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# “The Ghost Language Which Passes between the Generations”: Transgenerational Memories and Limit-Case Narratives in Lisa Appignanesi’s *Losing the Dead* and *The Memory Man*

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**Abstract:** This article aims to uncover the tensions and connections between Lisa Appignanesi’s autobiographical work *Losing the Dead* (1999) and her novel *The Memory Man* (2004) and to point out that, in spite of belonging to different genres, they share several formal, thematic, and structural features. By applying close-reading and narratological tools and drawing on relevant theories within Trauma, Memory, and Holocaust Studies, I would like to demonstrate that both works can be defined as limit-case narratives on the grounds that they blur literary genres, fuse testimonial and narrative layers, include metatextual references to memory and trauma, and represent and perform the transgenerational encounter with traumatic memories. Moreover, Appignanesi’s creations will be contextualised within the trend of hybrid life-writing narratives developed by contemporary British-Jewish women writers. Accordingly, these authors are contributing to the expansion of innovative liminal autobiographical and fictional practices that try to represent what it means to be a Jew, a migrant, and an inheritor of traumatic experiences in the post-Holocaust world. Finally, I launch a further reflection on the generic hybridisation characterising those contemporary narratives based on the negotiation of transgenerational memories, which will be read as a fruitful strategy to problematize the conflicts created when the representation of the self and (family) trauma overlap.

**Keywords:** transgenerational trauma; Jewishness; British-Jewish; memoir; holocaust; belatedness; journey; hybridity; meta-textuality

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## 1. Introduction: The Memoir Boom, Limit-Case Autobiographies, and British-Jewish Women Writers

It was at the turn of the millennium that the humanities witnessed what Andreas Huyssen described as an “obsession with the issue of memory” (Huyssen 1995, p. 9), which produced a “memory boom of unprecedented proportions” (p. 5), the consequences of which are still traced in those contemporary literary practices that portray memory as a site of contradictions. In light of this, an expansion of life-writing in its different manifestations has been observed since the end of the 1990s, along with a growing critical interest in autobiographical genres (France and St. Clair 2004). In her article “Writing Lives” (Light 2004), Alison Light reviewed the evolution of life-writing genres in Britain from the 1970s to the 2000s. As she points out, in the 1970s, autobiographical practices became powerful means to assert collective identities, and many writers used confessional poetry to express their internal suffering. In the 1980s, novelistic experimentation became very popular in the field, and fictional accounts of real lives multiplied. In the early 1990s, literary memoirs produced by well-known writers were very fashionable. Moreover, by the late 1990s and early 2000s, we witnessed what this critic described as a “post-autobiographical era” (Light 2004, p. 765), characterised by the blurring

of boundaries between fiction and reality and the emergence of a great variety of autobiographical subgenres, such as confessional memoirs, autofictions, autobiografictions, biomythographies, limit-case autobiographies, etc. Moreover, critics such as Light (2004) and Luckhurst (2008) consider that many of the autobiographical works published at the turn of the century dealt with challenging aspects concerning the narrativisation of the self against the background of some of the most painful historical events of the twentieth century. Likewise, this “memoir boom” seemed to be organised around the collective and individual need to voice disquieting experiences as well as to offer an alleviating mechanism for the conversion of traumatic memories into narrative ones.

Moreover, the expansion of autobiography should be framed within the ethical turn experienced in the humanities in the 1980s, which manifested itself as a renewal of interest in the ethical potential of literature—an issue that had lost importance in the previous decades with the demise of humanism. By that time, numerous progressive movements materialised in a renewed type of discursive ethics that allowed those sectors of society who had not yet found a voice to reconstruct their silenced (hi)stories in the public arena. In this vein, life-writing practices became a fruitful resource for them to start making visible their experiences of alienation and constructing their fragmented identities. For these marginalised groups, such as women and ethnic or sexual minorities, autobiographical writings offered the possibility of writing stories that had traditionally been omitted from hegemonic historical records. Thus, drawing on Laura Marcus’ relevant work on black criticism and historiography in relation to racial minorities, the genre of autobiography was “enlivened and in many cases transformed by feminist, working-class and black criticism and historiography” (Marcus 1994, pp. 210–11). In the case of women, Leigh Gilmore explains that “autobiography provides a stage when women writers, born again in the act of writing, may experiment with reconstructing the various discourses—of representation, of ideology—in which their subjectivity has been formed” (Gilmore 1994, p. 85). More recently, she has emphasised that “women’s life stories gained new prominence” (Gilmore 2018, p. 85) because of the expanding “memoir boom” that took place in the late twentieth century. For this scholar, these narratives “claimed memoir’s distinction as being the literary eyewitness to history, capturing the experience of complex lives not characterized by privilege and status” (p. 88). This explains why both the market and critics were particularly interested in their autobiographical works.

