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Trauma, Diasporic Consciousness, and Ethics in Nicole Krauss's *Forest Dark*

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Abstract: Dislocation, expatriation, and the attendant loss of homeland are concerns at the heart of Jewish literature. The dialectical relationship between identity and the sense of homeland informing the Jewish diasporic consciousness, in particular, has often culminated in nostalgic depictions of Israel in post-war American Jewish literature. In focusing on such a literary representation, this essay unravels the multidimensionality of diasporic Jewish identity. Critically analyzing Nicole Krauss's *Forest Dark* (2017), it evaluates the trauma of exile and the psychic dilemma of third-generation American Jewish writers. The novelist brings about a confluence of nostos and nostalgia in *Forest Dark*. In evoking the visceral sense of loss, dislocation, and a painful yearning for the lost homeland, the author succeeds in tracing the lives of two protagonists, Jules Epstein, a retired New York lawyer, and Nicole, a Jewish American novelist struggling with a deep marital crisis. The text foregrounds the theme of self-discovery exemplified in the homecoming of its two central characters. Following his parents' death and haunted by the anguish and horror of the Shoah, Jules unmoors himself from his current life and flies to Tel Aviv on a whim. Nicole, who suffers from creative blockage on account of her failing marriage, undertakes the trip to Tel Aviv hoping to recover from her soul-sickness, as it were. If Jules and Nicole do not cross paths, it still remains that their Jewish identities stem from the originary tragedy of the Holocaust. Although removed from the horrific sights and scenes of the tragic event, intergenerational trauma resonates with certain aspects of the diasporic Jewish existence. Using theoretical interventions of memory studies and the Freudian concept of *Unheimlich* or the uncanny, this essay explores the ethical implications that undergird Nicole Krauss's diasporic depiction of Israel.

Keywords: uncanny; trauma; memory; ethics; Holocaust literature



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1. Introduction

Nicole Krauss, a third-generation American Jewish Holocaust writer, meditates on the protean idea of the Jewish homeland in her tour de force *Forest Dark* (2017). Representing the old and the new diaspora, the two protagonists of her novel, notwithstanding their collective Jewish past, approach the subconscious sense of loss and dislocation and its relation to the homeland in different ways. In significantly contributing to the American Jewish discourse on Israel, the novel searchingly contemplates diasporic identity. This essay examines Krauss's novel as a narrative of the return of the repressed traumatic memory of the Holocaust and nostalgia for the homeland. Accordingly, we employ Freud's concept of the uncanny to explore how the novel's protagonists embark on their journey to Israel only when repressed memories revisit them.

With New York and Tel Aviv as setting, *Forest Dark* interweaves the stories of two Jewish American protagonists, namely, the sixty-eight-year-old retired attorney Jules Epstein and a struggling middle-aged novelist Nicole. While Jules is in the grip of emotional turmoil and rumination following the death of his parents, Nicole experiences writer's block in the midst of a failing marriage. Both Jules and Nicole are caught in a maelstrom of personal crisis. Following the death of his parents and his divorce, Jules untethers

himself from his humdrum life in NYC and flies to Tel Aviv on a whim to pay tribute to the memory of his departed parents. The lawyer's journey doubles as a sustained meditation on Israel and what it means to be Jewish in a land that he cannot claim as his. Redolent of mystery, Israel witnesses Jules prophesied as King David's descendent by Rabbi Klausner and working toward his cherished project of erecting a memorial in honor of his revered parents. Nicole's journey to Tel Aviv is a philosophical odyssey that seeks to recover her life's sense of purpose and direction blighted by her loveless marriage. Similar to Jules's, Nicole's disconnect with her own sense of reality stems from the guilt of being estranged as much from her own self as her Jewish history. While Krauss has it that their paths do not cross in the course of the story, her protagonists still remain kindred spirits in invoking Israel's healing powers to reach a redemptive resolution to their crises.

