kept touching me, so I climbed into the front seat and poked the driver's shoulder until he gave me some attention" (4). Oskar does not say anything about what happens at the funeral. Grandma narrates this event differently, as we can see in her second last chapter: "Your mother wanted to have a funeral, even though there was no body. What could anyone say? We all rode in the limousine together...The limousine took us home. Everyone was silent" (232-233). Oskar does not understand why Grandma "keeps touching him" (232). He just remarks that he finds it irritating, but does not want to let her know that. Grandma, on the other hand, interprets Oskar's behaviour as a way of dealing with his pain. We see that Grandma expresses what Oskar is not able to, both in that she includes the funeral in her narrative and that she uses the word suffering rather than heavy boots.

The images and typographical effects in *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* are not mere illustrations or ornamentations; they form part of the narrative. The author uses specific typographical devices varying according to the narrative voice. Oskar's narration does not carry any specific features which would supplement his narrative voice considering the typeset arrangement. His narration is organised classically, including paragraph indentation. However, there are some specific font-features employed in Oskar's narration especially at the moments of disturbances or digressions. For example, in the case of the conversation of Oskar's mother with a psychiatrist, this is eavesdropped by Oskar from behind the door and rewritten in fragments. It could be easily retold by Oskar who could intermediate the main point of the conversation and his personal conclusions to the reader. Oskar neither interferes in the conversation nor interprets it. The reader is thus let to listen and figure out the missing words and meaning of the incomplete sentences.

Grandfather's narration is the richest typographical device in the novel. Except for the contrast of the condensed text with the one-sentence pages there are other distinct features such as blank and black pages or two pages filled by numbers. The blank pages are actually (not) written by Grandma but intermediated by Grandfather. Grandfather encourages Grandma to write the story of her life and after months of listening to Grandma's everyday typewriting she hands him over the typescript of two thousand pages. Grandfather introduces it with the words: "[...] but this was all I saw:" (120) and the reader browses through three empty pages, confused just like Grandfather. It provokes many questions about Grandma and the reader has to wait for two chapters for Grandma's explanation. Although Grandfather blames himself for not checking the ink tape and for not noticing Grandma's difficulties with her sight the reader learns, that Grandma left them blank on purpose in order to symbolize the emptiness of her life. As a contrary to Grandma's blank pages, Grandfather's last chapter finishes with a black page (Fig. 2). The gaps between words as well as the space between the lines keep diminishing until the words start overlapping each other. The last three pages thus become illegible. On these three pages the overlapping further escalates until the last page becomes so overloaded with words that there is hardly any white space left (Fig.3). Grandfather claims that he is running out of space in his daybook but still has so much to say to his son that he cannot stop writing. The black pages represent the desperate effort of Grandfather to be understood and the fact that the more he tries the more he fails.

Another example of such failure is his phone call from the airport. Since Grandfather cannot speak but needs to communicate with Grandma immediately, he expresses himself by pressing the numbers according to letters as if he was writing a message on a cell phone. This phone call is written down and the reader is offered a clue in order to decrypt the speech (Fig.4).

The most extensive visual domain of the novel is photographs. They appear throughout the book, some of them even repetitively. They are predominantly incorporated in Oskar's narration. The importance of photographs as a visual device is indicated from the very beginning of the book as it is the first encounter of the reader with the story. The book is commenced with series of photographs before the title page actually appears so-called frontispieces. All three frontispieces are closely attached to the story; two of them actually reappear later in the book (Fig.5). The frontispieces not only mirror the main narrative voices and the major themes but also introduce the organization of the narrative voices in the novel.

The first frontispiece shows a photograph of a keyhole, a symbol connected with Grandfather's storyline. This link becomes evident in the 2nd chapter, where Grandfather's narration presents a doorknob (Fig.6). The detail of the keyhole later reminds the reader of Grandfather's physical separation when he is condemned to watch Oskar visiting his Grandma only through a keyhole. It is also a metaphor of his life, which he cannot enjoy entirely and which he watches passing by only through the keyhole of his trauma. The doorknobs thus become a metaphor of Grandfather's isolation and trauma which locked him away from the outside world for the rest of his life. The doorknobs also function as a parallel to Oskar's search for the lock belonging to the mysterious key. While Oskar looks for the right keyhole, Grandfather came back to America with desperate need of a metaphorical key which would help him escape from his permanent inner solitude.

Photographs presented in Oskar's narration are not unified in theme, quality or origin. They are an amalgam of what Oskar sees and captures by his camera, inherited from his Grandfather. In the third chapter, Oskar lets the reader look into his scrapbook called "Stuff that happened to me," a kind of album of his photographs, it is, however, full of cuttings and borrowed photographs. The real "Stuff" in fact starts happening to him once he sets out in order to search for the keyhole. Oskar captures two significant photos during his visit of the Black family number one: an entrance door to an apartment and Mrs Black, which is a portrait taken from behind (Fig.7). The picture of the entrance also resonates with the theme of Oskar's key as well as with Grandfather's series of photographs of doorknobs. The last picture of this chapter is taken at night and it captures Grandma's apartment (Fig.8). It is an allusion to the third photograph presented at the beginning of the novel. This time it is a detail of the frontispiece dedicated to Grandma. It is in fact the only photograph in the novel connected directly to her. Grandma's apartment is opposite to Oskar's and they often talk during the night through an old two-way radio. Oskar also watches her window with his binoculars just to make sure she is there. The lit up window in the darkness also symbolizes Grandma's role in Oskar's life. The glowing window may also parallel Grandma's own life – despite the miserable moments of her destiny, she never stopped believing in life, she never stopped trying. The quality of the photograph is very poor and the reader can hardly recognize a silhouette behind the window but, after reading Oskar's narration, he/she knows that she is there.