It is in this context that the writings of Lisa Appignanesi, a British-Canadian Jewish writer and psychoanalytic critic based in London, become relevant. Born in Poland in 1946, before moving to Canada and France when she was a child, Appignanesi went through the perils of Jewish migration and the difficult inheritance of her parents’ Holocaust memories. Her family memoir *Losing the Dead* (Appignanesi [1999] 2013) received significant attention at the turn of the millennium, since it revolved around the exploration of her parents’ experiences as Polish Jews during the Second World War. However, I have argued that Appignanesi’s autobiographical text means much more than that, as it comprises “a traumatic bildungsroman, a travel book, a family memoir, a collective account of many Jews that survived the camps, and a historical narrative about wartime Poland” (Pellicer-Ortín 2018, p. 8). This tallies with what Irene Kacandes has termed the “Holocaust family memoir”, a subgenre comprising “a small but noteworthy number of personal texts produced by those who count themselves as familially connected to the Shoah”, the emergence of which she places in the 1990s (Kacandes 2012, p. 179). Kacandes believes that this category describes Appignanesi’s book, along with others created by children of survivors, because such texts are narratives made of personal experiences, which “also draw on the personal experiences of family members of their authors” (ibid.). In the fictional domain, *The Memory Man* (2004), which won the 2005 Holocaust Literature Award, portrays a renowned neuroscientist who, after devoting all his life to research on memory, comes across some repressed memories of his childhood that disclose that he is a Holocaust survivor. In this novel, all the characters—neuroscientist Bruno Lind, his adopted daughter Amelia, Polish journalist Irene Davies, and Pole Aleksander Tarski—engage in entangled memory journeys. Here, Appignanesi revisits the topic of her family memoir. In fact, she not only revisits the topic, but there are also numerous textual and paratextual parallelisms between *Losing the Dead* and *The Memory Man*, which

have led some critics, including myself, to wonder whether “Appignanesi’s decision to revisit her family history through Bruno Lind’s story mean[s] that she has come to terms with her family past or that she is still grappling with it” (Grekul 2006, p. 178).

Considering this, the main aim of this study is to uncover both the tensions and connections between Appignanesi’s autobiographical and fictional works and to point out that, in spite of belonging to initially assumed different genres, memoir and fiction, they share several formal, stylistic, thematic, and structural features. By applying close-reading and narratological tools and drawing on relevant theories within Trauma, Memory, and Holocaust Studies, mainly those that are concerned with the narrative (im)possibilities of representing trauma from a transgenerational perspective, I would like to demonstrate that both works can be defined as limit-case narratives, following Gilmore’s conceptualisation (Gilmore 2001). Moreover, Appignanesi’s creations will be contextualised within the trend of hybrid life-writing narratives developed by contemporary British-Jewish women writers. Finally, I launch a further reflection on the generic hybridisation characterising those contemporary narratives that revolve around the negotiation of disturbing transgenerational memories. Liminality will, thus, be read as a fruitful strategy to problematize the conflicts created when the representation of the self and (family) trauma overlap.

