

"SWADDLED IN WHITE STRING": BREAKING LOOSE
FROM THE TIES OF FAMILY MEMORY
IN EVERYTHING IS ILLUMINATED

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ABSTRACT

Author Jonathan Safran Foer traveled to the Ukraine in search of the woman who saved his grandfather from the Nazis, and found nothing. Having intended to write a nonfictional account of his journey and findings, he realized as he sat down to write that he had to replace the missing information with an imagined personal history. From these inventions was born his novel, Everything is Illuminated.

This (re)creation process is characteristic of postmemory, a concept developed by Marianne Hirsch. Postmemory defines the relationship that children of exiled Holocaust survivors have with the memories of their parents. Because these children were not there to experience their families' trauma, they cannot adopt the memories of their parents but must instead invent their own memories. This essay explores how the novel's narrative structure, mythical elements, and resolution (or lack thereof) serve as solutions to allay the problems of postmemory.