As the book proceeds, the reader starts realizing that there are some common denominators which link some of his photographs. One of these common themes is a flight/free fall (Fig.9). This motif is closely connected with Oskar's obsession with the photograph of the falling man which Oskar finds during his search on the internet and which reappears in the novel several times. Oskar is desperate to find out the way his father died. He enlarges the found photo in order to see whether it is or is not him. The theme of flying or falling objects thus reflects this thorny necessity to know and to protect himself and other people from such kind of death. The double page of the flock of birds functions as an allusion of such a solution (Fig.10). The photograph of the flock of birds is placed literally in the middle of the book and covers two pages. The flying birds also symbolize the liberation of Mr. Black from his solitude. Mr. Black starts accompanying Oskar on his investigative errands, giving him support and protection, deputizing for the missing Grandfather. He stops once he realizes that there is a real Grandfather who has been following them but who Oskar does not know about. The reader can find a visual connection between these two characters in the novel, both intermediated by Oskar. Oskar encounters two old men and is somehow fascinated by them.

Although Mr. Black is significant and close to Oskar, the real Grandfather can never be substituted. The connection between Grandfather and Oskar is amplified by another photograph which Oskar takes at night on his way to the graveyard. He captures with his Grandfather's camera the night starlit sky (Fig.11). There is a visible link between Oskar's last photograph and Grandfather's last page of his letter. The black page is a result of accumulated words which, within three pages, gradually overtake the whole page. If the reader goes back to the page with the last just about visible words, he/she realizes that the text becomes illegible when Oskar tells Grandfather about his plan to dig up the grave and Grandfather begins to describe their preparation for the daring deed. It follows that the photographs used in the novel pervade several layers of the narration. By their concrete connection to the plot they function as illustrations which bring the reader closer to the story and offer him/her a direct view of the reality which the protagonist experience.

The scrapbook artefacts rather reflect the inner world of Oskar. They illustrate his memories, fears, traumas as well as things and people he loves and esteems. This is why the reader encounters them predominantly in the first half of the book where Oskar is self-oriented, locked up in his thoughts, before he actually starts taking action and sets out in order to find the key. "Stuff That Happened to Me" (325) is introduced to the reader when Oskar goes to bed and browses through it when trying to fall asleep. At that moment, the reader enters Oskar's mind for a while and flicks through the scrapbook together with him wondering what thought, idea or memory each photograph signifies. It is introduced to the reader by Oskar as if he was unveiling his secrets, letting him look into his inner world. The photograph of the keys reflects the trickiness of Oskar's task (Fig.12). The reader comes across double-paged photograph of New York

with the Central park cut out of it (Fig.13), the only thing he/she can connect it with is only the Reconnaissance Expedition which Oskar's Father organized for him. The reader can deduce that the cut-out central park symbolizes the empty space that Oskar feels after his Father's death.

The picture of Hamlet holding the skull of Yorick is another good example (Fig.14). It refers to preceding as well as oncoming situations and underlines other crucial themes of the novel which are death and a father-and-son relationship. The theme of Hamlet then penetrates the whole story while Oskar rehearses the performance at school. What is more, in Oskar's scrapbook, is the photograph of the falling man which appears not only once. Two pages after the first appearance, there is enclosed its enlarged detail. This brings the reader "extremely close" to the tragedy. Oskar is agonized by the lack of information about the way his Father died. On that account he enlarges pictures of people jumping from the Twin Towers during the attack in case one of them is his Father. This is in fact the most controversial part of the book, since the photographs are authentic and capture a video of a real person jumping in desperation out of the attacked building. They reappear several times in the novel, and conclude it as a flipbook where the photographs become animated. By the reversed arrangement of the fall, the flipbook makes an illusion of men flying up towards the sky. The use of the authentic photography is certainly a disputable act since it depicts a real tragedy of a real person. Nevertheless, the aim of the author may be to demonstrate, that the life stories as well as trauma and pain within his novel, although fictional, are real and probably truly happened to someone. The author, however, indicates that trauma plays a significant role in everyone's life. The flipbook is the means through which Oskar, a nine-year-old child, comes to terms with his wish to rewind the time, to save his Father and other impacted people. However, impossible the wish is he does his best to make it happen, which finally helps to comfort his disturbed soul.