As for the connection between autobiographical practices and the representation of traumatic experiences, Suzette A. Henke is one of many scholars and psychologists (Herman 2001; Bloom 2010) who have contended that autobiographical narratives could be understood in relation to other psychoanalytical healing methods, such as psychotherapy, counselling, group therapy, and the Freudian talking cure. Thus, autobiographical works could be seen as part of the process of “scriptotherapy”, which she defined as “the process of writing out and writing through traumatic experience in the mode of therapeutic re-enactment” (Henke 1998, pp. xii–xiii). Laura Marcus has also emphasised the therapeutic role that autobiography can have on traumatised subjects (Marcus 1994, p. 213), and Victoria Stewart has established significant links between the attempts to revisit the past through literature and these healing practices (Stewart 2003, p. 14). Accordingly, one of the main aims of traumatic life-writing would be to articulate some emotional crisis that has become unspeakable for the writer (Henke 1998, p. xviii). In this regard, focusing on contemporary literary representations of traumatic experiences, it has been observed that the “dialogism of the art of trauma suggests an affinity not only with the analysand–analyst relationship required by Freud and Breuer’s talking cure, but also with the I–you relationship of narrator–narratee in autobiographical and testimonial writings” (Ganteau and Onega 2014, p. 3). Moreover, although the “capacity of art to create and transmit unspeakable knowledge indirectly is set into question . . . by the ethical demand to represent the traumatic experience faithfully”, the collective and individual urge to “restor[e] this double dialogue might explain the proliferation of autobiographical and testimonial writings in the late twentieth century” (pp. 3–4).

As for the narrative representation of trauma, most literary critics within Trauma Studies—the Yale school critics who established the field in the 1990s (Felman and Laub 1992; Caruth 1995; Hartman [1996] 2002), literary scholars and historians expanding their theories in the 2000s (Rothberg 2000; LaCapra 2001; Whitehead 2004; Luckhurst 2008), and more recent academics reinterpreting the trauma paradigm (Crownshaw et al. 2011; Buelens et al. 2014; Ganteau and Onega 2014; Vickroy 2015; Bond and Craps 2020)—have understood that the representation of traumatic experiences usually leads to formal experimentation and a rupture with realistic narrative forms. For instance, Anne Whitehead has argued that, “the impact of trauma can only adequately be represented by mimicking its forms and symptoms, so that temporality and chronology collapse, and narratives are characterised by repetition and indirection” (Whitehead 2004, p. 3). This points to some of the features of trauma narratives identified by Luckhurst (2008): “[T]he challenge to conventional narrative frameworks and temporality” (p. 81), “intertextuality” (p. 84), “repetition” (p. 86), and the “multiplicity of testimonial voices” (p. 88). Ganteau and Onega have focused on “the complex modal and generic destabilisation that has

materialised in the upsurge of a plethora of new hybrid forms” (Ganteau and Onega 2014, p. 5), turning generic experimentation into one of the central aspects to consider when analysing trauma narratives.

The genre of autobiography has always allowed for special literary innovation. This would explain why “writers have historically made use of its literary elasticity to assert legitimacy, to challenge power, and to enable counterpublics to coalesce around life stories” (Gilmore 2018, p. 9). Therefore, it could be asserted that the complex relationship between trauma and life-writing contributed to an upsurge in one of those autobiographical subgenres that have emerged in the post-autobiographical era: the “limit-case autobiography”. Following Gilmore’s theories, these autobiographies are characterised by the blurring of diverse literary genres, the experimentation with traditional conventions of linear autobiographical practices, the combination of numerous testimonial and narrative layers, and the inclusion of metatextual references to trauma (Gilmore 2001, p. 14). After arguing that many recent autobiographical works deal with such traumatic events as the Second World War, the Holocaust, and nuclear bombs, Gilmore explains that our critical attention should be redirected to those “texts about trauma that test the limits of autobiography” (p. 3) because they can offer new alternatives to traditional autobiographical genres so as to make the representation of trauma possible. Moreover, in her more recent study of liminal autobiographical writings, mainly those by women belonging to marginalised racial groups, Gilmore has concluded that many of these texts “experimented with or exposed the limits of genre. Some revealed the limits of genre to contain their testimony: they were often hybrid in combining poetry with essays, memoir, and autobiographical fiction; occasionally bilingual; and innovative in drawing life story into new media, like graphic memoirs and blogs” (Gilmore 2018, p. 88). Thus, although autobiography has always been a fundamentally dialogic genre, the fact that it “should have undergone a process of hybridisation in order to meet the demands of representing the traumas of our contemporary age points to the complexity of these demands” (Ganteau and Onega 2014, p. 6). This aspect can lead us to assume that it is the intricate attempts to represent trauma in contemporary texts that have challenged the limits of autobiographical practices.

