



## Article

# 'You think your writing belongs to you?': Intertextuality in Contemporary Jewish Post-Holocaust Literature

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**Abstract:** This article examines a sub-category of recent Jewish post-Holocaust fiction that engages with the absent memory of the persecution its authors did not personally witness through the medium of intertextuality, but with intertextual recourse not to testimonial writing but to literature only unwittingly or retrospectively shadowed by the Holocaust. It will be proposed that this practice of intertextuality constitutes a response to the post-Holocaust Jewish author's 'anxiety of influence' that, in the wake of the first generation's experience of atrocity, their own life story and literature will always appear derivative. With reference to works by four such post-Holocaust authors, Jonathan Safran Foer's *Tree of Codes* (2010), Maxim Biller's *Im Kopf von Bruno Schulz* (2013), Helen Maryles Shankman's *In the Land of Armadillos* (2016), and Nicole Krauss's *The History of Love* (2005) and *Forest Dark* (2017), all of which engage intertextually with Franz Kafka and Bruno Schulz, it will be suggested that these authors are looking to return to a Kristevan practice of intertextuality after the predominantly citational recourse to antecedent material that has often characterized post-Holocaust literature. In the process, they also succeed in troubling recently popular conceptualizations of 'postmemory' literature as the 'belated' and 'evacuated' recipient of encrypted traumatic content inherited from the first generation that it must now seek either to preserve or to work through vicariously.

**Keywords:** contemporary Jewish literature; post-Holocaust; postmemory; intertextuality; Biller; Kafka; Krauss; Maryles Shankman; Safran Foer; Schulz

## 1. Introduction

This article will examine a sub-category of recent Jewish post-Holocaust fiction that engages with the (absent) memory of a persecution, destruction or diaspora the authors did not personally witness through the medium of intertextuality, but with intertextual recourse not to witness literature, or to the diaries, letters or other first-generation testimonial objects that might be, and often are, found in their own families, but to other works of fiction and, moreover, to works of fiction by authors who, though themselves potential or actual victims of the Holocaust, did not live to see it or to document their experience of it. The growing category of post-Holocaust intertexts arising from this practice of borrowing from Jewish fiction only unwittingly or retrospectively shadowed by the Holocaust includes works by Aharon Appelfeld, Maxim Biller, Michael Chabon, Nathan Englander, David Grossman, Aleksandar Hemon, Danilo Kiš, Nicole Krauss, Helen Maryles Shankman, Cynthia Ozick, Philip Roth and Jonathan Safran Foer. Their subject matter is not always the Holocaust, but it, and the pressures of living and writing as descendants of survivors or as post-Holocaust Jews more generally, are always there as a subtext. Though the majority of these later-born authors are American or Israeli, they span a range of nationalities, backgrounds and languages, and their numbers are increasing. The pool of Jewish pre-texts from which they draw, however, is rather less expansive. So selective has the focus of this particular kind of intertextual engagement been that the authors listed above, despite also

responding to a diversity of other texts, have all turned to the same three Jewish pre- or peri-Holocaust authors for their primary intertextual inspiration: to Franz Kafka, to the person, though significantly not the diaries, of Anne Frank, and, in overwhelming numbers, to Polish-Jewish modernist Bruno Schulz, whose presence can be identified in texts by every single one of them.

As a perhaps inevitable consequence of such a narrow primary focus, a secondary level of exchange has arisen among these post-Holocaust intertexts in which the intertextual engagement of the first order is reflected and refracted to such a degree that it can be difficult to determine whether a given text is still in dialogue with a first-generation author or whether it is, and therefore we are, (also) responding to their mediation in and through other intertexts. The distinction between derivative and tributary becomes blurred. While it is absolutely true that this can produce ‘the eerie sensation that perhaps there is only a single Jewish author and a single Jewish text’, what it seems to emphasize above all, as Miller Budick also suggests, is that, if there *is* only a single text, then its narrative is dynamic, dialogic, evolving, and never just one person’s or one generation’s to tell: that nobody has written the definitive book on anything (Miller Budick 2015, p. 136). In what follows, it will be proposed that, in the context of contemporary Jewish post-Holocaust writing, intertextuality of a certain kind constitutes a response to the post-Holocaust Jewish author’s ‘anxiety of influence’ (particularly acute for being extraliterary as much as literary) that, in the wake of the first generation’s experience of atrocity, their own life story and narrative can only ever be derivative (Bloom 1997). Through their inter-weaving of ‘pre’- and intertexts, the authors examined here are looking to stress the fluid, transformative and palimpsestic qualities of both ‘origin’ and ‘copy’ to return to a more Kristevan understanding of intertextuality as a practice that blurs the outlines of ‘the book’ and its one ‘true’ meaning as guaranteed by its author, and disperses and collectivizes narrative. In the process, they succeed in troubling both the predominantly citational use of intertextuality that has often marked post-Holocaust literature’s recourse to antecedent material, and recently popular conceptualizations of ‘postmemory’ literature as the ‘belated’ and ‘evacuated’ recipient of traumatic content and gaps inherited from members of the first generation that it must now seek either to preserve or to work through vicariously (Hirsch 1997, p. 22). With reference to works by four such post-Holocaust authors, Jonathan Safran Foer’s *Tree of Codes* (2010), Maxim Biller’s *Im Kopf von Bruno Schulz* (2013), Helen Maryles Shankman’s *In the Land of Armadillos* (2016), and Nicole Krauss’s *The History of Love* (2005) and *Forest Dark* (2017), it will be suggested that the titular quotation, ‘You think your writing belongs to you?’, from Krauss’s *Forest Dark*, has programmatic value here: though in the novel it is phrased as a (rhetorical) question from a member of the first generation to a post-Holocaust writer and authorial alter ego figure, it can also be read as a counter to the first generation, as well as posing a challenge to the reception of post-Holocaust fiction more generally—a challenge mounted both within and by the very form and existence of the text (Krauss 2017, p. 125).

## 2. ‘Occasionally a writer will encounter a story that is his, yet is not his’

As a genre that has always been focused as much on narrative process as on narrative content—on how to write about its subject matter as much as on the subject matter itself—Holocaust literature has from the outset made widespread use of intertextuality. This becomes more prevalent still in writing by post-Holocaust authors for whom the Holocaust past, though not part of their own life-story, has come to feel like the story of their life. In her 2000 monograph *Holocaust Fiction*, Sue Vice observes: ‘If there is one method that stands out among all the others used in Holocaust fiction, it is intertextuality [...]’ (Vice 2000, p. 2) More recently, Angela Kershaw has added with reference to contemporary French post-Holocaust literature, though her comments are more broadly applicable:

Explicit and extensive intertextuality is a recurrent feature of recent French novels about the Holocaust that discuss not only the events but the memorialization of those events. Although such works are not themselves testimonial, being the products of creative writers of the second or third generation [...], they frequently rely on overt intertextual

references to a canon of Holocaust writing that *is* directly testimonial. (Kershaw 2014, p. 185. Original emphasis)

Kershaw is referring to post-Holocaust texts where the primary purpose of intertextuality seems to be that of filling in blanks. The recourse to a pre-text apparently serves to compensate for an absence or lack here: of direct experience or first-hand knowledge, of documentary authenticity or testimonial authority, of words capable of giving shape to the inconceivable. As such, it appears linked to an encumbering awareness of the (perceived) limitations, inadequacy or impropriety of the imaginative act: 'Contemporary Holocaust novelists seem [...] to be beset by an anxiety of originality, a fear of excessive invention, overcome through explicit intertextual references to testimonial Holocaust writing' (Kershaw 2014, p. 195).<sup>1</sup> In this use, or reading, of post-Holocaust intertextuality, authors resort to it to supplement the content of their narrative while also bolstering the legitimacy of their undertaking. It is a practice that marks a text's distance to events at the same time as its deference to a higher and prior textual authority, even if that deference is ultimately (also) intended to be self-legitimizing.

