

# **When Literary Men Become Historians: The Role of Literature in Presenting History through Selected Postmodern Fictions- A Thematic Study**

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### پوختە:

ئەم توپۆزینە وەبە بریتی یە لە لیکۆلینە وەبە کی بابەتیانە دەربارە ی رۆلی ئەدەب لە پیشاندانی میژوو لە شی کردنە وەبە چەند رۆمانیکی پۆستمۆدێرنە وە. میژوو (وەک بابەت) یان گێرانی وەبە رابردوو بوو بە بابەتیکی گرنگی زۆرینە ی رۆمانە پۆستمۆدێرنەکان. ئەم توپۆزینە وەبە تیگە یشتنیکی رۆون و ئاشکرای میژوو لە پێگە ی دوو رۆمانی پۆستمۆدێرنە وە دەردەخات کە ئەوانیش (خۆشەویست - Beloved) (1987) ی تۆنی مۆریسن و (هەموو شتیکی رۆوناکراوە تە وە - Everything is Illuminated) (2002) ی جۆناسان سافران فۆوهرن. ئەم لیکۆلینە وەبە لە بواری ئەدەبی پۆستمۆدێرنە بە تاییە تی رۆمانی ئینگلیزی پۆستمۆدێرن دا گرنگی ی خۆی هەبە، هەروەها هاوبەشی دەکات لە نیوان هەردوو بواری هزری پۆستمۆدێرنە و میژوو دا. ئەم توپۆزینە وەبە وەلامی ئەم پرسیارانە دەداتە وە: رۆلی ئەدەب چییە لە گێرانی وەبە میژوو دا؟ چۆن ئەدەب وادەکات میژوو لەبیر نەکریت؟ دەکریت ئەدیپیک بییت بە میژوو نووس؟ ئایا چۆن میژوو بەرجەستە کراوە لەو رۆمانە پۆستمۆدێرنە دا؟ بە بەکارهێنانی تیۆری پۆستمۆدێرنە لە ئەدەب دا (Postmodern Literary Theory) بۆ شیکردنە وەبە رۆمانەکان دەگەینە ئەو ئەنجامە ی کە بە کارهێنانی تەکنیکە ئەدەبیەکان و بیرە وەری کۆمەلی (Collective Memory) کە کاریگەری دەخەنە سەر هزری خۆینەر وادەکەن دەربەرینەکانی نووسەر زیاتر وابەستە ی هەستەکانی خۆینەر بن. هەروەها نووسەرپکی ئەدەبی دەتوانی رۆلی میژوو نووسپیک بیینیت بە هۆی ئەو توانایە ی هەبە تی لە ئاراستە کردنی تیروانینی خۆینەر بۆ حەقیقە تی رابردوو لە پێگە ی خە یال (Imagination) و بە کارهێنانی ئامرازەکانی رەوانیپێزی بۆ ووروزاندنی هەست و سۆز. هەروەها لیکۆلینە وەبە کە تیشک دەخاتە سەر گرنگی میژوو (وەک بابەت) لەناو ئەو رۆمانە پۆستمۆدێرنە دا کە پیشتر ئامازە یان پیکرا. ئەنجامەکانی ئەم لیکۆلینە وەبە بۆ خۆیندکاران و توپۆزە رانی بواری خۆیندنی کلتوری و ئەدەبی و بەشەکانی ئینگلیزی لە زانکۆکان و خۆیندنی ئەدەبی بریتانی و ئەمریکی بە تاییە تی رۆمانی پۆستمۆدێرنە بەسوودن.