The title of Krauss's novel is drawn from the opening lines of the first Canto of Dante's *Inferno*: "In the middle of the journey of our life, I came to myself in a dark wood, for the straight way was lost" (Alighieri 1996, p. 27). Given that the Holocaust's calamity is perennial, every new generation is born into the long and continuing sequence of that tragedy. Their lives always come midway in this unfinished legacy. It is neither possible to overcome that trauma nor easy to decipher the lives of those survivors whose personal histories are marked by ceaseless uncertainty and doubt. Aptly enough, Krauss's epigraph—"that not only could we remain forever in Paradise, but that we are currently there in actual fact, no matter whether we know it here or not", drawn from Kafka's *Parables and Paradoxes*—captures her novelistic agenda of espousing the permanence and irreversibility of expulsion and exile through an eternal process. This Kafkaesque reference resonantly prefigures the metamorphoses that the protagonists undergo in Israel. Though most reviews of the novel applaud her deft handling of reality and realism (Clark 2017), the depiction of divided selves (Orner 2017), and the concept of the "multiverse" (Halpern 2017), our approach highlights Krauss's literary method that, in seeking elliptically to address issues of Holocaust trauma, bestows her devastated characters with a renewed sense of meaning and purpose.

2. Results

2.1. *Yearning for the Lost Homeland*

Forest Dark dramatizes how diasporic Jews view their ethnic selves vis-à-vis their American identity and Israel's role in their collective consciousness. To understand the novel's critique of the American Jewish diaspora, it becomes necessary to define the concept of Jewish diaspora. Jews are perhaps the oldest diaspora, and even though they lacked a "homeland" for two millennia, the idea of a return to it arguably remains part of the collective consciousness. Their banishment from Judea was on account of transgression against God or for their refusal to accept Jesus as the Savior. William Safran defines Jewish diaspora as: "It has also connoted a continuing sense of insecurity, for Jews have been the proverbial Other in terms of religion, dress, customs, cuisine, and language, so that they have constituted convenient scapegoats and have been subjected to forcible conversion, expulsion, and massacres" (Safran 2005, p. 38). Given that Jewish myth, history, and culture are continually under threat of erasure, it has deepened the ardor of the Jewish diaspora to preserve and bequeath the collective Jewish legacy of exodus and extermination to its posterity. Appropriately, Jewish canonical literature foregrounds a preoccupation with the "land" in depicting the Jews' relationship with Yahweh. More importantly, the undying hope of repatriating to Israel remains an inextricable part of the Jewish exiles' faith. Gruen asserts that "The images of uprootedness, dispersal, and wandering haunt Jewish identity throughout" (Gruen 2002, p. 18). One of the central tenets of diaspora studies consists in the Jewish experience of straddling two identities and negotiating ethnicity from the imaginative reconstruction of the diasporan's homeland. While the politics informing the Jewish diaspora does not have a fixed agenda, the diasporans' cultural investment in Israel remains distinct. This essay limits itself to a discussion of the American Jewish diaspora, since Nicole Krauss herself belongs to the group of third-generation Jewish Americans.

Produced largely by first-generation Holocaust survivors, diasporic Jewish writing since 1945 is marked by a sense of communal lamentation for a vanished past. In its wake, WWII created a monumental refugee crisis that forced Jews to flee Europe to the United States of America. This social upheaval was contemporaneous with other global events, such as the creation of Israel as an independent nation. According to Nadine Blumer, while the majority of the Jewish population stayed in Europe even when the Nazi persecution was unrelenting, the Jewish community's dream of returning to a homeland after a two-thousand-year-old exile became real only with the creation of Israel (Blumer 2011, pp. 1331–47). The choice to remain in their adopted land was informed by a sense of what constituted "diasporic Jewish identity".