Yet even where the post-Holocaust author's intertextual engagement with the Holocaust generation is not undertaken with the primary aim of procuring testimony, and the Holocaust-generation source texts are literary, rather than narrowly documentary, such engagement has frequently struggled with the same 'anxiety of originality' identified by Kershaw in the use of non-fiction sources. Manifesting as a compulsive intertextual return to Holocaust-generation authors, it features here as part of a set of 'symptoms of incomplete mourning', to borrow terminology applied to Jewish post-Holocaust writing in this context by Miller Budick, symptoms that will make the post-Holocaust text appear 'melancholic rather than mournful', and 'fixated, or otherwise obsessed with the Holocaust rather than engaged in meaningful intercourse with it' (Miller Budick 2015, pp. 123–24). Though they may ultimately 'point the way to a form of mourning [...] that enables the reader as well as the writer of the text to put the past to rest', the intertextual engagement of such textual 'exercises in the failure to mourn' with their predecessors is apt to take the form of a conjuring of dead authors and their writing 'as an idol or fetish' to be in turn 'passed on as an obsessive, intertextual trope or symptom of the characters' and texts' melancholy and incomplete mourning' (Miller Budick 2015, pp. 16, 134–35).

In only apparently stark contrast to this view of post-Holocaust fiction as a melancholy preserver of an immutably introjected narrative of the past, other recent assessments of postmemory literature have suggested that it, and it alone, may be capable of putting the past to rest through 'imaginative investment, projection, and creation' (Hirsch 2012, p. 5). In 2001, Marianne Hirsch wrote:

Perhaps it is only in subsequent generations that trauma can be witnessed and worked through, by those who were not there to live it but who received its effects, belatedly, through the narratives, actions, and symptoms of the previous generation. (Hirsch 2001, p. 222)

Here too, the relationship between the first and post-Holocaust generations is conceptualized in terms of intertextuality, as a process of transmission and reception, in which the 'stories, images, and behaviors' of the first generation are communicated to later generations, albeit in this instance supposedly to be reworked, worked through, and put to rest on behalf of the first generation and for the benefit of future ones (Hirsch 2012, p. 5). And yet, while the processes of 'imaginative investment, projection, and creation' may make possible the adoption or appropriation of someone else's memories and even perhaps the reconstruction, or construction, of content to fill the gaps left by traumatic

<sup>1</sup> It is an 'anxiety of originality' which also extends to Holocaust literature studies, where a 'fear of excessive invention' perennially risks destabilizing the very foundations on which the field uneasily rests, and where, even today, it can be difficult to move beyond a discussion of the fundamental question of whether the Holocaust can, and ought to, be represented in fiction to an investigation of the different forms in which such literary representation has been undertaken, in any generation. In turn, such critical unease in the face of Holocaust fiction further enhances the post-Holocaust authors' anxiety. For a more detailed discussion both of the challenges facing and of the forms taken by Holocaust fiction, see e.g., (Horowitz 1997; Vice 2000; Eaglestone 2004; Sicher 2005; Gwyer 2014).

non-memories, such (re)constructive work is in fact tightly circumscribed by being pressed into the service of an imagined 'return journey' to, and attempted 'rescue of memory' from, someone else's narrative, suggesting that Kershaw's 'fear of excessive invention' diagnosis may still apply even here (Sicher 2000, p. 70; Kershaw 2014, p. 195). The transmissions received or recovered from the first generation in this way are experienced as so 'powerful' that the 'belated' narratives of postmemory are felt to have been 'displaced' or 'evacuated' by them (Hirsch 2001, p. 221; Hirsch 1997, p. 22).

Whether seemingly mourned or demonstratively unmourned, the past is engaged in post-Holocaust literature (as, apparently, in post-Holocaust living) via a form of intertextuality that appears statically locked into the act of either preservation or reconstruction, so into citational or re-creative, rather than pro-creative, mode. While intertextuality might usually be expected to produce some form of exchange or communication—some interplay—between anterior and posterior text, or might mark a later author's attempt to assert their own subject position by imaginatively transforming someone else's earlier narrative, here, experienced as an integral part of post-Holocaust existence and narration, it more often than not seems to have the opposite effect of increasing, rather than decreasing, the 'belated' author's anxiety of influence, of heightening their sense that they are responding to a primary, original narrative from which their own, secondary one per force derives or deviates, but not in a way that would allow for any 'meaningful intercourse' between narratives past and present (Miller Budick 2015, p. 123). In a post-Holocaust generation accustomed to working with someone else's 'stories, images and behaviors', this is intertextual transmission not by choice but as a default setting.

What we find in the recent postmemory texts that will be discussed here is an attempt to reclaim creative intertextuality for Jewish post-Holocaust writing in a form that acknowledges the past, its insurmountability and the traumatic gaps it has left behind, without being dominated or displaced by the 'stories, images, and behaviors' that are its legacy (Hirsch 2012, p. 5). In order to do so, the authors have tried to abandon a view of the post-Holocaust intertext as predominantly receptive or citational in favour of a more collective fantasy of intertextuality as a dynamic and multidimensional practice where meaning emerges from the intersection of, and interplay between, narratives, as a product of connections and differences, absence and presence.

Theirs is not a form of intertextuality that holds out any hope of redeeming or restoring or even knowing the past, and so it is not to documentary source material that they have turned but to other fiction and, moreover, pre-Holocaust fiction written with at most a sense of foreboding and trepidation about what would transpire. Where Anne Frank is featured, most notably in texts by Philip Roth, Nathan Englander and Maxim Biller, she is present not as an eyewitness and for the testimonial value of her diaries, but as a literary figure, and their intertextual engagement is not with what she wrote and who she was but with who, in a different world or parallel universe, she might have been or become. Franz Kafka and Bruno Schulz are invoked both as imaginatively enhanced, or re-imagined, characters and through the fiction they wrote and the style in which they wrote it.

A number of reasons have been cited for the popularity of these particular authors, though Schulz is by far the most frequent intertextual trigger. Miller Budick has suggested that he is more commonly resurrected than Kafka because he was killed by a National Socialist and so 'comes to stand [...] for a whole generation of Jews slaughtered in the Holocaust', whereas 'Kafka may have foreshadowed, even prophesized the Holocaust, but he was not one of its victims' (Miller Budick 2015, p. 128). This is of course true, though actually Kafka and his writing do also feature prominently, most strikingly in Krauss's *Forest Dark* (2017), which came out after the publication of Miller Budick's study, but, as we shall see, even in earlier texts, including by Krauss herself. In fact, Kafka and Schulz's appeal may reside precisely in the circumstance that, while they were both members of the first generation, and in that sense, albeit in that sense alone, 'authentically' and representatively Jewish, their works were written in proximity, but without the experience, of the Holocaust, which establishes a commonality of sorts between them and the post-Holocaust authors in whose intertexts they appear and who feel as if they too are writing in the shadow of an event they did not live through. And while their recourse to

Kafka or Schulz's pre-Holocaust writing may look like an evasive manoeuvre or form of displacement, what it perhaps demonstrates above all is that the concern of this category of post-Holocaust writers is not with 'rescuing memory' from someone else's past but with wresting back creative control over their own narrative in the present, a process which necessitates an engagement with the stories of the first generation, but which is perhaps facilitated if these stories appear on a more equal footing with their own for not having the weight of the Holocaust behind them to impose limitations on the creativity of the intertextual response. From their 'shared' venture—a collective weave of narratives analeptically or proleptically shadowed by the Holocaust, a tissue of absences and trace presences—the past can emerge as one strand of the text but without being the whole and sole purpose of the story, and without being the sole property of any one party to possess and transmit. No one owns the story of the past in this constellation.

