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Ethical Representations of Trauma in Young Adult Holocaust Literature

Holocaust literature is a challenging space in which to write, seeking to convey an event that cannot truly be represented in words: the systematic destruction of millions of lives, an estimated 1.5 million of which were children who perished in the concentration camps. Young adult authors have the added challenge of creating texts that convey the trauma of the Holocaust in ways that are accessible to teenage readers, attempting to reconcile a moral duty to historical accuracy with the desire for an engaging, empathetic novel. Beyond the controversial question of whether or not the Holocaust should be represented in literature for young people, the complex and contested issue of how to do so in an ethically responsible manner inevitably arises. Placing this paper in the receptive dimension of this conference, I will address the use of young adult fiction to represent the Holocaust, and outline how literary strategies such as flashbacks, framing, and fragmentation can create an ethical depiction that respects simultaneously the experience of trauma, the historical event, and the teenage reader. If, according to trauma scholar Cathy Caruth, a traumatic experience can only be understood as it returns to a victim in flashbacks and fragmented memories, then these nonlinear literary techniques can recreate the experience, representing the chaos as opposed to attempting to order it. Building on Dominick LaCapra's theory of "empathetic unsettlement," I will use the novels *After the War* (Carol Matas, 1996), *If I Should Die Before I Wake* (Han Nolan, 1994), and *Briar Rose* (Jane Yolen, 1992) to demonstrate how these literary techniques allow young adult authors to select that which they reveal to their readers while simultaneously conveying the experience of trauma itself.

Keywords: Trauma Theory, Young Adult Literature, Holocaust Literature, Flashbacks, Fragmentation

Talia Crockett is a second year PhD student at Victoria University of Wellington with a passion for children's literature. She received her HonBA in English from the University of Toronto before working in the Canadian young adult publishing and film criticism industries. Her upcoming doctoral dissertation will focus on ethical representations of personal and cultural trauma within Holocaust and postcolonial literature for young adults.