The Jewish diaspora in the United States took it upon themselves to record, preserve, and uphold the collective history of their communities. Consequently, the period from the late 1940s to the end of the 1960s experienced a surge in both the production and circulation of diasporic Jewish literature in America. Among others, it included the works of Saul Bellow, Bernard Malamud, Philip Roth, and Isaac Bashevis Singer.¹ Although conspicuous in America, this trend snowballed into a literary-cultural movement that witnessed Jewish authors from different countries reading and interacting with one another, deliberating upon issues and concerns surrounding the Holocaust and the fate of millions of Jews who had embraced Israel, the fledgling nation. Notably, Ted Solotaroff observed, "[s]ince the Six-Day War the survival of Israel has been the paramount concern of organized Jewish life and probably the paramount source of Jewish identity" (Solotaroff 1988, p. 1). With nostalgia becoming a literary shorthand for the diasporic condition, Israel itself became the "holy grail" in some forms of diasporic Jewish literature.

One of the major concerns of diasporic studies focuses on the affiliation of Jewish people to their homeland and its significance. As Abrahamson suggests, "It describes how the homeland is imagined, reproduced, and performed abroad but pays less attention to the physical homeland itself" (Abramson 2017, p. 14). This facet of Jewish experience becomes more apparent in second- and third-generation Holocaust writing, which moves away from questions of the homeland's geographic embeddedness or the possibility of ever returning to it. It focuses more upon the symbolic value of exile in the workaday world that plays out between Jewish and diasporic identities. Shaul Magid posits that, "Intense focus on the Holocaust as a lens to view developments in Jewish identity in America began in earnest in the early 1970s. The question of the Holocaust's uniqueness was a prominent part of that inquiry, an expression of the competing desires of American Jews to be fully integrated yet definitively distinct in American society" (Magid 2012, p. 102). Laying claim to traditional or authentic Judaism is still a contested ground for different generations of diasporic writers. Horowitz observes that "while in the past Jews were often subject to enforced separation, Jews today are no longer marked in a way that enforces their segregation from others. Since they are neither forced to be Jewish nor discriminated against for being Jewish, they are all 'Jews by choice'" (qtd. in Ray and Diemling 2016, p. 2). Similarly, Blumer shows that the diaspora's older generation generally remains rooted to the idea of a Jewish homeland. Contrastingly, the new diaspora, in decentering the primacy of the homeland from its own identity, seems to embrace a more transnational identity of plural sites of belonging (Blumer 2011, p. 1332). The Holocaust remains a watershed for the diasporic Jewish community in shaping its identity and collective memory. Therefore, the intergenerational transmission of trauma and the dilemmas of depicting the Holocaust and the distant homeland in Israel remain core concerns of the third-generation American Jewish diasporic literature, such as Krauss.

2.2. Nostalgia, Diaspora, and the Jewish Homeland

Depending on how you read it, the history of exile is central to Jewish religious and social identity. From Biblical times to WWII, Jewish writing attests to a sense of involuntary uprootedness that transcends spatio-temporal limitations. The idea of nostalgia, particularly "nostos" reminiscent of the Homeric trope of undertaking a long return journey home,

serves as one of the hallmarks of these narratives. Voyages to Israel, a rite of passage for Jewish writers, exemplifies allegiance to a collective identity. Prominent examples of these are present even in the diasporic writings from an earlier American generation, namely, Philip Roth's *The Counterlife* (1986) and Saul Bellow's work of nonfiction, *To Jerusalem and Back* (1976). This preoccupation with Israel bears entirely different connotations for identity and memory-making of the second- and third-generations of Holocaust survivors, especially among the diasporans. American Jewish writers depict a sense of double identity as inheritors of different national and cultural heritages. That identity becomes further amorphous following the schism between Israeli and diasporic understandings of Jewishness. For the Holocaust survivors' progeny, this identity attenuation is further compounded by the endless struggle between reconciling intergenerational trauma with the need to preserve the Holocaust in Jewish collective memory—both as a means of hallowing the memory of the loving dead and as a warning to descendants of survivors.