This ideal of a non-proprietary intertextuality is anticipated in the short story from which the quotation from the beginning of this subsection was taken: 'Occasionally a writer will encounter a story that is his, yet is not his.' (Ozick [1974] 1995, p. 131). The story, 'Usurpations (Other People's Stories)', from 1974, is by Cynthia Ozick, whose Schulz intertext *The Messiah of Stockholm* (1987) is cited by Miller Budick as yet another example of 'thwarted mourning and idol worship' (Miller Budick 2015, p. 142). 'Usurpations' presents itself as an intertext created by a narrator reminiscent of Cynthia Ozick, in response to hearing a story told by an author apparently modelled on Bernard Malamud, but a story which in the 'Malamud' version is already derived from an unattributed prior version found in a newspaper. We are told that, on hearing the 'Malamud' version, which is included in paraphrase in the narrator's version, the narrator felt that 'his' was a story that would have been in better hands with her, that she should have written it. Of course, she *has* written it, in the sense that, at least within Ozick's text, our only access to the story is through Ozick's narrator, whose text—a re-imagining of an already-not-original re-imagining of an also-not-original prior story—has thus, paradoxically, produced the version that gave rise to it. At the same time, the narrator's version has also been shaped by a number of other, lateral intertextual influences that have informed her reading of the non-original source text. In the end, it is impossible to tell what is original and what is copy, what is invention, or re-writing, or conscious or unconscious borrowing or influence, and the narrator concludes: 'It is not my story. [...] It is no one's story' (Ozick [1974] 1995, p. 157).

Similarly, in the post-Holocaust intertexts we are about to examine, the story that is told—a story that both is and is not about the Holocaust and which, for coming after and being informed by the Holocaust, both is and is not the story of the post-Holocaust Jewish author—is a story that emerges from a tissue of narratives, a network of intertexts both anterior and lateral, through which the authors are seeking to dispel a linear, unidirectional view of the relationship between (writing) generations as one of source and reception or memory and postmemory. In its place, we find self-legitimizing fantasies of collaboration or retro-inspiration, with perhaps more than an occasional hint of a vying for influence. Above all, we witness an attempt to regain creative control of the post-Holocaust narrative: to recover, restore and reclaim not the story of the past but that of the present. The attempt is preliminary and not necessarily successful—at least not in the sense that the post-Holocaust's preoccupation with the Holocaust is ever fully laid to rest in it—but it does seem to be producing a growing number of authors who, while they may still concede, with Ozick's narrator, 'It is not my story', are increasingly writing in a way that suggests: 'But nor is it yours'.

### 3. 'A book whose meaning was exhumed from another book / A text whose erasure would be a continuation of its creation'

Jonathan Safran Foer's *Tree of Codes* (2010) presents the most physically tangible manifestation of the fact that something more complex than intertextual reference and deference is at stake in these recent intertextual responses to pre- or peri-Holocaust literature. The outcome of Safran Foer's engagement with Polish-Jewish avant-garde author and artist Bruno Schulz, who in 1942 was shot and killed by a German Gestapo officer in his home town of Drohobycz, in what then was occupied



Poland, *Tree of Codes* was created in response to and out of the English translation of Schulz's 1934 story cycle *The Street of Crocodiles* in a process of die-cutting: it is a skeleton book consisting of the few fragments and the many gaps that have remained after about two thirds of Schulz's text (ranging from individual letters, as in the title, to entire pages) have been excised and discarded.<sup>2</sup>

Schulz's *Street of Crocodiles* is a story cycle told from the perspective of a young first-person narrator. In a blend of autobiographical elements from Schulz's own childhood and a generous dose of magic realism, this boy-narrator recounts glimpses of life in his hometown, a confusing, shifting maze where space and time are out of joint, and charts in and through it the equally unstable nature of his father's declining mental health. What remains of this in Foer's *Tree of Codes*, if we go through it in linear sequence, die-cut page by page, is a cryptically disjointed narrative, which reads a bit like a prose poem, revolving loosely around a father-mother-son relationship. All historically- and biographically-specific references from the Schulz volume have been cut. The father in Schulz's text, a bookkeeper and owner of a textile shop, who appears as a representative of declining nineteenth-century trade practices, is uprooted by Safran Foer and turned into 'a broken exile' (Safran Foer 2010, p. 40). The narrator figure, who is no longer a young boy in *Tree of Codes*, describes how 'sometimes during the night we were awakened by nightmares, shadows fled sideways along the floor and up the walls—crossing the borders of almost. Hideously enlarged shadows attached to my father' (Safran Foer 2010, pp. 23–24).

Intratextually, passages such as this one seem to bespeak a sense of the father's past haunting the son's present in Safran Foer's version. The father's nightmares are the family's; he is both haunted by the shadows attached to him and haunting because of the shadows he casts. Those around him suffer the effects, but have no access to the content, of what troubles him. In a post-Holocaust context, one might be tempted to (over)read this as the parent's encrypted trauma being transmitted to the descendant, who is vicariously exposed to the symptoms—the 'stories, images, and behaviors' of the first generation – without having experienced their cause (Hirsch 2012, p. 5). At a formal level, the text would then appear as the embodiment of an evacuated post-Holocaust narrative: permeated with gaps where its own substance has been displaced by the inaccessible content of someone else's story.

However, this is not how Safran Foer interprets his intertextual relationship with Schulz. For one thing, the gaps are not passively inherited from, but actively inflicted on, the first-generation narrative. Yet while there might seem to be something rather Oedipally aggressive about the act of an author taking a blade to a predecessor text, in Safran Foer's reading, the de(con)struction *Tree of Codes* practises is both constructive and collaborative: he refers to his approach as a process of 'exhumation', in which he has tried to create 'a book whose meaning was exhumed from another book', from 'a text whose erasure would somehow be a continuation of its creation' (Safran Foer 2010, p. 138). In using the term 'exhumation', Safran Foer suggests on one level that he understands the role of his text as bringing something dead back from the grave, reviving it from neglect and obscurity, which presents his undertaking as an act of restoration and homage. It also aligns him with Miller Budick's description of post-Holocaust literature as being caught up in a process of 'conjuring and ghost worship', in which the postmemory author offers himself up as 'amanuensis' to the first generation or—as Miller Budick also puts it, citing David Grossman's *See Under: Love* (1986), another Bruno Schulz intertext—as 'the vessel, the writing hand, the weak link through which [Schulz's] stifled energy could flow' (Miller Budick 2015, pp. 152–53).

And yet, the 'conjuring' of the past in Safran Foer's text aims to achieve more than just reanimation, as seems to be hinted at in one line he has excavated from Schulz that reads: 'The tree of codes was better than a paper imitation.' (Safran Foer 2010, p. 96). In the other sense implicit in the idea of 'exhumation', Safran Foer is mining the text for a meaning that is at best only latently already there

<sup>2</sup> It is a point worth stressing that Safran Foer's intertext, like all those examined here, is the product of an intertextual engagement with the original-in-translation and so with a version of the text that has already undergone a further process of dispossession and displacement before any of the contemporary post-Holocaust authors discussed here have taken their pens or scalpels to it.

in the original and would not have been known to Schulz at the time of writing. ‘Conjuring’ of this nature involves a reinterpretation of the pre-text. What Safran Foer brings to *The Street of Crocodiles* is his post-Holocaust perspective. He ‘unearths’ in the original text an eerie anticipation of what during the time of Schulz’s writing had yet to happen, and this ‘unearthing’ happens largely by erasure. While there is already a fair amount of unspecifically ominous imagery in Schulz’s 1934 original—imagery such as a ‘plague of dusk’, which ‘contaminated everything’ and ‘everything it touched became black and rotten and scattered to dust’—this imagery is embedded in extended passages of whimsical magical realism that balance out, even if they do not completely dispel, the sense of foreboding created by the more baleful sections (Schulz [1934] 2008, p. 86). This sense of foreboding is vastly enhanced by Safran Foer’s excisions, which, for instance, bring to light, or create, a menacing underside to Schulz’s playful imagery of overflowing black rivers of pots and pans or marching mobs of dry poppy heads by stripping the abstract nouns of their comical concrete embodiments (Schulz [1934] 2008, pp. 77, 87; Safran Foer 2010, pp. 102, 114). In this respect, Safran Foer seems to understand himself more as a ‘co-creator’, or even a ‘pro-creator’, rather than recreator, of Schulz’s text. His attempt to bring to the fore what Schulz himself could not have known, and stage how the older author’s text, or at least our reading of it, is transformed in a post-Holocaust world, seems to hint at an underlying fantasy of a role reversal, an act of reverse displacement and self-investiture, in which the descendant takes possession of the ancestor narrative and can almost imagine himself as a precursor to his own precursors. It is a fantasy that is facilitated by the structure of Foer’s text, which upsets our sense of chronological linearity and direction by having underlying ‘later’ layers of text surface out of turn and sequence to shade our reading of ‘earlier’ ones.