Jewish communities become especially relevant when considering those contemporary narratives that represent the contradictory identity construction when the subject is immersed in the process of both remembering and forgetting the traumatic past. Jewish writings can also be a fruitful space for the authors to encounter their complex memory legacies as part of the subsequent generations. It can be claimed that the commemoration of memories is part of Jewish culture and tradition, responding to a need deeply rooted in Jewish diasporic history and their perception of homeland as linked to trauma and displacement (Sicher 1998, p. 21). In fact, of all the groups that have been interested in coming to terms with issues of diaspora, exile, and trauma, particularly in relation to the Holocaust, Jewish communities in particular have tried to reconstruct their diasporic history and memory through multifarious writing practices. As such, they have produced works impregnated by a deep sense of dislocation (Jelen et al. 2011). As Ruth Gilbert puts it,

This lack of rootedness . . . is a recurring theme in other second and third generation Jewish writing. . . . for many British Jews of Eastern European heritage, this is further complicated by the fact that places of Jewish history were brutally annihilated in the Holocaust. The rupture from the past is, in this respect, unnaturally abrupt and deeply traumatic and many diasporic Jews have to rely on memory rather than place in order to make and renew identities. (Gilbert 2013, p. 5)

Therefore, the aforementioned formal liminality can be particularly identified in the works written by successive British-Jewish generations—Anne Karpf’s *The War After* (Karpf [1996] 2008), Linda Grant’s *Remind Me Who I Am, Again* (Grant 1998), Eva Figes’ *Tales of Innocence and Experience* (Figes 2004), and Eva Tucker’s *Becoming English* (Tucker 2009) are just some examples—who are uncovering their difficulties in connecting themselves with the traumatic experiences undergone by their relatives and with their present lives as immigrants, or children of immigrants, in Britain. The children and grandchildren of Holocaust survivors frequently deal with the struggle between leaving behind their families’ past in order to continue with their present lives and their moral obligation to bear

witness to the atrocities of the Holocaust (Glowacka 2012, p. 1). This responsibility and the complex retrieval of the past have resulted in a proliferation of experimental narratives by contemporary British-Jewish writers where the shadows and ghosts of the past haunt the present and the conflicts between the individual and the collective, the familiar and the national merge, giving place to hybrid narrative forms. Following Gilbert's ideas, this current wave of British-Jewish writing could be related to the fact that "the history of Jews in Britain is a story that has not yet been fully told. . . . Moreover, these British-Jewish writers, who are often two generations away from the Holocaust, are arguably well placed to articulate difficult issues in British as well as in Jewish histories. . . . [T]hey are able to confront a painful past, despite, or perhaps even because, that past is not directly theirs" (Gilbert 2013, p. 51).

Furthermore, all these complexities reach their highest potential in the works of those Jewish women writers who have had to cope with being Jews, émigrés, and women, adding their complex perspectives on questions of belonging to the intricate "Jewish question". On top of that, Jewish women tend to find themselves struggling between the traditional roles ascribed to them by a male-designed Jewish culture and a matriarchal religion that turns the family into the centre of Jewish values, together with their need to open up to modern societies (Tylee 2006; Las 2015). In the British-Jewish context, critics like Phillips and Baraister (2004), Lassner (2008), Gilbert (2013), and Valman (2014) have insisted that it was at the turn of the millennium when these authors started to make sense of their and their families' experiences of immigration and the Holocaust and to explore "female bodies, maternity and sexual politics" in their writings more openly (Valman 2014, p. 2). In a similar vein, it can be claimed that many of these writers exemplify some of the innovations that have been observed in the field of autobiography since the 1990s, as this was the time when these women started to discuss their complex Jewish identities and their lived or inherited Holocaust experiences publically. Thus, limit-case traces can be identified in such autobiographical works as Louise Kehoe's *In this Dark House* (Kehoe 1995), Leila Berg's *Flickerbook* (Berg 1997), Jenni Diski's *Skating to Antarctica* (Diski 1997), and Linda Grant's *Remind Me Who I Am, Again* (Grant 1998), which narrativise the authors' process of coming to terms with the inherited (hi)stories of the Second World War and the Holocaust. These liminal autobiographical practices tend to raise questions about the Jewish identity of their protagonists and the transgenerational transmission of trauma that occurs among the members of the families represented. Lisa Appignanesi's memoir and novel will thus be discussed in order to ascertain the extent to which the ghosts of her parents' experiences motivated her to create limit-case narratives, which challenge the representation of the self against inherited traumatic memories.