Forest Dark portrays Jules, a second-generation Jewish man who seeks to connect with his deceased Holocaust-surviving parents by erecting a memorial in their honor. His journey to Tel Aviv in *Forest Dark* following the death of his parents is meant to locate the source of his soul-sickness and alienation. His struggles reflect the majority of many second- and third-generation writers who, even when far removed from the paralyzing horror of the Holocaust, are strangely defined by the catastrophic event. In depicting Nicole, the novel captures the anguish and dilemma of third-generation Jewish writers who bear the ethical burden of remembering the Holocaust and perpetuating its legacy even as they inhabit a world that dismisses the Jewish genocide as a distant memory.

2.3. The Politics of Jewish Nostalgia

As a child, Krauss was raised on New York's Long Island. Her parents and grandparents were diasporic Jews with origins in Israel, Germany, Ukraine, Hungary, Belarus, and England. While devastating Holocaust losses occurred on both sides of the Krauss family, her paternal grandmother survived after fleeing a Polish transit camp on the last Kindertransport boat before WWII. As children, Krauss and her siblings accompanied their parents regularly to Tel Aviv when the latter visited relatives. The nostalgia informing these visits is at the heart of *Forest Dark*.

Coined by seventeenth-century medical student Johannes Hofer, nostalgia is a compound of two Greek words—νόστος (nostos), meaning “return” or “homecoming” and ἀλγία (algia), meaning “pain”. The term began its semantic journey to represent a clinical condition of anxieties that Swiss mercenaries experienced while fighting far away from home. Although, over time, its pathology has morphed into more of a sentiment, the general idiomatic meaning of nostalgia, according to *The New Oxford Dictionary of English* (1998), remains “a sentimental longing for the past”. The German term for nostalgia is Nostalgie, and Heimweh means longing for heim or homesickness, a term analogous with nostalgia. Moreover, the cognate *heimlich* and *heimisch* suggest “familiar” or “belonging to the home”.² Krauss evocatively defines home in *Forest Dark* as:

Heim—home. Yes, the place one has always been, however hidden from one's awareness, could only be called that, couldn't it? And yet, in another way, doesn't home only become home if one goes away from it, since it's only with distance, only in the return, that we are able to recognize it as the place that shelters our true self? (Krauss 2017, p. 71)

This passage reflects Krauss's characteristic exile, solitude, and estranged psyche. In addition, it resonates with the take of Lukács in *The Theory of the Novel* that the novel is, above all others, the form that expresses “transcendental homelessness” (Lukács 1971, p. 41). Therefore, *Forest Dark* articulates Krauss's longing for an emotional and spiritual home. The novelist's musings on the multiverse testify to her sense of brokenness and alienation. The multiverse hypothesizes multiple universes, and the universes within the multiverse are characterized as “alternate universes” or “parallel universes”. Multiple universes have been conjectured particularly in science fiction, fantasy, and comics.³ The

reference to the multiverse in *Forest Dark* is appropriate in suggesting that the author's diasporic self inhabits multiple identities.

In this sense, nostalgia and its politics have been central to exploring the continuities and discontinuities in diasporic Jewish writing and problematizing Israel in Jewish imagination and identity. It bridges the diverse lived experiences of the diasporic community. For instance, the significance of Israel and the contrasting roles of Jews in history as oppressors and the oppressed make it particularly onerous for a native Israeli writer, such as David Grossman, who has written extensively on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the Holocaust. The Israeli novelist approaches these complexities impartially and deferentially. Interestingly, similar to Grossman's characters, Krauss positions her protagonists in the novel as both outsiders and insiders, who as much witness and inscribe the event as participate in it. This narrative strategy dismantles the intentional blind spots that often mark diasporic literature. In his essay "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire", Pierre Nora claims that the obligation to remember rests on the individual—"when memory is no longer everywhere, it will not be anywhere unless one takes the responsibility to recapture it through individual means" (Nora 1989, p. 16). What Nora defines as "duty-memory" translates as ethical accountability in the context of Holocaust literature. While the tensions between oppression and victimization are often irreconcilable, they remain inseparable from the anatomy of Jewish memory and identity in seeking a resolution through the agency of literary works, such as *Forest Dark*.