Moreover, the attempted dispossession of narrative control in *Tree of Codes* is extended even beyond Schulz by a further act of revelatory erasure. In another passage of *The Street of Crocodiles*, which is already haunted by virtue of the fact that it conjures the ghost of Kafka, the father can be seen to metamorphose into a cockroach. In *Tree of Codes*, this section has had the more obvious traces of its literary debt erased, but the erasure takes the form of another possible evocation of the Holocaust, in which ‘the fantastic structure of his anatomy visible through the skin’ of the father-as-cockroach becomes simply a naked body with visible ribs, an evocation which, by extension, has now also come to haunt and displace Kafka’s narrative (Schulz [1934] 2008, p. 76; Safran Foer 2010, pp. 100–1).

And yet, if Safran Foer seems to be saying ‘It is not your story’ to both Schulz and Kafka, he is also saying ‘Nor is it mine’. Though the structure of *Tree of Codes* seems to reverse the arrow of time, or allow for a bidirectionality of chronology, the experience of reading the text also stresses the *Nachträglichkeit* of knowledge more generally, the fact that every interpretation in turn is shadowed by the future, that what is to come will always inform and modify the way we currently understand things. Glimpses of words that appear further into the book, on future pages, flash up from the depth, sometimes for ten or more pages, and colour how we read the words on the present page. For example, towards the end of the text, the words ‘almost unbearable’ start to become visible, qualifying each new page in turn, and themselves being qualified by the context of each new page, ranging from ‘almost unbearable exaggerated hopes’ on their first appearance, to ‘almost unbearable stammering articulation’, to ‘almost unbearable ordinariness’, as they come to rest, temporarily, on their own page (Safran Foer 2010, pp. 123, 126, 127). The descendant’s knowledge after the event may haunt his predecessor’s incomplete knowledge of what was to come, but this knowledge, too, is shifting and incomplete. And so, as we conjure up the spectres of what might have been, and of what went before and has been irretrievably lost, we are at the same time haunted both by what may be to come, and by the awareness that how we fill in any blanks is contingent and provisional. As we read in another line: ‘And yet, and yet—the last secret of the tree of codes is that nothing can ever reach a definite conclusion.’ (Safran Foer 2010, pp. 95–96).

The uneasy blend of exhuming and mining, erasure and creation, inspiration and imitation that transpires from these descriptions of a purported transgenerational joint venture reflects the anxieties of influence faced by post-Holocaust Jewish writers who feel that ‘their’ story derives its meaning from

someone else's. However, whether we think of 'exhumation' as a form of resurrecting, contributing to, displacing, or just gouging into someone else's narrative, or a combination of all four, what it seems designed to achieve above all—by breaking down the impression that the relationship between first-generation and post-Holocaust narrative is a linear, uni-directional one of original and derivative or legacy and inheritance—is to allow Safran Foer to repossess his own narrative, however contingent and provisional, and authorize himself. Indeed, his contingency and provisionality—the sense that his writing, like Schulz's and Kafka's before him, is just another vessel, exhuming and waiting to be exhumed—is precisely what makes it possible for him to align himself with them and introduce himself into a collective of great Jewish literature, an intertextual network in which he is carrying forward the family 'exhumation' business. Paratextually, this becomes evident in a statement made by Safran Foer about Schulz, though by extension he might have said a similar thing about Kafka:

Often, while working on this book, I had the strong sensation that *The Street of Crocodiles* must have, itself, been the product of a similar act of exhumation [...], that there must have existed some yet larger book from which *The Street of Crocodiles* was taken. It is from this imagined larger book, this ultimate book, that every word ever written, spoken or thought is exhumed. (Safran Foer 2010, p. 139)

It should perhaps come as no surprise that the image of all books as lesser derivatives of one ultimate book is itself 'exhumed' from a Schulz text. Schulz's 1937 story cycle *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass* is constructed around the notion of an absent original source text known simply as The Book (which, though linked to the origin of creation, is explicitly not understood to be the Bible). The Book, an 'indescribable thing, which no words, no pictures drawn [...], could evoke', feels like the authentic origin of all meaning to the narrator, who seems to remember having once encountered it in early childhood, though even in this encounter, as he now describes it, The Book was already a palimpsest, and he has spent his life since then in vain pursuit of it (Schulz [1937] 2008, pp. 115, 117). Any books written after The Book may afford glimpses of authentic meaning, but 'they live only a borrowed life, which at the moment of inspiration returns to its ancient source' (Schulz [1937] 2008, p. 125). In Schulz's handling of the material, The Book and its books can be read as part of an extended refiguration, or 'retextualization', of the kabbalistic myth of creation, a three-stage process of creation, deconstruction and restoration (Shallcross 1997, p. 275). In this process, God draws in his divine light to leave a void for the creation of the world, but the vessels God had formed to hold the light were unable to contain it and shattered, dispersing sparks of divine light trapped in shards of broken vessels across the world. By freeing and gathering the dispersed sparks, humanity may participate in the repairing and redemption of the world (Schulz [1937] 2008, pp. 117, 124–25). In Schulz's refiguration, the all-meaning Book is aligned with the harmonious origin of creation, and its disintegration and dispersal would equate to the shattering of the vessels, leaving just disseminated text fragments behind. In Safran Foer's refiguration of Schulz's refiguration, the image of cosmogony is retranslated back into an image of intertextuality, where what is left of Schulz's original text may be a 'pale imitation', but it is a pale imitation animated by sparks of divine light.

#### 4. 'Inside the Head of Bruno Schulz'

While Safran Foer's text thus still appears on some level as a 'vessel' for Schulz's 'creative energy'—albeit a vessel embedded in a greater intertextual network in which it in turn might provide a moment of inspiration for someone else's vessel, including even Schulz's own—some more recent texts have gone even further in their attempt to reverse the polarities of vessel and flow. In these, the authors' intertextual engagement with Schulz sees them reclaim creative control over their own narrative by taking over Schulz's: by appropriating his persona, rewriting his life story and literary narratives, and adopting, or adapting, his style, literary imagery and visual art. In some cases, their intertextual retro-engineering goes so far that the relationship between inspiration and conduit appears somehow



transposed, as if Schulz were acting as the ‘writing hand’ channelling the later-born author’s creative energy, albeit a creative energy they derive, at least in part, from him.

Two texts that practise this extensively are Maxim Biller’s novella *Im Kopf von Bruno Schulz* (2013) and Helen Maryles Shankman’s story collection *In the Land of Armadillos* (2016), both of which appropriate Schulz’s language and imagery to give us elaborate fantasies of at most loosely factually informed episodes of his life. In the eponymous first story of Maryles Shankman’s volume, she reimagines the final few weeks of Schulz’s life—weeks spent under the ‘protection’ of Gestapo officer Felix Landau who had ordered Schulz to paint murals for his young son’s room—up to Schulz’s murder in November of 1942 by another Gestapo officer in an act of vengeance on Landau. Or at least this is the already apocryphal account of how he died. Maryles Shankman’s narrative revolves around fantasized interactions between Schulz and Landau (Tobias Rey and Max Haas in her version), descriptions of Rey’s murals as Maryles Shankman paints them in her mind’s eye, and a fairy-tale told by Rey but invented by Maryles Shankman. Biller, meanwhile, takes as his starting point the factual incident that in 1937 Schulz wrote a short story in German called ‘Die Heimkehr’, which he then sent to Thomas Mann. Neither the story nor any accompanying correspondence has survived, and we do not know if it ever reached Mann. Biller’s novella revolves around his Schulz figure’s attempt to write a covering letter to Mann to send with ‘Die Heimkehr’—a covering letter in which he wants to ask Mann to intercede on his behalf, to help him get published abroad and leave the country, for Schulz in Biller’s version is a prophet of the Holocaust. However, the bulk of Schulz’s letter as rewritten by Biller shows Schulz trying to get Mann’s attention by warning him about a sinister impostor who has supposedly shown up in Drohobycz claiming to be Mann, and who is drawing up an inventory of the town’s Jews and violently mistreating and engaging in sadomasochistic sexual acts with them.

