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“Tattered Photograph”: Challenges to Postmemory in Jonathan Safran Foer’s

Everything Is Illuminated

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Abstract: Identification with events from an imagined Jewish past, especially in the case of an event like the Holocaust, which acts as a major disruption of such roots, can occur vicariously via material (or immaterial) totems, like photographs, stories, behaviors of survivors, serving as a database of memory famously called “postmemory” by Marianne Hirsch. In the case of Jonathan Safran Foer and his debut novel *Everything Is Illuminated*, a third-generation Jewish-American writing about a highly-fictionalized *shtetl* of his ancestors, the temptation to fill in the blanks in that history gives way to a magical realist understanding of Jewish life in Western Ukraine and of postmemory, but at the same time sheds light on the difficulties of writing personalized historical fiction *vis-a-vis* what is considered authentic. This paper delves into the minutiae of *Everything Is Illuminated*, meaning the novel itself and also the novel-within-the-novel, both of which question the importance of a cohesive intergenerational family narrative in order to achieve a form of closure in the case of a rupture as traumatic as the Holocaust.