An example of the use of illustrations can be found in the second chapter, at the very beginning of Oskar's search for the lock. In order to understand the inscription on the envelope with the key (Black) he goes to the art supply store and asks for closer information about the black colour. The shop assistant, however, claims, that the word Black probably does not stand for a colour, since it is written by a red pen and people rarely write a different name of colour than the one they are writing with, and that the word would more likely stand for a name Black. As a proof, she offers Oskar to have a look at the pad of paper that is next to the display of pens. Moreover, in the jumble of writings, a perceptive reader finds Thomas Schell's name (Fig.15). Oskar also spots it and becomes overexcited since he thinks that the name stands for his Father. It just does not make much sense to him and neither does it to the reader. The pages from the stationary pad thus make the narration more vivid and entertaining and offer another riddle to solve. The last illustration used in the book appears in Oskar's scrapbook "*Stuff that Happened to me*" (325).

According to colour symbolism purple used to be the colour of mourning. It is also considered as an unlucky colour and symbolizes magic and mystery. Green, on the contrary, is associated with newness, life force and good luck. Oskar fuses these two opposites into one unit just like they intersect during his journey. All these hidden meanings fit perfectly into the puzzle of Oskar's story. It is in Oskar's and Thomas Sr.'s chapters that we find images and unusual layout. Thomas Sr.'s chapters often feature pages with a single line on them and pictures of doorknobs within the text. This is because all Thomas Sr.'s texts are letters to Thomas Jr. which he rips out of his daybook. The pages with single lines show the pages he has been using to communicate with other people. We learn the significance of the pictures of doorknobs in his narrative where Grandma explains that Thomas Sr. took pictures of everything in their apartment and taped them into his daybook "He took a picture of every doorknob in the apartment. Everyone. As if the world and its future depended on each doorknob" (175). This makes it look as if we are leafing through one of Thomas Sr.'s notebooks. It is part of what makes Thomas Sr.'s texts look like documents that support the main narrative of the book, which is Oskar's story about his search for the lock.

Similarly, many of the non-verbal elements in Oskar's chapters also seem like documents. They contribute in some way to the meaning of the narrative. Oskar explains that his father had a habit of marking mistakes in the New York Times with a red pen (Fig.16). An example of this is evident in the novel where there is a portion of newspaper text with a red circle around a phrase. Oskar says that "Sometimes they were grammar mistakes, sometimes they were mistakes with geography or facts, and sometimes the article just didn't tell the whole story" (12). In other words, we also learn that, in the novel marking mistakes with a red pen is something that is typical of Thomas Jr. Oskar's explanation of what this means prepares the reader for what they will see when they reach Thomas Sr.'s third chapter, WHY I'M NOT WHERE YOU ARE 4/12/78 (208). Here, the text is marked with red circles in several places. Words such as "actresses," "bourgeois," and "refugees" are circled, and so are many of the commas instead of full stops. However, we also see that some of the circled words or phrases are not grammatically incorrect or misspelled, so it seems that these elements are circled for a different reason. We also see that the amount of red marking increases drastically at the end of the letter and this increase occurs as the narrative turns toward the bombing and Thomas Sr. describes in detail what happened to him that day, as well as attempting to explain why he left before Thomas Jr. was born. In Grandma's third chapter, she says that Thomas Sr. had never written to her "For forty years not a word. Only empty envelopes" (233).

In Thomas Sr.'s fourth chapter, we learn that the guards ask him about all the paper in his suitcases, and Thomas Sr. replies "They're letters to my son. I wasn't able to send them to him while he was alive" (268). At this point, it is rather unclear whether Thomas Sr. ever sent any letters or not, both he and Grandma claim he did not, but the red scribbles on the pages in Grandfather's narrative indicate that Thomas Jr. must have

had the letter at some point. What is more important is that we realize that the red circles do not only mark “mistakes”, they mark elements of the text that Thomas Jr. has either not understood or disagreed with. He has for instance circled the words “your mother” and “your grandfather” (215-216). The red circles reveal that Thomas Jr. did not know about the odd connection between Grandma, Thomas Sr. and Anna. The increase in red markings toward the end of the letter seems to indicate that Thomas Jr. feels angry or distressed by what he is reading, because we see that he has circled bits of text such as “I’m so afraid of losing something I love that I refuse to love anything” and “I love you, Your father”(216).

Grandma’s chapters do not contain visual elements, but there is nevertheless a connection between what Grandma writes about and what some of the images depict. It is Grandma’s discourse that explains why the pictures of doorknobs appear in Thomas Sr.’s chapters. If it had not been for her explanation, the readers would not have been able to work out the relevance of these images, and thus they would have lost their mimetic function. The pictures of doorknobs are part of what makes Thomas Sr.’s chapters look like pages from his daybooks. We also see that Thomas Sr.’s second chapter shows only his turns in a dialogue between Thomas Sr. and Grandma. The turns are shown with only one line per page, as if we were flipping through pages of his daybook. It is not until we get to Grandma’s second chapter that we are able to make sense of the dialogue, since she renders it with both her own and Thomas Sr.’s turns. Another example of a connection between Grandma’s text and visual elements is in Grandma’s final chapter. Grandma describes a dream she has had in which everything that happens is reversed: “In my dream, all of the collapsed ceilings re-formed above us. The fire went back into the bombs, which rose up and into the bellies of the planes whose propellers turned backward, like the second hands of the clocks across Dresden, only faster...”(307).