### خلاصة:

هذا البحث الذي بين يدينا يدور حول دور الأدب بالنسبة لعرض التاريخ عن طريق عدة روايات ما بعد الحداثة ان سرد الماضي اصبح مادة مهمة لأغلبية هذه النوعية من الروايات, يظهر هذا البحث مفهوم التاريخ بوضوح و دقة عن طريق روايتين مختارتين في فترة ما بعد الحداثة و هما ( محبوبة- *Beloved* ) (1987) لتوني موريسن و (كل شيء مضاء- *Everything is Illuminated* ) (2002) لجوناثان سافران فوور. لهذا البحث أهمية خاصة في مجال أدب ما بعد الحداثة و خاصة الرواية الأنكليزية لما بعد الحداثة و يتشارك في مجالين وهما: مجال الفكر ما بعد الحداثة والتاريخ. يجيب هذا البحث على هذه الأمثلة: ما هو دور الأدب في سرد التاريخ؟ كيف يعمل الأدب في سبيل عدم نسيان التاريخ (الاي نسي التاريخ)؟ هل يمكن أن يصبح أديباً ما مؤرخاً؟ كيف صوّر التاريخ في تلك الروايات ما بعد الحداثة؟ عن طريق استخدام النظرية ما بعد الحداثة في الأدب (Postmodern Literary Theory) لتحليل الروايات وصلنا الى النتيجة التي تقول بأن استخدام التقنييات الأدبية والذكريات المجتمعة (مجموعة الذكريات - Collective Memory) يؤثر على فكر القاريء, فهذه الطريقة يصبح تعبير المؤلف أكثر اتصالاً بأحاسيس القاريء. وأيضاً يستطيع كاتب أدبي ان يقوم بدور المؤرخ عن طريق التخيل و استخدام الوسائل البلاغية لاثارة العواطف والمشاعر, و يلقي البحث أيضاً الضوء على أهمية التاريخ كموضوع داخل هذه الروايات الانفة الذكر التي تنتمي الى ما بعد الحداثة. تفيد أهداف هذا البحث الطلاب والباحثين في مجال دراسة التراث و الأدب لأقسام الدراسات الأنكليزية في الجامعات, و دراسات الأدب الأنكليزي خاصةً روايات أدب ما بعد الحداثة.

**Abstract:**

This paper is about the role of literature in presenting history in selected postmodern novels. History or retelling past events has become a prominent subject matter of a number of postmodern fictions. This study provides a clearer understanding of the way how literary writers present theme of history through postmodern novels, among them Salman Rushdie's *Shame* (1983), Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987), and Jonathan Safran Foer's *Everything is Illuminated* (2002). This paper is significant in the field of Postmodern Literature, in particular, postmodern novels. It will contribute to both fields of postmodernism and history. It will answer the following questions: what is the role of literature in telling history? How does literature make history memorable? Can a literary writer be a historian? How is history presented in the selected postmodern novels? Using the postmodern literary approach, we will reach to the findings of the paper that through the selected postmodern novels, the use of postmodern literary forms and collective memory of the past will affect the reader's consciousness to make the expressions rather attached to the reader's senses. Moreover, a literary writer can be a historian as well via entailing a degree of power over people's perception of actual truth of the past through the use of imagination and rhetorical devices to arouse certain emotions. Also, theme of history has been depicted through the use of literary techniques. The findings of this study would be beneficial and valuable for students and researchers of the literary and cultural studies, departments of English, and British and American Literature especially postmodern novels.

**Keywords:** Postmodern novels, historiographic metafiction, The Holocaust, traum, collective memory

### Introduction:

It can be stated that literature and history are closely connected. Since history is about what the reasons of an incident are, it is through history that one is able to learn the cause and effects of the chains of events. By exploring the history of a nation one is able to know about its past. All of the catastrophes and tragedies that the nation has been through are recorded within history. One is familiar with his/her traditions through history. Furthermore, history enables people to be aware of their future, since by knowing about their pasts, they will be familiar with making important plans for approaching a better future. However, history has become more accessible and at hand for readers, and more comprehensible through readers' exploring literary genres, particularly postmodern historical novels through which contemporary readers gain knowledge of the past.

In the course of my discussion, first I am going to depict the role of a literary piece of writing in retelling history. Second, I will show the ability of literature to keep history in the reader's memory. Then, the difference between the way history is told by a literary writer will be the next area of discussion. Using the postmodern theory, I will go on to portray the way history is perceived through each of the selected postmodern novels: *Beloved* (1987) and *Everything is Illuminated* (2002). These novels are regarded as true evidences for illustrating the way history is told through postmodern literary prose.