2.4. Framing Israel, the Site of Trauma

The motif of journey or return to a site of trauma is common to the majority of contemporary Jewish writing. This transnational memory voyage includes Jews visiting Eastern Europe, as portrayed, for instance, in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Everything Is Illuminated* (2002). Significantly, Marita Sturken claims that "memory tourism can also provide an experience of return—a return to memories that one might or might not have, yet a return nevertheless" (Sturken 2011, p. 284). Astrid Erll's "Travelling Memory" (Erll 2011, pp. 4–18) and Aleida Assmann's "Transnational Memories" (Assmann 2014, pp. 546–56) discuss the changing aspects of memories within the framework of transnational connections. In her interview with Brett A. Kaplan, Krauss asserts, "For many American Jews, there is the 'there' of Israel that we often think of. We are always going back and forth between America and Israel" (Kaplan 2020, p. 293). In *Forest Dark*, Israel acts as the lieux de mémoire where "memory crystallizes and secretes itself" (Nora 1989, p. 7). Appropriately, both the central characters in the novel return to Israel. Jules was born in Tel Aviv to parents who emigrated to Palestine after World War II. Similarly, New York-born Nicole was conceived during her parents' stay at the Tel Aviv Hilton hotel. Interestingly, her family since then made it a point to stay there during their annual visit to the famed city. However, as Freud avers, familiarity often can enhance the sense of uncanny (Freud 2003, p. 124). Neither Jules nor Nicole is certain about what to expect once they are in Israel.

Krauss robustly addresses the complex dialectical affinities with nostalgia that is a hallmark of Holocaust fiction. According to Victoria Aarons and Alan L. Berger, Krauss employs post-memory devices, such as photographs, journal entries, and letters, much akin to contemporary post-modernist writers, to flesh out her protagonists' experiences as part and parcel of her contradictory and fragmented Holocaust memories (Aarons and Berger 2017, p. 153). The author analyzes this nostos from the perspective of the Israeli booking agent who offers Jules a Tel Aviv apartment. Initially, the American Jew is instantly smitten with Israel's cultural life:

They [American Jews like Jules] come to Tel Aviv and find it so sexy, the sea and the strength, the nearness to violence and the hunger for life, and how, even if Israelis are living in an existential crisis all the time, and sense their country is lost, at least they live in a world where everything still matters and is worth fighting for. (Krauss 2017, p. 234)

The agent who rents the apartment to Jules understands the fleeting infatuation of affluent Americans with Israel. For the Jewish diaspora, the homeland is more of a symbol than a lived reality. Once the initial flush of enthusiasm associated with Israel's varied adventures, places, and histories wanes, the diasporic Jewish visitors are gripped by a sense of disenchantment when the shadow falls between the Israel of their imagination and that of reality:

The city really is a shithole, isn't it, everything that isn't new is falling apart, . . . and actually Israelis are impossible to deal with, so stubborn and intractable, so frustratingly immune to logic, so damn rude, and it turns out most of them don't care for anything Jewish, their grandparents and parents ran as far away from it as they could, and the ones that do care, they're over the top, those settlers, totally out of their minds, and frankly the whole country is a bunch of Arab-hating racists. (Krauss 2017, p. 235)

The agent recounts here how once when their enchantment with Israel wanes, American Jews begin to deride everything about the country and its people.⁴ With the city's charm failing to enamor them any longer, they find it unmistakably hideous. This passage exemplifies the human psyche's susceptibility to the motions of the strange or the uncanny. No wonder the reader tends to detect a simultaneously critical and melancholic undertone in the agent's observations.