Stylistically, both texts seem to understand themselves as having been written from inside Schulz’s head, as the title of Biller’s novella suggests. Biller uses Schulz as his focalizer, and both texts incorporate a great deal of imagery that feels drawn straight from Schulz’s own writing, including not least the idea of the double and impostor itself. Yet while such borrowing is not a new feature, the way in which it is applied seems to differ from earlier Schulz intertexts. One example that illustrates this is the extensive and striking use of animal imagery that characterizes Schulz’s writing and, by extension, his intertexts. In David Grossman’s *See Under: Love* (1986), where the narrator-as-vessel finds himself in the thrall of Schulz’s writing, he experiences this as a form of possession, even though it is a form of possession that engenders a creative response. What starts out as transcription becomes creation, but is presented as echoic creation: the narrator has the impression that Schulz has taken hold of his pen and taken over his normally ‘thin-lipped’ style, such that he is now ‘experiencing a veritable stampede of panting, perspiring words’ in his notebook ‘like the mating dance of the peacock, or a vivid cloud of hummingbirds, as Bruno once wrote. (Or did I write that?)’ (Grossman [1986] 2010, p. 100). This is Grossman’s narrator’s writing informed by and credited to Schulz. It is Grossman’s ‘creation’ (Schulz himself has ‘a colored peacock’s heart, or a chattering nest of hummingbirds’), but presented as Schulz’s inspiration putting words into Grossman’s narrator’s head (Schulz [1937] 2008, p. 116).

In Biller and Maryles Shankman, by contrast, Schulz’s inspiration is retro-applied to, or even used against, him, furnishing images and words for them to put in his (fictional double’s) head, which almost makes it appear as if the flow of inspiration had been reversed. Thus when the ‘peacocks’ and ‘hummingbirds’ from Schulz (and Grossman) make a reappearance in Maryles Shankman, they have been embedded in a story that is attributed to Rey / Schulz as if it were his own, when actually it is Maryles Shankman’s creation, albeit a creation that is informed by Schulz’s own writing and especially by other intertexts. The story Maryles Shankman has Rey tell is that of a boy with a passion for birds, who studies them so intently in illustrations that they communicate with him and bestow on him the gift of flight. He jumps out of the window and soars, but his fellow townspeople, taking him for a threat, stone him out of the sky. His death is mourned by a swarm of birds including hummingbirds and peacocks (Maryles Shankman 2016, pp. 52–56). The stoning of birds, and the imagery and colours used to describe their ‘whirling vortex of multi-hued feathers’, can be traced back to Schulz (Maryles

Shankman 2016, p. 55; Schulz [1934] 2008, p. 92). However, through the premiss of the boy who thinks he can fly, Maryles Shankman actually establishes closer ties to another post-Holocaust Schulz intertext, to Nicole Krauss's *The History of Love* (2005), which features a boy called Bird who once jumps out of a window because he thinks he can fly and later falls off the roof of his Hebrew school, and who in turn may be a nod to Philip Roth's Ozzie Freedman in 'The Conversion of the Jews' (Roth [1959] 2006), who gets a crowd of Jews to swear to the divinity of Christ because they think Ozzie is going to jump off the synagogue roof where he is flapping his arms and pretending to fly (Roth [1959] 2006). Maryles Shankman has put words in Rey's mouth, and images in his head, in a way that appears less as an intertextual engagement with the first generation than as an association in the second degree with Jewish post-Holocaust literature. The first generation may have triggered this second-degree intertextual exchange, but the focus has shifted to where the narrative is going in the present.

Biller's way of getting into Schulz's head, meanwhile, sees him use Schulzian imagery to describe anxieties he has put in the mind of his Schulz figure, who, according to Biller, lives his life accompanied by 'Fear', under the constant impression 'that large black lizards and squinting snakes, as green as kerosene and with evil grins, were about to slither out of the walls around him', and who every few minutes imagines he can hear 'the beating and rushing of gigantic *Archaeopteryx* wings behind him' (Biller 2015, p. 11). The 'Archaeopteryx wings', or the 'lizards' and 'snakes' emerging from the wallpaper, bring to mind passages in Schulz such as the description in *The Street of Crocodiles* of freshly hatched bird chicks as a 'dragon brood' of 'lizards' and 'hissing' monsters, or of the nameless terror that continually besets the narrator's father:

He felt, without looking, how the pullulating jungle of wallpaper, filled with whispers, lisping and hissing, closed in around him. He heard, without looking, a conspiracy of knowingly winking hidden eyes, of alert ears opening up among the flowers on the wall, of dark, smiling mouths. (Schulz [1934] 2008, p. 13)

This is Schulz's imagery, but it is as if Biller had taken it from Schulz's head, refigured it, and put it back in there, in a way that makes Biller appear as the source of inspiration in the present context while at the same time humorously undercutting Schulz as a source by suggesting that what we today take for emanations of fertile imagination may simply have been neurotic anxiety talking.<sup>3</sup>

Like Safran Foer in *Tree of Codes*, Biller then de-/re-contextualizes Schulz's imagery further still by giving it a retrospectively proleptic quality and introducing to it the dimension of the Holocaust. When the snakes and lizards reappear, it is in a Holocaust-inspired vision of a future

populated by gigantic wall lizards, snakes and primeval birds [...], by armies of human beings in gray uniforms in long, straggling processions that reached to the horizon, by millions of naked men, women and children who could move only on all fours. And everywhere in that country, fires large and small were burning, and anyone who could see through the smoke and the flames shooting up around him prayed that he might not be forced, like those people, to his hands and knees, and be driven like them into that fire. (Biller 2015, p. 28)

By the end of the text, the future is upon 'Schulz':

he caught sight of a blaze of red firelight over the nocturnal city, he heard the sound of motor engines and loud orders, and when he looked to left or right he always saw, at the end of every alley, a gigantic, black, prehistoric insect running past on feet that rattled like tank tracks. (Biller 2015, pp. 55–56)

<sup>3</sup> For a more detailed discussion of other instances of such borrowing and reworking, see (Hudzik 2015). The author gratefully acknowledges the assistance of Arkadiusz Kwapiszewski, who translated this article from the Polish original.

The ‘prehistoric insects’ are another borrowing from Schulz, recalling his description of the cockroaches that haunt the narrator’s father in *The Street of Crocodiles* until, finally, he is himself transformed into one, in a metamorphosis that in turn harks back to Kafka. In one sense, this constitutes another instance of self-investiture by a post-Holocaust author into an intertextual network of Jewish literary greats—a network that is extended further by the fact that Biller prefaces his text with an epigraph from S. Y. Agnon. However, the intertextual alignment with Jewish literature also serves a second purpose here: it functions as a means for Biller to distance himself from the German canon as represented by Thomas Mann in his story. And therein seems to lie the ultimate agenda of *Im Kopf von Bruno Schulz*: though the account given by Biller’s Schulz of the fake Thomas Mann is clearly marked as a fabrication, the image of the impostor is so outrageous, and yet also in some biographical and literary details close enough to the ‘real’ author, that it begins to merge with, and, thanks precisely to its outrageousness, comes to displace any more hallowed image of Mann. Biller’s Thomas Mann is an effeminate, violent pervert with a small penis, who wears make-up like Mann’s Aschenbach, and a black leather trench coat like an SS officer. He enjoys flogging people and riding them like animals, and during one of his whipping sessions, in a large hotel bathroom, the smoke from his cigar rises to the ceiling where, in a provocatively tasteless evocation of a gas shower, ‘it disappeared with a loud hiss into the jets of the showers—thus revealing a great heap of naked bodies lying lifeless around the false Thomas Mann’ (Biller 2015, p. 36).