### 1. Literature Makes History Memorable

One can believe the notion that memory and remembering are subjective experiences. Hundreds of years ago, people had relied on their memories for retrieving back the mental images in their minds; while the process of remembering one might depend on his/her own ability to retrieve the memory. Nevertheless, through literature this memory becomes a collective endeavor. What the past is trying to discover and teach the reader is a collective treasure that literature attempts to keep and reserve to the next generations. We can put this under discussion through Paul Connerton's view on the collective memory that relates to the present. In *How Societies Work* (1989), he writes:

"...our experience of the present very largely depends upon our knowledge of the past. We experience our present world in a context which is causally connected with past events and objects, and hence with reference to the events and objects which we are not experiencing when we are experiencing the present: not simply because present factors tend to influence- some might want to say distort- our recollections of the past, but also because past factors tend to influence, or distort, our experience of the present" (Connerton 2).

No doubt, he views that our knowledge of the present is connected to our experience and knowledge of the past. He remarks that the collective memory- which later he calls social memory- would be sustained via understanding social structures and the examination of habits, practices and rituals.

Moreover, Connerton sheds light upon the way such collective memory is subsumed. He argues that to read or to compose a literary text one should do so with careful preconception. He states that "one must bring to it an implicit understanding of the operations of literary discourse which tells one what to look for or how to set about composing" (Connerton 11). Certainly, this tells us about the relation between collective memory and literary texts for which the reader must have adequate competence understanding of the text so that it would be subsumed as collective memory. In addition, he confirms that one should possess competence to internalize the grammar of literature

to convert linguistic sentences into literary structures and convey meaning. Therefore, anyone unfamiliar with such competence might well find it difficult to comprehend a literary genre. It is to indicate a set of expectations that one believes by means of “unexamined features in the new experience” to be the same as past experience. If the experiences are not the same, they will be identified with virtue of their degree of “divergence from that set of expectations.” He then indicates that this structure becomes a component of a type of literature from whose virtue a new experience will be subsumed (Connerton 12). It is worth stating that this argument implies to the authors’ objectives towards subsuming memories which are shared by a group. Authors attempt to expose such experiences to the reader in a form of collective memory through their literary abilities. In doing so, they attempt to keep and preserve the most crucial experiences of their generations and put them into their texts.

In *Literatures of Memory: History, time and space in postwar writing* (2000) Middleton & Woods depict the importance of memory that becomes part of history to be recognized through literary works. They strengthen their view about the purpose of literature in history by defining historical literature. They state:

“Historical literature- by which we mean drama and poetry about the past, as well as historical novel- not only reveals shared understandings of pivotal moments, historical figures and the everyday life of earlier times, it also outlines more general beliefs about the past and its relation to the present” (Middleton & Woods 1).

This indicates that it is through the literature and works of art that our present is connected to the knowledge of our past. In doing so, Middleton & Woods maintain this connection through historical literature. Therefore, literature serves as the creativity that inspires an entry to be more relatable and more interesting to read, in comparison to merely objective attitude of a written memory. Literature also makes it more appealing for the reader to go back to history, as well as it makes it easier for them to understand it.

Moreover, Charles Bernstein draws a highly important aspect of the new historical literature when he comments on Second World War. In doing so, Bernstein reflects on Toni Morrison’s unwillingness to remember slavery in her *Beloved* (1987). He states that there is a “general numbness” expressed by writers when discussing a traumatic memory. He views that “writers now fully acknowledging the psychological effects of the Second World War are still largely repressed and... we are just beginning to come out of the shock enough to try to make sense of the experiment” (Middleton & Woods 2). This certainly shows the contemporary writers’ state under the effect of traumatic events and historical mishaps happening to them. Further, concerning contemporary poetry, Bernstein perceives that the war for the textual memory in literary practice is highly important since “Language Writing’s desire to make writing, becomes more and more conscious of itself as world generating, object generating led to a use of diminished referentiality and disjunctive syntax which appeared to put almost any recognizable representation of the past into question” (Middleton & Woods 2).