The portraiture of Nicole is drawn from the author's personal experiences of living through a crumbling marriage that visited upon her writer's block. Her capacity to plan and anticipate her future is severely jeopardized by being trapped in a loveless marriage. The eponymous middle-aged protagonist confesses:

I had been sleeping badly for weeks. My work wasn't going well, and this left me feeling constantly anxious. But if my writing was a kind of sinking ship, the larger landscape—the sea in which I had begun to sense that every boat I tried to sail would eventually go under—was my failing marriage. (Krauss 2017, p. 42)

Much to her disappointment, Nicole's efforts to deploy her children as the anchor to salvage her failing marriage prove futile. This breakdown causes a creative block which in turn confronts her with the unenviable prospect of not being able to write. Reconciling to the atrophied emotional self that her failing marriage has brought, Nicole is inured to the "boundless loneliness" that stems from it (Krauss 2017, pp. 43–44).

Significantly, the novel's second chapter deepens the sense of the uncanny in showing Nicole experiencing a strange sensation of being simultaneously present in different spots of the house: "Not as a soul or a frequency. But full-bodied, exactly as I was there on the threshold of the kitchen, but, somehow—elsewhere, upstairs—again" (Krauss 2017, pp. 40–41). These lines depict the emotional distress visited on the author on account of her failing marriage and her hyphenated Jewish American identity. Germane to our discussion is Krauss's take on the issue articulated in her Kaplan interview, that "we can be somewhere, but our longing and our imaginations can be elsewhere" (Kaplan 2020, p. 293). This resonates with Freud's concept of the "double", notably explored in his essay "The Uncanny" (1919). In contemplating the multiverse, Krauss foregrounds this idea of the double, reflected here as the source of Nicole's psychic conflicts. Dismissing her life in NYC as unreal, she believes that her self will acquire reality only when she is in the Hilton Hotel at Tel Aviv.

Triggering her intergenerational trauma, the representations of the author's grief over her impending marital breakdown overwhelm her with a gnawing sense of loneliness, the loss of connection that is the lot of the surviving Jewry's descendants, no matter how they engage with their collective past. Nicole journeys to Israel with the hope of discovering herself. She expects her pilgrimage to fortify her psychic resources and enable her to find a way out of the woods where she feels lost.

In a semantic sense, Nicole's and Jule's journey to Israel, similar to the idea of nostos, is centripetal as well as centrifugal. If it is a journey away from home to an ancient land,

it also signifies arrival into a world of possibilities. According to Freud, the uncanny “is actually nothing new or strange, but something that was long familiar to the psyche and was estranged from it only through being repressed” (Freud 2003, p. 148). The author’s gloss on the intriguing significance of the journey is telling enough, even as the novel echoes Freud: “If Freud were right about the uncanny stemming from something repressed that comes to light, what could be more *unheimlich* than returning to a place that one realizes one may never have left?” (Krauss 2017, pp. 70–71). Being a distant land invested with filial ties, Israel proves an enigma that eludes any sense of identity among diasporic Jews.

Krauss’s breakthrough, however, lies in adroitly delineating how Israel has evolved in the Jewish imagination. The novelist meditates upon how the nation has transformed itself from an exemplum of the global Jewry’s loyalty to an emblem of their salvation. To depict the fragmented, chaotic, and anomic ethos of a century of genocide and exile in a work of fiction is far from easy. Nonetheless, similar to many of her contemporaries⁵ who are, borrowing Primo Levi’s term, “proxy” witnesses⁶ to the Holocaust, Krauss finds it impossible to exorcize the unspeakable event’s trauma from her own identity. In Krauss’s diasporic imagination, Israel is situated in a dynamic relationship between survivor’s guilt and exilic memory. Therefore, the Jewish homeland is more of a symbol than a geographical reality. Transcending the temporal into the metaphysical, the journeys of third-generation Holocaust survivors to Israel appear less about embracing their roots or returning to the promised land and more about tracing the source of the inexplicable alienation that plagues them.