In Oskar’s final chapter and the final chapter of the book, Oskar tears the pictures of the man jumping from one of the towers out of his scrapbook. He reverses the order, so that “When I flipped through them, it looked like the man was floating up through the sky” (325). This train of thought continues until the day before 9/11, and Oskar concludes “We would have been safe” (326). What we see here is thus a consistent link between Oskar’s and Grandma’s narratives and the images of the falling man, with which the novel ends. The reversed series of pictures of the falling man that Oskar was talking about can be flipped, so that the figure of the falling man on the right-hand side appears to float upwards toward the tower, like Oskar describes. The flip-book effect creates a movement which is in a sense narrative since it marks a transition from one state to another.

In *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, there are two narratives that contain visible narrators, namely those of Grandma and Thomas Sr. Both of their narratives are letters. Thomas Sr. and Grandma address other characters within the fiction directly. Oskar’s narratives does not contain any explicit narrator, however, and as we have seen, it is

Oskar's narrative that takes up most of the book in terms of the number of chapters and pages dedicated to it. Oskar's narrative also differs significantly in that it is much more multi-textured and multi-voiced. It contains more images, more dialogue and quoted text or speech, and genre conventions to a greater degree than what can be found in Grandma's or Thomas Sr.'s texts. We might think of Oskar's texts as making up the "main" narrative of the story, while the chapters narrated by Grandma and Thomas Sr.'s are more like "documents" which are back grounded against Oskar's narrative, just like the illustrations and facsimiles from Oskar's "Stuff That Happened To Me" book (325).

The overall theme of the novel may be said to be the nature of grief, and the process of grieving. The characters in the novel grieve in different ways. Oskar is angry with his mother for starting what he assumes to be a romantic relationship with a new man named Ron, but it turns out that she met this man in group therapy and that he actually is, as she has insisted all along, just a friend. Oskar generally resents the idea of moving on with life, but we see at the end of the novel that Oskar's experience has helped him move on as well. Grandma and Thomas Sr. have different ways of dealing with grief. Grandma reaches out for help, while Thomas Sr. pulls into himself. Thomas Sr.'s loss of speech may be seen as reaction to the trauma he has experienced. Grandma wants to start again. She wants to leave behind her German identity and become an American. She also wants to have a family. But it seems that Thomas Sr. goes along with this half-heartedly. He holds on to Grandma because she is all that remains of his life in Germany. They end up living next to each other rather than together, or as Thomas Sr. himself says "... I thought we could run to each other, I thought we could have a beautiful reunion, although we had hardly known each other in Dresden. It didn't work. We've wandered in place, our arms outstretched, but not toward each other, they're marking off distance, everything between us has been a rule to govern our lives together, everything a measurement, a marriage of millimetres, of rules..." (109).

The novel shows how grief affects people differently, and how they react to it. It also presents different narratives next to each other and invites the reader to trace the parallels between them and to interpret the meanings that emerge from them. Their meanings depend on each other; since the reader's interpretation is arrived at through an interpretation of all three narratives and how they relate to each other.