The depiction of Biller’s Mann is tarnished further still by Biller’s deployment of Schulz’s visual art. The German version of Biller’s novella includes six drawings by Schulz, as well as references to further illustrations not reproduced in the text. The decontextualized way in which Biller uses these drawings, and his descriptions of them, to comment on or reinforce his own text again appears as an act of dispossession, making it seem as if Schulz were acting as illustrator to Biller’s narrative. Yet as with the words of the narrative attributed to Schulz, the images in his drawings as repurposed by Biller are not meant to dispossess Schulz so much as discredit Thomas Mann. For instance, the fact that almost all of the incorporated illustrations are of haughty, dominant females looking down on submissive or prostrate males is in keeping with the theme of sadomasochism that Biller is mining for his novella, but at the same time it serves to reiterate and enhance the feminizing of Thomas Mann in his role as sadistic dominatrix. Intertextuality and intermediality are working together here in the dual aim of allowing Biller to take his place in Jewish world literature and position himself against the narrowly German literary canon.

Though the balance between legitimizing themselves and deauthorizing others is differently weighted in each text, both Maryles Shankman and Biller are clearly pursuing their own agenda beyond and by means of their apparent dispossession of the first generation. In that sense, though Miller Budick’s point remains that contemporary post-Holocaust writers ‘conjure dead authors like Schulz’, and that they conjure them ‘not so much as an object of mourning’, it seems to hold less true than it used to that the dead author plays the part of ‘an idol or fetish, or a golem or a messiah’ in this act of intertextual summoning (Miller Budick 2015, p. 134). Rather, the fantasy of a redemptive collaboration between first and post-Holocaust generation seems to be ceding to a refocusing on the post-Holocaust author’s narrative in the present.

## 5. ‘Kaddish for Kafka’

Perhaps the clearest illustration of this development emerges from a comparison between two further recent post-Holocaust intertexts, both of them novels by Nicole Krauss: *The History of Love* (2005) and *Forest Dark* (2017), whose evolving use of intertextuality will be illustrated by way of a conclusion here.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> For insightful overviews of the post-Holocaust perspective and the absent presence of the past more generally in *The History of Love*, see e.g., (Lang 2009; Codde 2011).

*The History of Love*, though for the main part an extended and complex conjuring of Bruno Schulz, also contains an indirect summoning of Kafka, reminiscent of the nested intertextual influences ‘exhumed’ by some of the texts mentioned above. The summoning, ironically, takes the form of an obituary, written for Kafka, but in the style of, and by a writer figure haunted by, Bruno Schulz. *Forest Dark*, by its title, sets up the expectation of an intertextual engagement with Dante, but it is also a reading of Dante against Kafka, or of Kafka against Dante. Having (apparently unsuccessfully) been killed off in the earlier novel, Kafka is resurrected, or reincarnated, in this later text, and yet there is a sense that perhaps this will finally allow him to rest more easily in Krauss’s narrative.

In *The History of Love*, the obituary that conjures the ghost of Kafka is titled ‘Franz Kafka is Dead’, and in it the famous Prague author is described as having died because he would not come down from a tree:

He died in a tree from which he wouldn’t come down. ‘Come down!’ they cried to him. ‘Come down! Come down!’ Silence filled the night, and the night filled the silence, while they waited for Kafka to speak. ‘I can’t,’ he finally said, with a note of wistfulness. ‘Why?’ they cried. Stars spilled across the black sky. ‘Because then you’ll stop asking for me.’ The people whispered and nodded among themselves. They put their arms around each other, and touched their children’s hair. [...] Then they turned and started for home under the canopy of leaves. Children were carried on their fathers’ shoulders, sleepy from having been taken to see the man who wrote his books on pieces of bark he tore off the tree from which he refused to come down. [...] Doors closed to warm houses. Candles were lit in windows. Far off, in his perch in the trees, Kafka listened to it all: the rustle of clothes being dropped to the floor, of lips fluttering along naked shoulders, beds creaking under the weight of tenderness. It all caught in the delicate pointed shells of his ears [...].

That night, a freezing wind blew in. When the children woke up, they [...] found the world encased in ice. One child, the smallest, shrieked out in delight and her cry tore through the silence and exploded the ice of a giant oak tree. The world shone.

They found him frozen on the ground like a bird. It’s said that when they put their ears to the shell of his ears, they could hear themselves. (Krauss [2005] 2006, pp. 116–17)

Thematically, the passage seems to invoke Kafka’s short story ‘A Hunger Artist’. Parents take their children to see Krauss’s Kafka up on his perch, people ‘admire his will and stamina’, and his life-as-performance derives its justification from their presence as his audience (Krauss [2005] 2006, p. 117). Like Kafka’s hunger artist, he cannot stop performing, even in their absence, yet in their absence, his performance, and his life, cease to be. The form of the obituary—the circularity of its reasoning, its parody of the parabolic genre, creating the expectation of a parable but frustrating exegesis—is also one familiar from Kafka’s own writing.

Stylistically, however, the passage recalls Schulz. The imagery—the personification of night, the spilling stars and canopy of leaves, fathers carrying their half-asleep children under the night sky, the descriptions of touch, tenderness and intimacy—is Schulzian, not Kafkaesque. The man-as-bird is also a trope familiar from Schulz stories, as well as evoking Kafka’s self-stylization as a bird, and the element of metamorphosis. And finally, Krauss, like Safran Foer before her, seems to be harking back to Schulz’s notion of *The Book* and its ties to the origin of creation, though she does so across an intertextual warp and weft that also draws in Nietzsche as well as Kafka, Philip Roth, and ultimately Krauss herself. The image of a shattering followed by an emanation of light recalls the breaking of a shard to release divine light trapped within it as an act of *tikkun*, of contributing towards the repair of the world, after the original breaking of the vessels had dispersed that light in shards (or in this passage, snowy fractals) across the world. The releasing is performed here by the voice of a female child, who takes over from the famous author whose light and voice have been extinguished, but she can do so only because he has withdrawn to make space for her re-creation, leaving sparks of his former light behind as glimpses of his original inspiration. In this analogy, reinforced by the Nietzschean echo

of the obituary's title—'Franz Kafka is Dead'—, Kafka has written *The Book*, but Krauss can write a book in his image—perhaps a book to act as 'the axe for the frozen sea inside us' (Kafka 1977, p. 16). The passage resonates with the tension between creation and destruction, between 'exhuming' and killing off, that we also saw in Safran Foer, and it is a tension well captured by the allusion to Kafka's much-cited book-as-axe image from a 1904 letter to Oskar Pollak. The pressure of following in the footsteps of the 'divine'—of being worthy of seeing herself in him, or hearing herself in 'the delicate pointed shell of his ears'—is also evoked between the lines, by the question, related to Nietzsche's pronouncement about God, of whether the 'greatness of this deed' may be too great for us, whether we 'murderers of all murderers' must 'ourselves not become gods simply to appear worthy of it' (Nietzsche [1882] 1974, pp. 181–82 (sec. 125)). And though the obituary ends with a focus on the living, not the dead, and despite the fact that post-Holocaust intertextual allusions to Philip Roth—via his *Zuckerman Unbound* (Roth [1981] 2005), which cites Kafka's book-as-axe letter, or his 1973 piece "'I Always Wanted You to Admire My Fasting"; or, Looking at Kafka'—speak to an attempt on Krauss's part to shift the focus to a present-day creative re-construction of past narratives, the sense we are left with at the end of the passage is that of the author as a vessel, refashioning herself in someone else's image, and speaking in a voice, or voices, not her own.

Like *The History of Love*, Krauss's later *Forest Dark* also engages intertextually with both Kafka and Roth, as well as Dante and others, but while in her earlier novel, this engagement culminated in the pronouncement of Kafka's death, in *Forest Dark*, she plays with his resurrection. This might make *Forest Dark* appear as another in the long line of post-Holocaust intertexts where the dead ancestor-author is conjured as a 'symptom of the characters' and texts' melancholy and incomplete mourning' (Miller Budick 2015, pp. 134–35). However, in this instance, the intertextual 'exhumation' that in the earlier novel had made Krauss appear to be under Kafka's, and Schulz's, spell rather than the other way round, here becomes a way of turning the tables and moving past, or at least gesturing beyond, the need for intertextual necromancy.