The twin issues of Israel’s representation and Jewish literature’s diasporic question remain dynamic and tumultuous as much in their own right as in their interrelationship. While defining diaspora’s paradoxical power, Jonathan and Daniel Boyarin in their Introduction to *Powers of Diaspora* (2002) elucidate, “On the one hand, everything that defines us is compounded of all the questions of our ancestors. On the other hand, everything is permanently at risk” (Boyarin and Boyarin 2002, p. 4). In *Forest Dark*, Krauss foregrounds the sacred Jewish belief in Yahweh himself ordaining the existence of Israel. In her meeting with the Israeli reporter Eliezer Friedman who helps her locate one of Franz Kafka’s long-lost manuscripts, Nicole contests his version of Israel as the eternal homeland knowing full well that most young native Israeli artists are keen to flee the country (Krauss 2017, p. 80). This evokes a sharp retort from Friedman, who recalls the inviolable devotion of the older generations of the diaspora who venerated Israel as the promised land. Expressing his conviction that the interplay between nostos and nostalgia requires a geographical locale to sustain itself, Friedman remarks: “That the reason we continue to live on this contested scrap of land today is because of the story we began to write about ourselves in this place nearly three millennia ago” (Krauss 2017, p. 81). In the novel, Epstein and Nicole who seek to slough off their former lives, attain a vision of redemption in reconciling their affinity for Israel with their American Jewish identities.

2.5. Holocaust Trauma and the Ethics of Remembering in *Forest Dark*

As a third-generation Holocaust survivor, Krauss understands that she cannot narrate her ancestors’ experiences the way survivors or their children could. Removed from the Holocaust’s brutalities by her grandparents and parents, all that the novelist could do is to engage with the catastrophe much as a survivor would deal with the trauma of dispossession. Tedeschi and Calhoun claim that if trauma exposure benefits people’s post-traumatic growth by testing their conceptions of themselves, the world, and the future, it may also help them in revising their worldview (Tedeschi and Calhoun 2004, p. 10). Their model of post-traumatic growth (PTG) reports positive psychological changes, including higher levels of fortitude, a sense of connectivity with the world, envisioning new possibilities and opportunities, a deeper grasp of spiritual and existential issues, and a greater respect for life. Similar to Krauss’s debut novel *Man Walks into Room* (2002), and her later novels *The History of Love* (2005) and *Great House* (2010), *Forest Dark* engages with these pivotal concerns. While portraying the impact of the Holocaust on the second-generation,

the novel also registers how a third-generation writer might reimagine the traumatic legacy of the Holocaust consisting in a fear of exile and extermination. Interestingly, Krauss employs post-memorial tropes and symbols to negotiate the transfer of trauma through generations. The author's literary works characteristically explore motifs of nostalgia, exile, and liminality to negotiate the catastrophic events of the Holocaust. In his review of *Forest Dark*, José Teodoro notes the novel's postmodern affiliations: "Epstein could be a Philip Roth character, but, given his fate, he could also be a Paul Auster character. Given its focus on dualisms, chance, and the liminal spaces in which writing things into being and out of being intermingle, it isn't crazy to consider that *Forest Dark*'s Escher-like premise could be that of an Auster novel" (Teodoro 2017). In its subtle yet profound reworking of the ethical obligation of remembering and representing, *Forest Dark* qualifies pre-eminently as a Holocaust narrative. No wonder Krauss's Israeli readers much more than her American readers make astonishing claims about her Jewish-themed novels. For instance, an older Holocaust survivor claims that reading Krauss's books brings her the vicarious sensation of spitting on Hitler's fictitious grave, while another reader maintains that the novelist's canon truly belongs to the Jewish people. As Avishai Margalit argues, "Collective memory has agents and agencies entrusted with preserving and diffusing it" (Margalit 2004, p. 147). Therefore, Jewish collective memory strives to preserve the history of attempted extermination in the face of denial and distortion. The ethical responsibility consisting in memorializing a Jewish legacy and strengthening the world Jewry resonates in the words of the novel's reporter Friedman: "We gave ourselves a past and inscribed ourselves into the future" (Krauss 2017, p. 81). The novel deftly underscores the ethical imperative to commemorate the Holocaust, one of the darkest catastrophic chapters in world history.