APPENDIX

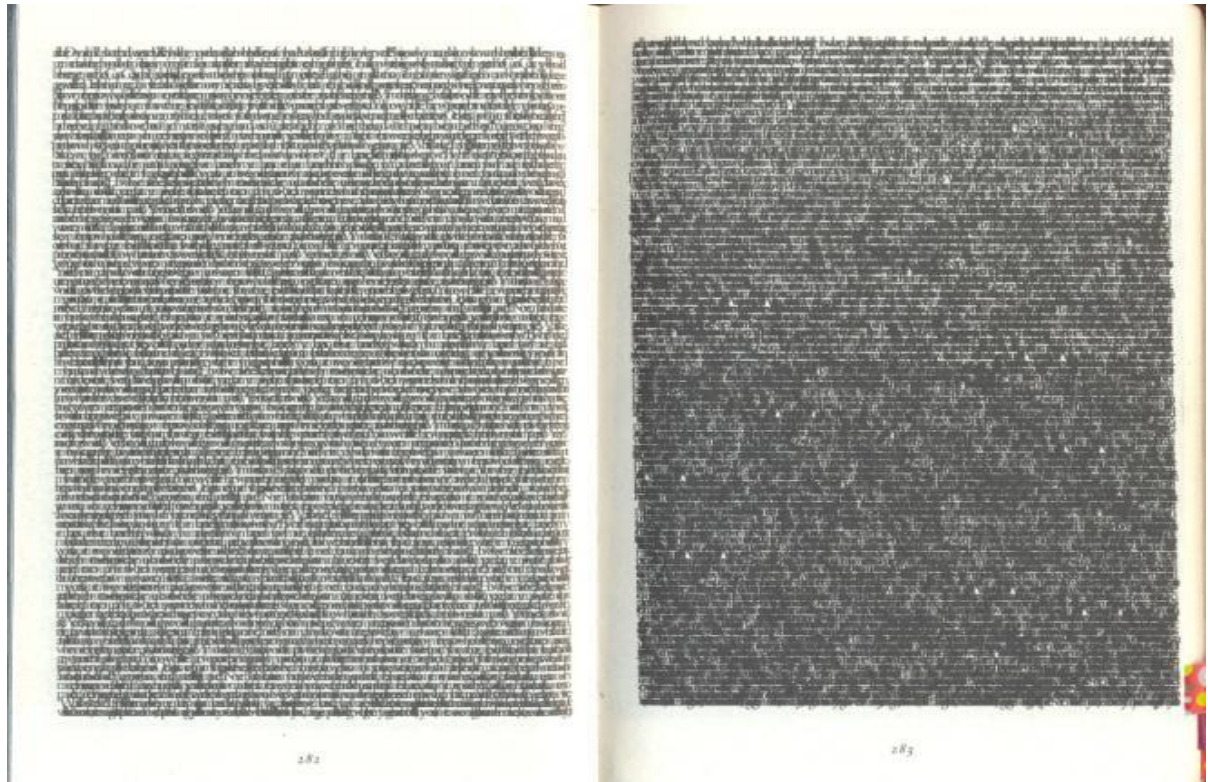


Fig.1

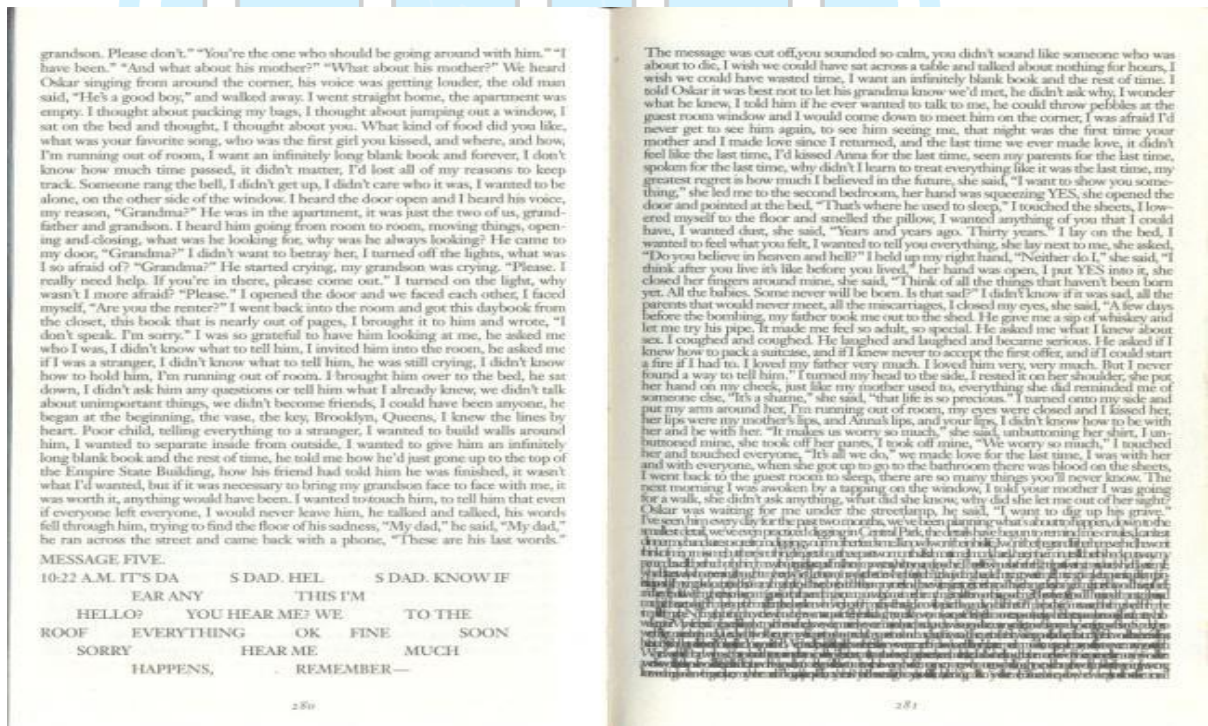


Fig.2





Fig.4



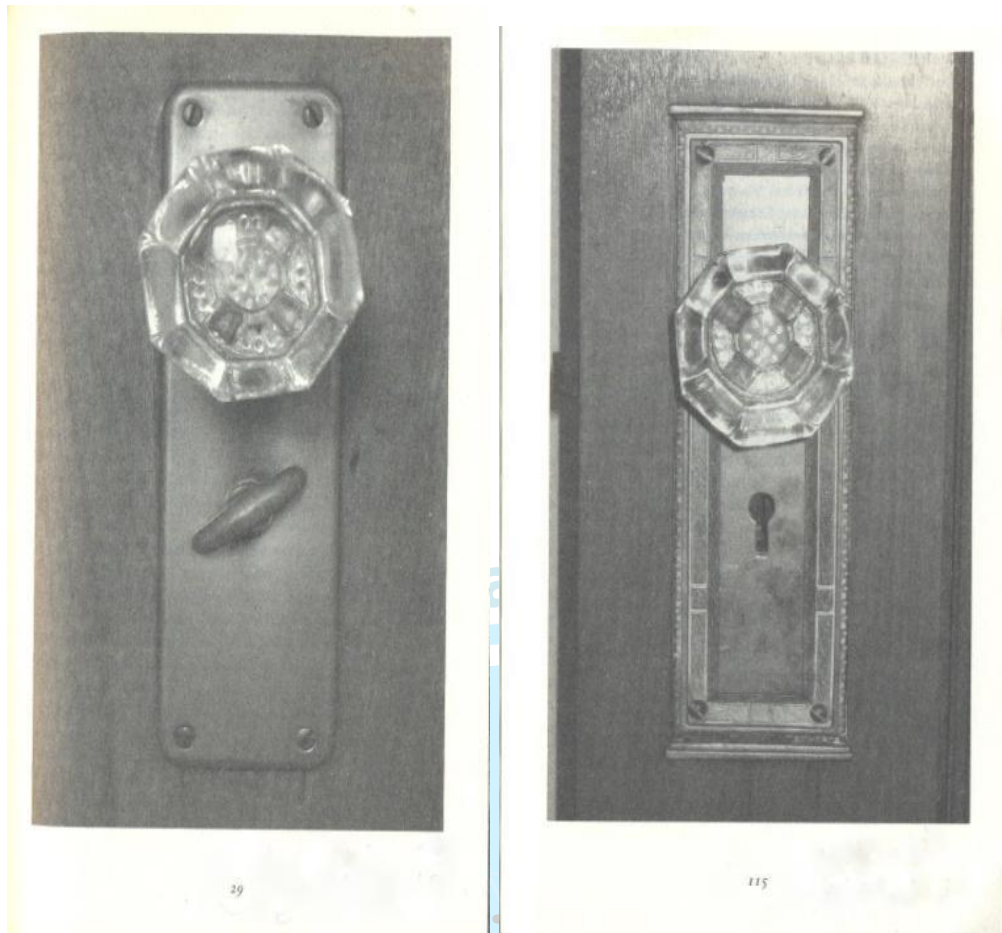


Fig.5

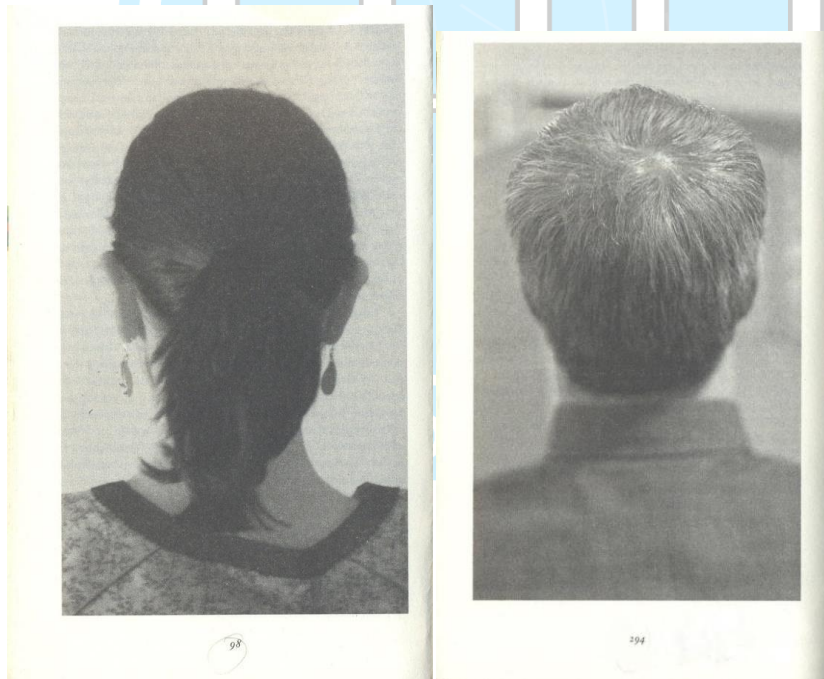


Fig.6



Fig.7

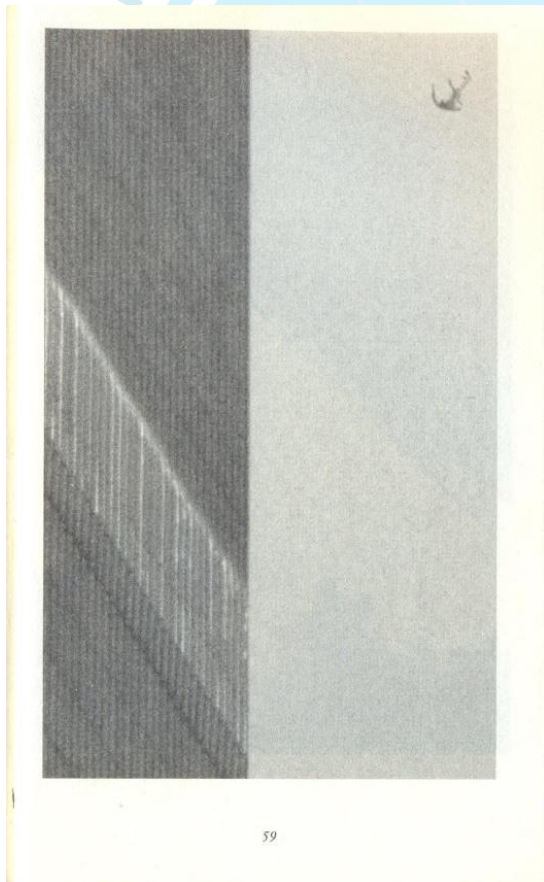


Fig.8



Fig.9



Fig.10

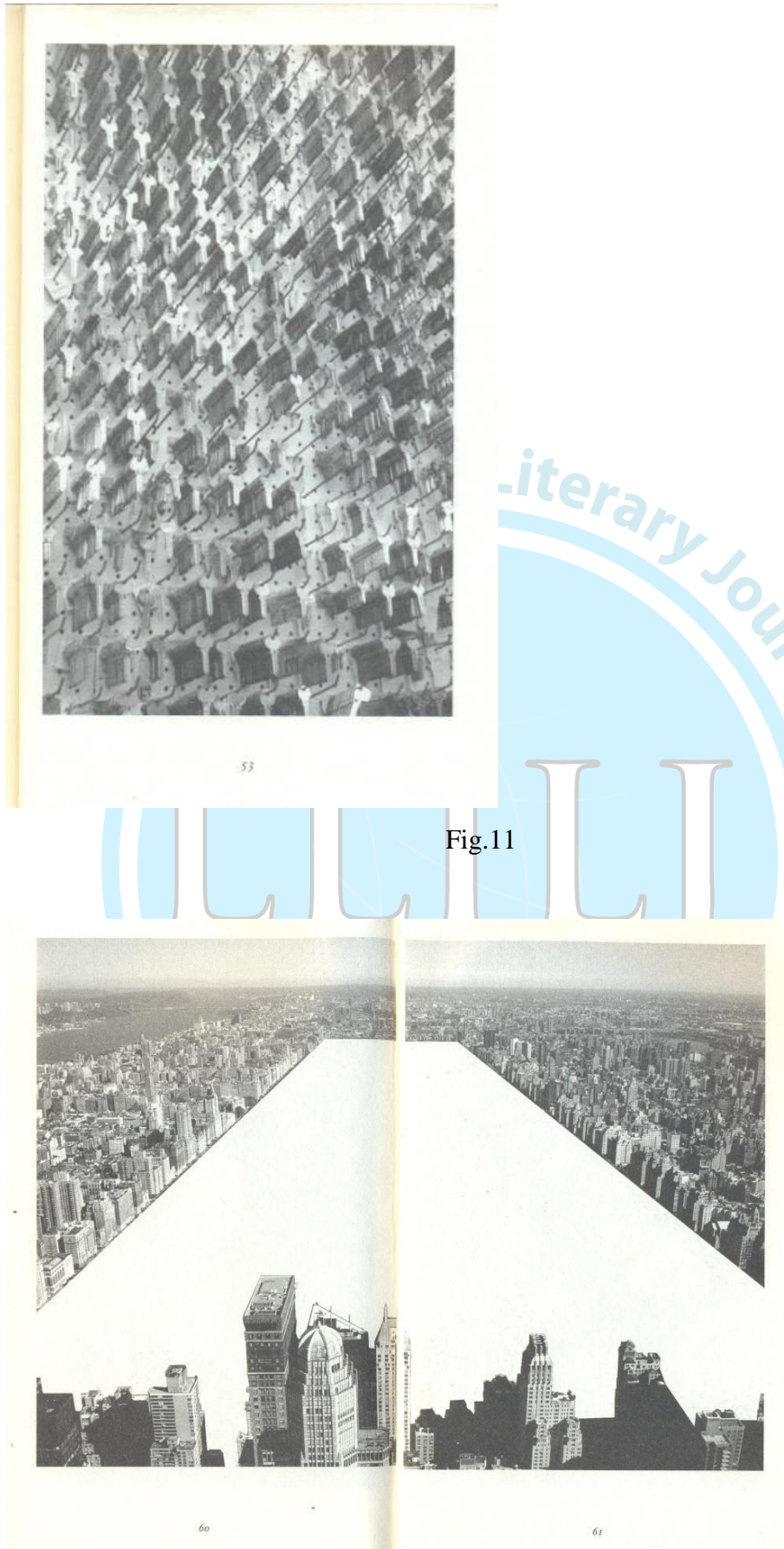


Fig.11

Fig.12

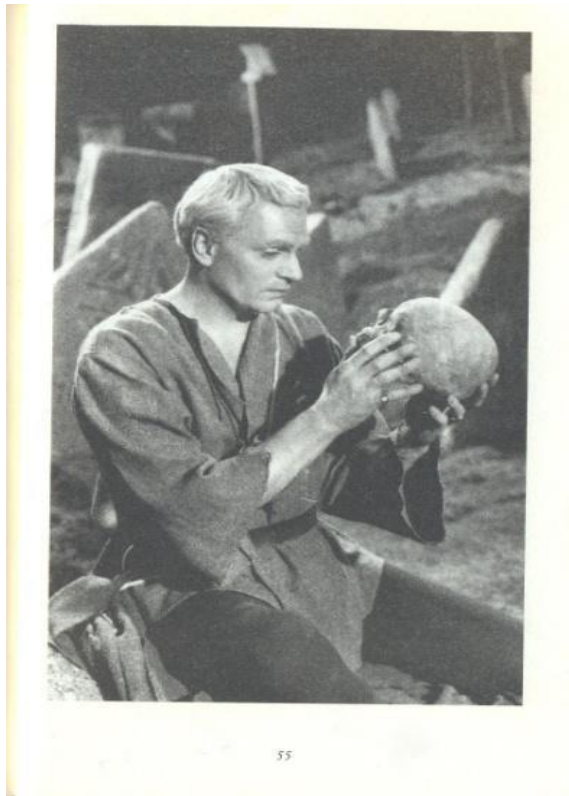


Fig.13





Fig.14

saw my reflection. I was terrified of my own image, my blood-matted hair, my split and bleeding lips, my red, pulsing palms, which, even as I write this, thirty-five years later, don't look like they should be at the ends of my arms. I remember losing my balance. I remember a single thought in my head: *Keep thinking. As long as I am thinking, I am alive.* but at some point I stopped thinking. The next thing I remember is feeling terribly cold. I realized I was lying on the ground, the pain was complete, it let me know I hadn't died. I started moving my legs and arms, my movements must have been noticed by one of the soldiers that had been put into action all over the city, looking for survivors. I later learned that there had been more than 220 bodies taken from the foot of the bridge, and 4 came back to life. I was one of them. They loaded us onto trucks and took us out of Dresden. I looked out from the flaps of canvas that covered the sides of the truck, the buildings were burning, the trees burning, the asphalt. I saw and heard humans trapped, I smelled