Middleton and Woods argue that history in contemporary literature has not yet been completely identified by literary works of art. One of the reasons is the changing nature of the experiences of the past which are hard to be articulated. That is to say, the textual memory of literature depends on imagery, sounds and effects as well as the availability of its less structured forms. They derive the Second reason from Paul Ricoeur’s theory of history and narrative, stating that “The quasi-past of the narrative voice [of a novel] is then entirely different from the past of historical consciousness” (Middleton & Woods 3). Thus, the historical consciousness of a historian differs

from the act of putting that consciousness into a work of literature. The historical literature moves between fantasies of social memories and entities that make the past as an “ethical demand.”

There are several features of a literary work which make its examination of history more memorable. Susana Onega argues that there is a certain linguistic self-consciousness of authors which makes them better able to emerge “a continuous experimentation with language in literary works.” (Onega 74) Thus, it is this self-conscious attitude of the author which makes him different from a historian. She admits that a historian might well lack such linguistic self-consciousness. Similarly, Middleton and Woods confirm that it is through “the potential reflexivity of a literary textuality” that social memory can be used as history (Middleton& Woods 4). By reflexivity they mean “the capacity of a highly rhetorical mode which elicits highly attentive readings to consider the term of their constitution which may range from language and subjectivity to history” (Middleton& Woods 4). Linguistic self-consciousness and the use of certain rhetorical devices for conveying meanings and create special effects on the reader and are important for making a piece of literary work. Also, the same reason allows that piece of work which is depiction of the past-history- to be much memorable to the reader.

Another reason for history to be more memorable through literature is the use of imagination. Despite the fact that both the writer and the historian provide their sources and materials from real life, the writer possesses a sort of imagination (Onega 75). The historian needs to portray the knowledge chronologically and indicate whether there will be interruptions or comprehensibility regarding his/her existing historiography. However, the literary writer needs to create an imaginary world through his/her narration. A literary writer is able to create new creative works, such as poems, novels, dramatic works, and compilations or volumes of creative works.

Although the main concern of writers is to find ways of presenting this self-conscious attitude by utilizing an imaginative license, the tendency of this relation still continues. The writer may not always portray the imaginary world in his plot. This is for the reason that the plot belongs to the world of reality and it is alike to the reader’s own experience. As this world is a part of the everyday reality, the experience of the plot becomes part of the world of reality as well. The writer creates a literary work via its form and content. The reader enjoys exploring both the imaginary world in the literary piece and the experience he finds as a part of the real world.

## 2. Postmodern Novels and History

Collective memory as one of the significant items that postmodern literature tackled has become intertwined with the past. A common view on the contemporary novels is either they are blamed for their “postmodern lack of accuracy or praised for questioning of received narratives of national identity” (Middleton& Woods 2). Some postmodern writers have put brave manuscripts on paper attempting to identify peoples whose cultural norms, such as gender, sexuality, race, religion, and class avoided them to contribute their memories to literary forms. For example, Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* is regarded as an emblem for the textual memory of the African-American experience of slavery that I will later on illustrate the significance of this novel with history.

Although Postmodernism can be regarded as contrary to the realism of history, the historical fictions present actual historical events and figures that are alive in another age. Fleishman states:

“What makes a historical novel historical is the active presence of a concept of history as a shaping force-acting not only upon the characters in the novel but on the author and readers outside

it. In the course of reading, we find that the protagonists of such novels confront not only the forces of history of their own time, but its impact on life in any time. The universal conception of the individual's career as fate becomes symbolized not by the gods but by history" (Middleton& Woods 57).

This is an opposing view to the postmodern notion of the practical history and its indication of truth. Thus, as Middleton and Woods confirm, a postmodern historical novel has become a paradox either by abandoning the postmodern critical history or getting rid of historical accuracy.