## 2. Trauma and Belatedness: Excavating the Haunting Past

Trauma writings in general and limit cases in particular have come to be defined by their fragmented structures, their lack of linear chronology, and their use of various narrative devices that combine times, spaces, and voices from the past and the present. The 1999 edition of *Losing the Dead* is divided into three main sections—"Scenes of Memory", "Excavations", and "Ghost Language"—which are framed by a foreword, "Legacies", and an "Afterword". "Legacies" contextualises the text within the debates on the transgenerational transmission of memories experienced by the ensuing generations of Holocaust survivors. Here, Appignanesi makes explicit her need to write this book in order to uncover her family history after her father's death and her mother's loss of memory. She also claims that the history of the Holocaust gives a profound, personal, and even physical dimension to her memory construction: "[M]ine is the last generation for whom the war is still a *living tissue of memory* rather than a dusty and barbaric history of facts and statistics. . . . The dead are lost. But maybe, none the less, it makes a difference if by remembering them, we lose them properly" (Appignanesi [1999] 2013, pp. 6–8, my emphasis). The first section, "Scenes of Memory", portrays those disjointed memories of Appignanesi's childhood from 1951 to the late 1960s—mainly her arrival and upbringing in Canada as a foreign Jew—which have troubled her since. Section two, with the significant title "Excavations", discloses the archaeological exploration of Appignanesi's family memories she carried out during her

trip to Poland in 1997. The final part, “Ghost Language”, narrates how the author-narrator’s inherited memories, once faced as an adult, have become a fundamental element of her narrative persona, even though she conceives them in terms of that language of ghosts, which marks the distance between her parents’ experiences and hers.

Above all, “Scenes of Memory” and “Excavations” remind us of the Freudian explanation for the way traumatic memories are processed, echoed by Appignanesi when she refers to the second generation of Holocaust survivors as the “Children of Freud” playing the “ultimate generation game” (ibid., p. 90). Already in 1925, Freud evocated memory as a mystic writing pad, where the inscriptions that appear on the pad’s surface may be eliminated by cutting out the celluloid’s sheet (Freud [1925] 1997). However, this excavation process, to use Appignanesi’s own words, becomes more complicated if the subject has gone through some traumatic experience. According to Freud, it is the unsuccessful “abreaction” of an initial shocking event that initiates the subsequent development of traumatic symptoms. After a “period of latency”, the subject starts experiencing acting-out symptoms, which can finally lead the individual to remove the memory covers under which the original traumatic episode has been suppressed (Freud [1939] 2001, pp. 67–68). In keeping with the reinterpretation of psychoanalytical theories carried out by such scholars as Geoffrey Hartman and Shoshana Felman, Cathy Caruth drew on Freud’s theories to explain the belatedness that characterises traumatic events when she defined trauma as a pathology consisting “solely in the *structure of its experience* or reception: the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its *possession* of the one who experiences it. To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event” (Caruth 1995, pp. 4–5, original emphasis). More recently, Luckhurst has defined psychical trauma in accordance with its belatedness as “something that enters the psyche that is so unprecedented or overwhelming that it cannot be processed or assimilated by usual mental processes. We have, as it were, nowhere to put it and so it falls out of our conscious memory, yet is still present in the mind like an intruder or a *ghost*” (Luckhurst 2006, p. 499, my emphasis), referring to the ghost language that predominates in Appignanesi’s narrative. Moreover, renowned psychiatrists Bessel Van der Kolk and Onno Van der Hart nuanced these notions when they distinguished between the processes of repression and dissociation as follows: “[R]epression reflects a *vertically* layered model of mind: What is repressed is pushed downward, into the unconscious. [ . . . ]. Dissociation reflects a *horizontally* layered model of mind: when a subject does not remember a trauma, its memory is contained in an alternate stream of consciousness” (Van Der Kolk and Hart 1996, p. 168, my emphasis). In its main section, *Losing the Dead* thus performs a vertical model of excavating the intertwined layers of Appignanesi’s family repressed memories.