them, standing in the molten, burning streets like living torches, screaming for help that was impossible to give. The air itself was burning, the truck had to make a number of detours to get beyond the chaos. Mines bore down on us once more, we were pulled off the truck and placed under it. The planes dove, more machine guns, more bombs, yellow, red, green, blue, brown. I lost consciousness again. When I awoke I was in a white hospital bed. I couldn't move my arms or legs, I wondered if I had lost them, but I couldn't summon the energy to look for myself. Hours passed, or days, when I finally looked down, I saw that I was strapped to the bed. A nurse was standing beside me. I asked, "Why have you done this to me?" She told me I had been trying to hurt myself. I asked her to free me. She said she couldn't. She said I would hurt myself. I begged her to free me, I told her I wouldn't hurt myself, I promised. She apologized and touched me. Doctors operated on me, they gave me injections and bandaged my body, but it was her touch that saved my life. In the days and weeks after my release, I looked for my parents and for Anna and for you. Everyone was looking for everyone in the rubble of every building, but all of the searching was in vain. I found our old house. The door was still stubbornly standing. A few of our belongings survived. The typewriter survived. I carried it in my arms

like a baby. Before I was evacuated I wrote on the door that I was alive, and the address of the refugee camp in Oschatz. I waited for a letter, but no letter ever came. Because there were so many bodies, and because so many of the bodies had been destroyed there was never a list of the dead, thousands of people were left to suffer hope. When I had thought I was dying at the base of the Loschwitz Bridge, there was a single thought in my head: *Keep thinking. Thinking would keep me alive.* But now I am alive, and thinking is killing me. I think and think and think. 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. I kissed her belly, even though there was nothing yet to kiss. I told her, "I love our baby." That made her laugh. I hadn't heard her laugh like that since the day we walked into each other halfway between our houses. She said, "You love an idea." I told her, "I love our idea." That was the point, we were having an idea together. She asked, "Are you afraid?" "Afraid of what?" She said, "Life is scarier than death." I took the future home from my pocket and gave it to her. I kissed her. I kissed her stomach, that was the last time I ever saw her. I was at the end of the path when I heard her father. He came out of the shed. "I almost forgot!" he called to me. "There's a letter here for you. It was delivered yesterday. I almost forgot." He ran into the house and came back out with an envelope. "I almost forgot," he said, his eyes were red, his knuckles were white. I later learned that he survived the bombing and then killed himself. Did your mother tell you that? Does