It can be stated that historical novels are intricate in their representations of historical facts. On one hand, Linda Hutcheon writes: "Postmodern texts paradoxically point to the opaque nature of their representational strategies and at the same time to their complicity with the notion of the transparency of representation" (Hutcheon 17). In her view, postmodern fiction is tied to history in a complex manner which is represented by possibility. She explains how this representation works. On the other hand, Brian McHale recognizes an "ontological boundary between the historical actuality in a historical novel...and a fictional invention" (Middleton& Woods 67). He argues that characters of the postmodern novels are identified in an ontological world. Therefore, he portrays the significance of the temporal and spatial frames of historical novels.

Paul Ricoeur's third volume of *Time and Narrative* (1988) is regarded as a significant study of historical novels. He argues that historical writings are able to provide a truthful manuscript of the past narrations and "depend upon a complex relation to the traces of the past for its discourse and value" (Simmns 97). However, he confirms the complexity of the way of describing "the role of the imaginary in intending the world as it actually was." He notes that literary works are more able to witness the traumatic memories of the past. "Fiction gives eyes to the horrified narrator, by its achievement of a past-like note" (Middleton& Woods 68). Ricoeur implies that a postmodern novel is the persistence of both realism and modernism. Accordingly, nothing new takes place except an intricate imitative representation of the real world in a historical novel. Thus, the postmodern historical novels discover the imperfect contingency of the past using "the complex temporalities" of complex narrations to present the complex experiences of the past to the present readers.

It is worth mentioning that postmodern novels and history are porous of one another. Both genres are closely related and hard to be separated. As Lies Wesseling mentions many postmodern novelists have turned to historical facts as a source of inspiration (Wesseling 3). The prominence of the historical subject matter and the collective past of the postmodern novels have already become a revival for the historical novels.

### **3. Depiction of History in Selected Post-modern Novels**

#### **1. *Beloved* by Toni Morrison (1987)**

Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) is regarded as one of the most outstanding postmodern fiction providing a representation of the repression of slavery. Morrison has drawn historical documents in the course of *Beloved* to display a historical memory which has still remained alive in the past of the African-Americans. However, her depiction made the novel appear somewhat surreal. The novel's protagonist, Sethe, is haunted by the ghost of her two-year old daughter, Beloved, whom she has to kill to avoid her live the life of slavery.

*Beloved*, by Toni Morrison, was published in 1987 for which she received the 1988 Pulitzer Prize for fiction. The novel is an attempt to grapple the legacy of slavery. The writer based her novel on a true story, in which an escaped slave woman, Sethe, killed her children so that she would save them from being taken back to slavery by the Schoolteacher and his nephews. This incident in the novel follows the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 in the US, which stated the escaped slaves should be retrieved by their old masters.

Morrison tries to draw a connection between Sethe's haunting memory of killing her daughter and the traumatic memory of African-American slavery. Beloved, as an incarnation of her dead child, haunts Sethe everyday as well as slavery does to all other characters. As Beloved once he says "I am looking at her see me she empties out her eyes I am there in the place where her face is and telling her telling her the noisy clouds were in my way she wants her earrings she wants her round basket I want her face a hot thing" (Morrison 249-50) The haunting memory of slavery creates the history of African-Americans. Yet, this history remains as a never-ending reality. Seemingly, the memory of the past is ghost-like haunting, and people need to confront it. Morrison states:

"The picture is still there and what's more, if you go there- you who never was there- if you go there and stand in the place where it was, it will happen again; it will be there for you, waiting for you" (Morrison 43-44).

Here, Sethe refers to *Beloved's* haunting memory and the reality of readers' pasts. This indicates that people might try to leave their past behind. However, part of it always remains to the readers' reality. Through *Beloved* Morrison attempts to focus on a part of history which is repressed and criticizes those who simply attempt to forget the history of slavery. Though, like Sethe been haunted, slavery can never be forgotten. It always remains as a haunting ghost in the back of memory of the African-Americans.