Temporal belatedness is especially remarkable in the central section of *Losing the Dead*, where Appignanesi juxtaposes chapters narrated from her viewpoint at the moment when she returns to Poland in 1997 to visit places associated with her family’s Holocaust past (and thus titled “On Site”) with chapters framed in that distant past, revolving around different family episodes of the Second World War (titled “Wartime: 1939–41”; “Wartime: 1941–43”; “Wartime: 1943–45”; “Wartime and After”). Moreover, this memoir also employs a circular structure, as Appignanesi starts by returning to the day before her father died and finishes by visiting his grave more than twenty years later. This visit is evoked both in the initial foreword, as she remembers the family ritual one year after his death (Appignanesi [1999] 2013, pp. 4–5), and in the final “Afterword”, when she and her brother pay tribute to him, and she adds that they “are both happy that with all the lost dead, our father at least, is in a place where we can find him” (ibid., p. 253). These words indicate that closing the circle through this visit and the writing of this memoir may acquire a redemptive meaning for the author.

The manifestation of multitemporal levels is also visible in *The Memory Man*, as the organisation of the narration reveals. Section one, “Present Tense”, revolves around the moment when Bruno goes back to Vienna, the city of his birth, for a memory conference, which triggers the journey to the past. In section two, “Past Perfect”, the chapters again alternate between the war years (1938, 1939) and the present—a narrative aspect that suggests that Bruno is still disturbed by his past. “Past Historic”,

the title of the third section, refers to a verbal tense that points to an action begun and finished in the past. Reflecting Freud's model again, this feature indirectly alludes to the traumatic memories that the protagonist had repressed in his unconscious, which come to the surface in this section, again juxtaposing the past (1940, 1942) and the present. The final part, "Return", goes back to the present moment, when important secrets of the characters' lives are disclosed; for instance, Bruno is revealed as Irena's father. In addition to this, circularity—with its redemptive qualities—also features in the novel, which ends by portraying its main character rounding off his reconciliation process during a visit to his father's unmarked grave in Mauthausen: "[I]t had cleared something in him. Even if it was also the passage to his own death. He allowed the childhood tears, never shed, to roll down his cheeks. It was some kind of small memorial" (Appignanesi [2004] 2005, p. 256).

In conjunction with these structural elements, narrative discontinuities are evident in both texts through continuous flashbacks and the juxtaposition of past and present, producing incomplete stories that readers are bound to piece together. Likewise, discontinuity is a recurrent theme in both Appignanesi's memoir and novel, since the characters often reflect on the ruptures that their traumatic experiences have inflicted on their lives. In *Losing the Dead*, the author-narrator recognises that her memory is "a montage of disparate fragments" (Appignanesi [1999] 2013, p. 91), whereas in *The Memory Man*, Bruno is portrayed in the following terms: "He had spent so long dealing with memory as chemistry that having to confront his own past as narrative, whatever the *ruptures and blanks*, presented itself as a daunting task" (Appignanesi [2004] 2005, p. 43, my emphasis), and Irena's stream of thoughts about her mother's loss of memory, which she equates with Austrian traumatic history, reveals that both her individual and the collective memory are characterised by "[s]o many *ruptures*. So many *discontinuities*" (ibid., p. 93, my emphasis). These examples demonstrate that, as the narratives advance, the author and her fictional characters are aware of the disruptions that the lived or inherited traumatic experiences have brought into their lives through their thoughts of memory as something fragmented and fragile.

### 3. Multivocality and the Blurring of Boundaries between Author and Narrator

Another common trait of liminal life-writings identified in *Losing the Dead* is the focus on the distinction between the writer and the autobiographical protagonist, in order to illustrate "the constructedness of autobiography" (Gilmore 2001, p. 98). Appignanesi's memoir makes this explicit in the "Afterword" to the 2013 version, as she elaborates some interesting meta-reflections on the act of writing her autobiographical work and her subsequent novel. These reflections explain that she wrote these texts, first, because her parents' memories were still tormenting her and, second, because of the fruitful connections she could establish with her readers through her texts: "As for me, the whole matter of my parents and Central Europe continued to *haunt* me and turned into a later novel *The Memory Man*. Maybe it was simply the number of letters I received about *Losing the Dead*: the book seemed to have touched so many people" (Appignanesi [1999] 2013, p. 258, my emphasis). Moreover, although these meta-reflections frame her memoir, her initial reluctance to face her younger self, something that characterises many trauma narratives, is also present throughout *Losing the Dead*. Appignanesi acknowledges that she had always wanted to "bury the past and its traces" (ibid., p. 68) and recognises her incapacity to comprehend some episodes that took place during her childhood. A good example is when she cannot understand her father's anxiety when he has to show his official documents during a family journey: "[A]s a child, I could never understand why these border-crossings were so excruciating, though for many years after I started to travel on my own, I would find myself edging into a nervousness akin to my father's when I approached a national frontier" (ibid., p. 57). This passage displays the distinction between the child and the adult narrator, as the latter can recognise that she has inherited some of her father's traumatic symptoms by experiencing the same fears she once observed in her father.