she know it herself? He handed a letter to me. It was from Simon Goldberg. The letter had been posted from Westerbork transit camp in Holland, that's where the Jews from our region were sent, from there they went either to work or to their deaths. "Dear Thomas Schell, It was a pleasure meeting you, however briefly. For reasons that need not be explained, you made a strong impression on me. It is my great hope that our paths, however long and winding, will cross again. Until that day, I wish the best for you in these difficult times. Yours most sincerely, Simon Goldberg." I put the letter back in the envelope and the envelope

Fig.15

### WORKS CITED

Foer, Jonathan Safran. *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*. Houghton Mifflin: USA. 2005. Print.

Glazerbrook, Olivia. "Wearing heavy boots lightly," *Spectator* June 11, 2005. Print.

Kakutani, Michiko. "Boy's Epic Quest, Borough by Borough," *The New York Times*. March 22, 2005. Print.

Phelan, James. *Reading People, Reading Plots: Character, Progression and the Interpretation of Narrative*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989. Print.

Phelan, Jim. *Living To Tell About It: A Rhetoric and Ethics of Character Narration*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005. Print.



---

### BIO NOTE

Meera Prasannan is an Assistant Professor in the Department of English, NSS Hindu College, Changanacherry, Kerala.

E-mail id: [meerakailas915@gmail.com](mailto:meerakailas915@gmail.com)