3. Conclusions

Krauss compellingly captures the third-generation Jewish writers' psychic dilemma attendant on the paradox of being bound to the Holocaust's trauma by cultural memory even when distanced from it by generations. For third-generation Jewish novelists, such as Nicole Krauss, Holocaust remembrance is an ethical duty to preserve the memory of the Shoah in public consciousness. It becomes imperative for the survivors' descendants to be mindful of the strenuous job of sifting fact from fiction. As Jenni Adams emphasizes, "The 'need for truth' appears particularly compelling given both the context of denial and the magnitude of the offence, while the 'opaqueness of language as such' is made emphatically evident in the disparity between the linguistic signifiers of suffering and the reality they attempt to denote" (Adams 2011, p. 23). The novel seeks to accomplish this through its innovative engagement with the metaphysical concept of a "cosmic multiverse" of endless possibilities, Freud's *unheimlich*, and a resonant treatment of the lost manuscript of the venerable East European Jewish author Kafka by imagining his possible reincarnation. These aspects of the novel complicate the uniform, comprehensive, and organized narratives that both articulate and constitute positivistic historical knowledge (Adams 2011, p. 23). Pertinently, Krauss asserts the impossibility of conjuring the story of survivors or their children whose lived experience of the Holocaust is immediate or proximal to their being (Aarons and Berger 2017, p. 149). Krauss's *Forest Dark* compellingly engages with this continual slippage inherent in the human condition without underplaying the gravity of the Holocaust.

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Notes

- ¹ The voices of the surviving Jewry—the apprehensions of the Holocaust refugees as well as the vociferous “pro-Israel” persuasion of the Zionists—drew international attention following the award of the Nobel Prize in Literature to Saul Bellow (1976) and Isaac Bashevis Singer (1978).
- ² In his essay “The Uncanny”, Freud posits that though the German word *unheimlich* (uncanny) is the opposite of *heimlich*, the uncanny is disturbing because it transports one to a scene that was once familiar. The uncanny, according to the thinker, signifies concealment and the term *heimlich* eventually overlaps with its contradictory *unheimlich*.
- ³ The term was first used in fiction in September 1961 in the DC comic book titled Flash of Two Worlds (Flash Volume 1 #123). In the story Flash meets with his duplicate version of another Flash (Flash-2).
- ⁴ Similar ideas prefigure even in second-generation American Jewish author Saul Bellow’s *To Jerusalem and Back*. In the travelogue, the author’s three-month-long retreat to Jerusalem exhibits the received wisdom about Israel that most diasporic Jews are conditioned to internalize. Disconnected from Israel’s religious and kibbutz life, Bellow finds his secular American sensibilities revolting against its Hasidim. Furthermore, given his assimilated Jewish-American identity, the author sees a separate homeland for the Jews as limiting rather than liberating. By the end of his war-reportage, he finds the country transformed into a biblical city that, at best, can help him escape the monotonous regularity of the American lifestyle. Bellow, however, welcomes the idea of an Israel that can determine its national culture and allow its Jewish citizens to live freely either secular or religious lives.
- ⁵ Third-generation Holocaust narratives such as Julie Orringer’s *The Invisible Bridge* (2010), and Natasha Solomons’s *Mr. Rosenblum Dreams in English* (2011), skillfully deploy tropes of nostalgia and displacement to depict a catastrophic event that occurred long before the authors were born. Unconditionally removed from the horrific memories of the Holocaust that plagued their grandparents and parents, these writers, however, stand incapacitated in recreating the story of survivors or their children for who the Holocaust continues to remain an immediate and extant reality.
- ⁶ The term has been used by Primo Levi in *The Drowned and the Saved*. This concept has been further studied in critical works such as *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* by Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub in the context of Holocaust testimony.

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