

The Timelessness of Trauma in *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*

Point of Departure: National tragedy is perhaps the central threat in this text, and Jonathan Safran Foer instantiates his theme in narrators whose ages illuminate the timeless personal symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Although the September 11 attacks and the Dresden bombings occur at different times and in different countries, the novel's twinned narration unites Oskar and his grandparents with sensations that transcend them, at once aging the former and reducing the latter to youth.

Introductory Questions: In what ways does Oskar seem older than he is and do his grandparents seem younger than they are? Are these characters aware of how trauma has developed certain sensibilities even as it has atrophied others? Consider several symptoms of PTSD: re-experience, avoidance, hypervigilance, mood disorder. Identify the defining characteristics of each narrative thread. Is Jonathan Safran Foer's portrayal poignant? Convincing? How do the novel's modernist innovations—integrated images, various typesetting—enhance or undercut narrative authority?

Relevant Passages (corresponding to PTSD symptoms):

Insomnia, flashbacks

- voicemails, replacement (15)
- conversation with grandmother, missing father (71)
- “no good at remembering” (130)
- “I can't fall asleep without you” (133)

Survivor's guilt

- the renter's silence (16)
- “he said I should give myself a break sometimes” (37)
- “I bruise easily” (50)
- pressure to conform to father (2, 43, 102)
- “lives I'm not living” (113)
- “work to live” (145)
- afraid of death (154)

Hypervigilance

- atheism (4)
- evidence in laboratory, corrections in red pen (9)
- versus innocence, key giveaway (6)
- impulse to search (10)
- expecting Anna (109)

Artistic impulse, creation

- hoarding (156)
- strange vernacular: heavy boots, birdseed shirt, worst day, sleeping bag of himself (1, 2, 5, 11, 37, 71)
- “started inventing things” (36)
- *Stuff That Happened to Me* (52)
- tambourine: “I was going through different neighborhoods, I was still me” (88)
- writing life story (119)

Concluding Nuances:

Oskar’s investigation and his grandmother’s memoir suggest that the artist emerges from tragedy, from some compulsion to reinscribe the past and thus control the future. Are these missions feasible or futile? How does Foer’s experimentation with form reflect his characters’ own creations?