Although Morrison concerns about revitalizing this segment of the African-American history, her narrative suggests that "remembering seemed unwise" since "it was not a story to pass on" (Morrison 324). Perhaps this relates to the anguish and the torments of those people as slaves. Fear of remembering has put the characters in a state of panic. Their remembering of the past has been back again in the form of a ghost haunting their entire being. Hence, remembering this agony, for Morrison seems to be a burden. As Lauren N. Riney claims, because the story was so horrible and so inconceivable, we do not have to remember it. We can forget it "as a bad dream" (Riney 2016). This suggests that we as contemporary readers cannot control the past, but we can take responsibility for gaining knowledge of the past and understand the experience of those people under slavery through the novel.

Moreover, Middleton states, Morrison wants to point out something promising to the future. She used *Beloved* as a means to show "a way of dispensing new information: It should have something in it that enlightens; something in it that opens the doors and points the way. Something in it that suggests what the conflicts are, what the problems are. But it need not solve those problems, it is not a case study, it is not a recipe" (Middleton 244). Thus, Morrison's actual implication of the novel is to make the contemporary readers aware of the horror of the experience of slavery as a memory of the past. She admits "it was not a story to pass on, and to undertake the task of remembering and rearticulating the individual and the communal body" (Morrison 134). She is fully aware that slavery is not a story to pass on to the next generation. However, it still remains as a haunting history of a community from which they can not get rid of.

Further, not only Morrison uses her novel to remind the readers of history of slavery, she depicts slavery as a supernatural being and makes the characters of *Beloved* as a ghost returning back to her mother. Through the character of *Beloved*, Morrison makes it clear that although the past is haunting, still it remains as a memory for the African-Americans and the dark history of America.

In the end, Beloved is expelled from the community by a group of women and she disappears. “The devil child was clever, they thought. And beautiful. It had taken the shape of a pregnant woman, naked and smiling in the heat of the afternoon sun. Thunderblack and glistening, she stood on long straight legs, her belly big and tight. Vindes aof hair twisted all over her head. Jesus. Her smile was dazzling... She flies. The ice pick is not in her hands. It is her hands.” (Morrison 308-9)

To sum up, Morrison presents the history of slavery to be repressed. Through her novel, she not only becomes a historian, she also tries to remind her readers about a reality that is on the edge of forgetting by the new generation, though remembering the history of slavery seems unwise. In addition, she tries to make her readers aware about characters who confront the ghosts of their pasts. Slavery, as part of the history, has become a ghost haunting the characters’ life and making them live in a life of misery and desolation even after they are free people. She has well presented the history of slavery and the horror of the past as a haunting ghost through her postmodern novel.

## 2. *Everything is Illuminated* by Jonathan S. Foer (2002)

Jonathan Safran Foer takes a different path for depicting history through his *Everything is Illuminated* (2002). The novel appears like a travel literature recollecting experiences from the author’s tour to Ukraine. It chronicles a twenty-one year old Jewish-American writer’s attempt to explore his grandfather’s experience in Ukraine during the mass killing of the Jews by the Nazis liquidation in Trachimrod. His name is Jonathan (the character). He seeks for the person who helped his grandfather flee from the mass murder in the Holocaust. Upon his journey from the US to Ukraine, he meets a person, Alex, as a tour guide and befriends him later in the novel.

Foer is able to weave a story revealing the history of the Holocaust in Ukraine, specifically during the start of Second World War. Ivan Katchanovski (2004) of the Prague Post states:

“The Nazis liquidation of Trachimbrod ghetto in August and September 1942, with a German killing squad executing several thousand Jews... Fewer than 200 survivors managed to escape the massacre in the ghetto and in another nearby Jewish village” (Katchanovski).

This is the central historical background of Foer’s plot. However, contrary to what is implied by the title, the protagonist does not find what he actually looks for. Instead, everything is blurred and remains in shadows. Katchanovski further claims:

“This story stands in a sharp contrast to claims made in the book. The author finds no Ukrainian rescues of his grandfather and implicates a fictional grandfather of the main Ukrainian hero” (Katchanovski).

Such confusion might well stand for the author’s inquiry of an unexplored aspect of the history of Second World War. The author implies that such events of Ukrainian territories were paid less attentions. Thus, Foer further strengthens the importance of such recollections to him, and fears of dying and being forgotten. He states:

“It’s true, I am afraid of dying. I am afraid of the world moving forward without me, of my absence going unnoticed, or worse, being some natural force propelling life on... I don’t mean the world ending with respect to me, but every set of eyes closing with me” (Foer 84).