*Forest Dark* is, among other narrative strands, the first-person account of Nicole, a Brooklyn author 'Midway upon the journey' of her life, who—like Dante, to whom Krauss alludes throughout the novel as well as in its title—finds herself, metaphorically speaking, 'within a forest dark | For the straightforward pathway had been lost' (Krauss 2017, p. 291; Dante 1867, c. I, ll. 1–3).<sup>5</sup> Professionally speaking, the reason for this is a, by now familiar, sense that she has lost authorship of her narrative. Her narrative is not her own but belongs to those to whom she is bound, by family ties and ties of ethnicity, against a backdrop of diaspora and persecution, and while this was already true when she was unknown as an author, now that she is famous, writing, which once had the potential to be 'an act of freedom', has become 'another form of binding': 'But now there was more. The need to make one's parents proud is deforming enough; the pressure to make one's whole people proud is something else again.' (Krauss 2017, p. 75). It is in this context that she is asked the rhetorical question 'You think your writing belongs to you?' and told that it does not, that it belongs 'to the Jews' (Krauss 2017, p. 125).

The sense that she is expected to act as a mouthpiece for someone else's story, to allow 'her' story to be ghostwritten, is communicated with reference to an episode where, at the International Writers Festival in Jerusalem, she is presented with 'a blank notebook commemorating the sixty-fifth anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz'. This time the rhetorical question is hers: 'Could the message have been any clearer if the endpapers had been printed with piles of dead children's shoes?' (Krauss 2017, p. 77). Her inability either to discard the notebook or to write anything in it that is hers sums up her present state of creative paralysis, and she joins the ranks of those who dream 'of falling out of this world, and into another where we aren't stunted and deformed to fit the past, but left to grow wild, toward the future' (Krauss 2017, p. 75). In an ironic twist on the Dante quotation taken at face value, she feels lost not because the 'straightforward pathway' has disappeared but, on the

<sup>5</sup> (Dante 1867) See (Alighieri 1867).



contrary, because her pathway—the pathway of her story in every sense—has been mapped out for her only too well.

When we encounter Nicole at the beginning of the novel, she has left her husband and sons in New York to come to Israel in search of a more self-determined, less predetermined narrative: for that pathway ‘left to grow wild, toward the future’, and for a corresponding ‘form that could contain the formless’ (Krauss 2017, pp. 67, 75). In other words, she has come to find herself (within) a forest dark. However, soon after her arrival in Tel Aviv, Nicole attends a pre-arranged meeting with a mysterious German Jew, Eliezer Friedman, a representative of the survivor generation, who commissions her to do the very thing she is trying to escape: write an ending for someone else’s narrative. Moreover, the protagonist of the tale without an ending is none other than Kafka—a Kafka who, in Krauss’s retelling, did not die of tuberculosis in 1924 but merely faked his death, and also survived the Holocaust, by emigrating to Israel where he lived a life of obscurity and finally ‘passed away peacefully in his sleep on an October night in 1956, known only, if he was known at all, as the gardener, Anshel Peleg’ (Krauss 2017, p. 178).

As well as being a revision of the original Kafka legend, this narrative strand of the novel also develops further Krauss’s intertextual response to Philip Roth’s ‘“I Always Wanted You to Admire My Fasting”; or, Looking at Kafka’. However, while in some of the texts discussed earlier, the intertextual alignment with post-Holocaust authors served to countervail a sense of being overshadowed by the Holocaust generation, Krauss’s use of intertextuality in *Forest Dark* does not offset one pre-text against another but, rather, seems informed by a desire to reclaim her narrative more broadly from that sense of obligation ‘to keep the great machine of Jewish literature rolling forward’ (Krauss 2017, p. 125).

In Roth’s ‘Looking at Kafka’, Roth also raises the question of what might have been if Kafka had not died in 1924 but had escaped to Palestine along with Max Brod. However, Roth answers his own speculation with a counter-question: ‘But *Kafka* escaping? It seems unlikely for one so fascinated by entrapment and careers that culminate in anguished death.’ (Roth [1973] 2001, p. 282. Original emphasis). Krauss counters Roth’s counter, and so steps out from under his shadow, by freeing Kafka from the sense of entrapment with which we associate him, which in turn allows Nicole to step out from under Kafka’s shadow, in a multi-layered process of dispossession and (re-)possession that, once again, unfolds across a complex network of intertextual resonances. Drawing together Freudian thoughts on the uncanny and the *doppelgänger*, theories of the multiverse, Kabbalistic notions of a transmigration of souls, and a Dantean-Kafkaesque conception of paradise, Krauss’s text undoes the idea of linear time and introduces the possibility that Nicole and the novel’s Kafka may somehow, in one universe, in one version of her story, have shared a plane of existence, a consciousness, a soul.

This ‘overlap’ in the text is engineered when Nicole, along with a suitcase supposedly full of Kafka’s unpublished ‘posthumous’ writings, is dropped off in a cottage in the desert, where she fancies Kafka once lived, to write his story. In this shared space, Nicole falls ill and, lying feverishly in Kafka’s bed, wearing Kafka’s coat, she has a sensation of falling ‘out of time’s old order and into another’, where time has ‘given up any attachment to sequence’ (Krauss 2017, p. 259). Having earlier already felt connected to Kafka through the impression that ‘I could feel in my own body Kafka’s claustrophobia and his longing for another world’, Nicole experiences this moment of falling out of time as a continuation of a ‘transformation already under way’ (Krauss 2017, pp. 195, 264). The notion of transformation of course recalls Kafka’s ‘metamorphosis’, yet this is a Hebraicized metamorphosis. Via the Hebrew translation of Kafka’s *Die Verwandlung*—*Ha Gilgul*, meaning not transformation but ‘cycle’ or ‘wheel’, and denoting a belief in the transmigration of souls—Krauss suggests that: ‘*The Metamorphosis* has always been a story not about the change from one form to another, but about the continuity of the soul through different material realities.’ (Krauss 2017, p. 194). The intertextual transposition of Kafka from Eastern Europe to Israel has opened up the possibility of him and Nicole sharing both a space (and a space removed from the geographical proximity of the Holocaust at that) and a temporal plane. This mitigates the anxiety-of-influence-inducing sense of being trapped in a historical and literary inheritance line, on a ‘straightforward’ narrative path on which Krauss’s story

comes after, and is therefore determined by, the first generation's, and allows for a fantasy of a more mutual and reciprocal relationship, in which the descendant gives shape and meaning to the ancestor's narrative, not just the other way round.

In *Forest Dark*, this premiss, already familiar from texts discussed earlier, sees the transmigration of Kafka's soul into Nicole presented less as a form of possession and more as a pregnancy of sorts, where he has taken over her body but she appears as a consenting vessel that will, impossibly, give birth to her own literary progenitor, as suggested by the fact that Nicole comes to be riven in Kafka's cottage with a kind of pain she has previously only known in labour (Krauss, p. 263). This, too, is an image that is embedded in the idea of *gilgul*, and particularly in one sub-form of it, *ibbur* (meaning incubation or gestation), in which a soul inhabits another body not from birth but just for a limited period of time, as in a pregnancy. Kabbalists attributed two related but distinct purposes to an *ibbur* temporarily entering a body. One was to fulfil a task that the soul had not been able to complete in its previous lifetime. The other was to help the host carry out a task that fell in the special purview of the visiting soul. There are aspects of both present in the Nicole / 'Kafka' constellation, and unlike the intertextual engagement with Kafka in *The History of Love*, this one, at least initially, takes the form of a two-way-exchange. She releases him from the ties that bind him to his official biography, and reimagines and carries forward his narrative, but the process helps her reach the realization 'that for most of my life I had been emulating the thoughts and actions of other people. [...] And that if I continued in this manner, whatever glimmers of brilliant life still burned in me would soon go out' (Krauss 2017, p. 262). By taking her outside the flow of time, her *ibbur* has reminded her of this 'brilliant life'—a Schulzian childhood Age of Genius at best dimly remembered—before she emerged from the forest dark: back then, she could see the whole story and felt no pressure to corral it into someone else's idea of a 'straightforward pathway', or as we are told in the text, when she 'saw [...] the whole of things, without needing to give them a human translation', 'without needing to make them subordinate to order' (Krauss 2017, p. 262). In a miniature replica of a breaking of the vessels, only glimmers have remained in her of this time of unshattered pre-self-conscious creativity, but she emerges from her 'metamorphosis' with the sense that the labour pains she is experiencing may in fact be a form of *self*-'flaying', a 'flaying' that opens up the possibility of a release of the 'glimmers of brilliant life' trapped within her (Krauss 2017, pp. 262–63).