Therefore, Foer’s appreciation of the importance of literature to history is obvious. It can be claimed that without literature a great part of history might die unnoticed, in a similar way to Jonathan’s (the character) death.

Throughout the novel, Foer reminds the reader of the importance of documenting history. In doing so, he makes reference to photography. He states:

“I take picture because I like to look at the pictures I take. It seems to me that when people take a picture of something they instantly forget about it. They can look at the picture and remind themselves” (Foer 31).

This passage depicts literature through pictures. It is literature that makes history more memorable more like how a picture makes someone nostalgic about him/her past. Therefore, the author suggests readers to make effort in exploring and researching those events which are less appreciated and less explored.

Moreover, the narrative of *Everything is Illuminated* (2002) assumes that past can be a pathway for an illuminating future. Placing himself as a character in the novel, Foer endeavors to depict the weight of memory and one’s past in drawing his future. “IF WE ARE TO STRIVE FOR A BETTER FUTURE, MUSTN’T WE BE FAMILIAR AND RECONCILED WITH OUR PAST?” (Foer 196) Both Jonathan’s and Alex’s future will be illuminated as they become familiar with their own histories. Jonathan “the hero” returns back to America and then completes his novel. He will eventually become a writer in the future. Alex plans to live and study in the US. Although his father was always against his decision, he chooses to leave Ukraine and settle in America. Thus, past and history have become elements to make the future promising. They have led the future become something of better chance and value.

Therefore, we can state that Foer is able to present history via his novel. This could have two folds: one related to the history of the Holocaust. The other is related to the concept of illumination that the title of the book holds. For someone who has no notion of the Holocaust, the novel can be a true guide through which the contemporary readers feel the horror of the Holocaust. The way the Nazis attacked the houses, gassed the people in synagogues, and bombed the villages in Ukraine is a true narrative of the historical records about the Holocaust. The other testimony of history that Foer shows is through the concept of illumination, figuratively, the clarification, explanation and knowledge. In the novel, Jonathan (the character) researches his family history to illuminate its history. In doing so, the quest allows him to gain knowledge about his own life. He reads his own life under the light of past generation. Therefore, what is illuminating is the past of his family that eventually illuminates his life path for a better future.

## Conclusion

Literature can be considered a central device for the revival of history. Due to its pure objectivity, history is regarded as a monotonous subject matter whose information might not always be comprehended by readers. Also, there are certain facts of history that might have been neglected and become subject of forgetting. However, through the charm of literature and the blessing of its imagination, history becomes more comprehensible and more relatable. Authors bring history closer to the thoughts of readers via the use of certain creative literary techniques. These procedures enable the literary artists to depict certain significant historical facts and portray them in a highly creative manner. Authors, in the novels, evoke their literary work to contribute to history in order to make significant changes upon their readers.

The literary imagination and narrative techniques specifically in the selected postmodern novels are able to embrace certain facts of history to make it understandable. In doing so, literature, specifically postmodern novels, has made it possible for the readers' experiences engage with history via the use of certain plots, characters, narrative techniques and etc. Therefore, the readers will find themselves engaged to history.

The selected postmodern novels have become something of the past. They obviously prove that history might be revitalized in a more interesting manner, for better being able of memorability and understanding. In *Beloved*, we can see that Morrison display's history of slavery as a ghost haunting all of the characters. Although they have survived from the agony of the past, still they can not get rid of the agony of the past. In *Everything is Illuminated*, Foer suggests that the past, though painful, as a source of illuminating the truth.

Both novels imply the notion that to a certain degree human beings need to have a more personal connection to history. That is to say, to remember what has become on the edge of forgetting.

Through literature, specifically through the selected postmodern novels, history needs to recreate significant meanings to the facts and information it presents. Hence, the presentation of history with the aid of literature will have a more plain and noticeable influence upon readers.

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