And suddenly, what appeared as a fantasized two-way-exchange between her and Kafka is opened up and its focus directed away from his narrative and onto Nicole's own. An important contributory factor in this redirection is that the intertextual transmigration performed by Krauss does not stop with the Hebraicization of Kafka, which already draws him away from a context of twentieth-century Eastern Europe against which he can fancifully be read as a first-generation prophet of the Holocaust. Rather, Krauss loosens the bonds of obligation to the 'great machine of Jewish literature' further still, by apparently cross-reading Kafka against Dante (Krauss 2017, p. 125). Nicole's 'vision' of 'the whole of things' harks back to a *pre-tohu-va-bohu* state of creation, but it also recalls (perhaps again via 'The Book' in Schulz) the first aspect of Dante's vision in the final Canto of *Paradise*, where he sees the world as a codex, a 'knot' in which 'Leaves that lie scattered through the universe' are 'gathered together, | Bound by love into a single volume' (Dante 1867, c. XXXIII, ll. 91, 85–87). The fact that Dante's is a temporal spiritual progression culminating in an extemporal beatific vision would appear to reinforce the sense that Nicole's own vision of an unordered whole does not lie as inaccessible in the past as she thought, but that glimpses of it are re-emerging in her kairotic encounter with Kafka, a 'supreme moment' out of time, which, read against Dante, is aligned with *Paradise* (Krauss 2017, p. 259). This would, of course, imply that Nicole already is where she hopes to be, though unlike for Dante, for Nicole, the forest dark appears as the aspired-to destination as well as the point of departure. And indeed, reading Dante against Kafka expressly blurs the boundaries between Edenic and terrestrial. Citing Kafka's Zürau aphorisms on *Paradise*, one of which also serves as the novel's epigraph, and referencing 'the presence of the eternal within us', Nicole suggests that it was Kafka's belief that 'the threshold between *Paradise* and this world may be illusory, and we may never have

really left Paradise', or, as it says in the epigraph, that it is therefore possible: 'that we are currently there in actual fact, no matter whether we know it here or not.' (Krauss 2017, pp. 267, 268).

In reminding her that she still harbours 'glimmers' of 'that vision I once had, before I began [...] to look at everything the way others looked [...], and to shape my life after theirs', and aligning the dark-forest days of a 'non-progressive', 'unstraightforward' narrative with the 'eternal within', the encounter with Kafka returns 'narrative control' to Nicole by suggesting that it may have been trapped inside her all along, even if she did not know it in the 'here' (Krauss 2017, p. 263). At the same time, the reading of Dante also serves as a reminder that the ancestor author and father figure, whether that be Dante or Kafka as her Virgil, can only take their progeny so far. There will come a point when their help is no longer required and the descendant's progress may even have surpassed the progenitor's. And so, unlike Zuckerman in Roth's *Ghost Writer*, who fantasizes that by bringing home 'Anne Frank', he will finally gain his father's acceptance, Nicole here divests herself of her *ibbur*: She takes off Kafka's coat, abandons the suitcase supposedly full of his unpublished manuscripts without reading any of them, and returns to face the ties that bind her—but ties in the present, not from the past—to reclaim her life and repossess her narrative. In keeping with the possibility that 'we may never have really left', there are only two parts to Krauss's novel; there is no third canticle, no *Paradise*. In its place, the second part of the novel ends on a chapter titled 'Already There'. Nicole has resumed her narrative, after the kairoic encounter with Kafka, but it is a dark-forest narrative that refuses to unfold sequentially and chronologically, and in which we learn, from a memory of an event yet to come to pass, that while she has returned to the bonds of motherhood, she has loosened those of marriage and taken a lover—at least in one version of events. Her stay in Israel ends with the event (the proleptic memory of) which precipitated Nicole's journey there in the first place: the fall of (a) man from a balcony of the Hilton Tel Aviv (Krauss 2017, p. 286). And the chapter concludes with her returning home to her children to find that she is already there, having, apparently, lived out multiple narrative strands at once in the multiverses of her novel.

By the end of her transformative 'cohabitation' with Kafka in the desert, Nicole is ready to say 'Kaddish for Kafka', as well as 'Kaddish for the whole story'—and 'Kaddish for the *whole* story' (Krauss 2017, pp. 268, 271. My emphasis.). While Krauss's novel therefore on one level does appear as another example of a text that conjures the ghost of the ancestor author, this would appear to be in order better to put him to rest, for his sake and hers, and along with him, all the other ties that bind her. As in some of the other texts discussed here, post-Holocaust intertextual connections may hold out the promise of an alternative exchange network to the fraught progenitor-progeny relations with the first generation, but even here, Krauss's engagement seems intended to loosen ties, or at least to prevent them from becoming shackles, at the same time as affirming them. Beyond just the ghosts of the first generation, it is the haunting dominance of 'the great machine of Jewish literature' more broadly that this novel is seeking to shake (Krauss 2017, p. 125). By embedding this machine in a more global intertextual network of possession and dispossession, Krauss frees herself up to create, or highlight, new connections and make the old ones feel less suffocating. Within this network, Dante can believe in the transmigration of souls. And Kafka can write in Hebrew, and she does not have to read him or continue his narrative. There is no need for him to be summoned so as to be exorcized or killed off; there is enough intertextual play for him to withdraw gracefully to make space for the post-Holocaust author's own creation. The Schulzian Book, or Dantean codex, or the forest dark of the past, may be irretrievably out of reach, but glimmers of it in the form(lessness) of a narrative present left to grow as it pleases are not. In allowing her to free these glimmers, intertextuality becomes an act of *tikkun* for Nicole, and by extension Krauss herself, but one designed not to repair (to) narratives of the past but to deviate from them.

As such, *Forest Dark* comes to stand as the provisional culmination of the evolution I have attempted to trace in recent post-Holocaust intertextuality away from a predominantly referential and reverential use of earlier Jewish narrative—in which a literary progenitor is conjured as a symptom of melancholy and incomplete mourning—towards a more creative engagement with

antecedent literature. More so even than the texts by Safran Foer, Maryles Shankman or Biller examined here, and more so than her own earlier writing, Krauss's most recent novel can be read as an authorizing of her own narrative in the present, and for the future, by means of intertextual divergence and diversification, rather than (self-legitimizing) deference. In the end, the—unspoken and purely speculative—intertextual resonance that seems to ring out the loudest in *Forest Dark* is not between Krauss and Kafka, or Dante, or Roth, but between Krauss's Nicole and Cynthia Ozick's Ruth Pattermesser from *The Pattermesser Papers* (1997). However, it is a resonance in which a revision of the earlier narrative offers up a vision for Krauss's own. Ozick's Pattermesser, who imagines paradise as a place where she can summon anyone, and will anything into being, simply by thinking it so, is disappointed to find, once there, that there are limitations placed upon her by the fact that 'anything she might call up would inevitably be from the past'. Condemned compulsively to relive bygone narratives with no hope for change, she finally concludes: 'The secret meaning of Paradise is that it too is hell.' (Ozick 1997, p. 234). For Krauss's Nicole, however, the realization that she is 'already there' means that 'paradise' still has the potential to be 'the place [...] where she could walk freely inside her imagination'—a forest dark 'where we aren't stunted and deformed to fit the past, but left to grow wild, toward the future' (Krauss 2017, p. 75).

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