In addition to this, Appignanesi obscures the presence of the prevailing extra-homodiegetic narrator in her memoir on many occasions. Just as in numerous Holocaust testimonial narratives

where “protagonist and narrator are two aspects of the same person, separated by the gulf between the unidentified present of the narration and the past of what is narrated” (Miller 2012, p. 32), this “separation” is continuously blurred throughout this memoir. The focalisation changes between the adult focaliser visiting Poland in the 1990s and the child focaliser who did not understand many of the events happening around her. For instance, she describes her family when she was a child as follows: “[M]y mother was the liar, my father the silent, inscrutable one, while I was the truth-teller. Or at least the truth-knower. In my fantasy of my childhood self, I rarely speak. I am a quiet girl who keeps her own counsel” (Appignanesi [1999] 2013, pp. 34–35). This episode reveals that, even though the family description is contextualised in the past by having recourse to the past simple tense when setting the scene (“was”), she uses the present tense (“speak”, “am”) when describing some of her childhood memories, which seem to be stuck in her unconscious as if a part of the girl she was then has been kept silent all these years. In fact, her adult self recognises this when, looking at the list of Polish Holocaust survivors in the archives of the Judaic library in Warsaw, she refers to that child within herself who finds it difficult to comprehend the traumatic events her parents went through: “Now that my father’s name perversely leaps out of me, I am at a loss. Despite my middle age, *the child inside me*, like all omnipotent infants, has had difficulty in believing that my parents really did lead a life which pre-dated me” (ibid., p. 106, my emphasis). Moreover, this mixing of verbal tenses continues through the narrative. In particular, in the “Wartime” sections, Appignanesi combines historical discourse, using the past tense, with family history, narrated in the present—again suggesting that those upsetting memories continue to haunt her as an adult (Freud [1939] 2001, pp. 36–38; LaCapra 2001, p. 21; Greenspan et al. 2014, p. 215). In those cases, she sometimes calls her parents father or mother (Appignanesi [1999] 2013, p. 186) but, on other occasions, they are referred to as Aron and Hena (ibid., pp. 190–91), as if they were external characters. I interpret this as a narrative strategy that distinguishes her memories of the stories her parents told her—when she uses the possessive article “my” and mostly the present tense, as in “My father is uncertain. All his capital is tied up here. There is his baby boy to consider. Warsaw is no place for an infant” (ibid., p. 136)—from the fragments of her parents’ lives she encounters in historical archives or family records, when she has recourse to the third-person characterisation.

Furthermore, in addition to her childlike voice, that of her parents, and the one provided by historical records, she also has recourse to her brother’s: “Suddenly my brother’s memory enters the narrative as a more consistent voice. . . . [H]is remembering didn’t always coincide with my parents’” (ibid., p. 202). These words draw attention to the polyphonic nature of this autobiographical text, where clashing voices emerge from the past, fighting for pre-eminence. Therefore, *Losing the Dead* may be said not to “attempt to confer the status of truth on an invented narrative and to assert an autobiographical identity” (Gilmore 2001, p. 145), as usually happens in limit-case autobiographies. In contrast, as the author-narrator states in comments such as “[t]ruth is a slippery substance and it can easily slip away in a kind of familial osmosis” (Appignanesi [1999] 2013, pp. 37–38), she envisions truth as an intangible and questionable entity that permeates the family history. In other episodes, such as when she explains that, “my brother would contend during rows that I was the product of my mother’s affair with the KGB colonel. . . . We’ll never know the truth. What do we know is that family romance is a rich terrain for fantasy” (ibid., p. 212), her autobiographical account highlights the unreliability of memories and the impossibility to know the truth of events that have not been experienced first-hand, those that have become part of the family mythology.

When it comes to the combination of verbal tenses, although Appignanesi’s fictional work also relies on the technique of juxtaposition, since the chapters alternate temporally and are connected spatially through the places Bruno visits in the present, the mixture is not as fragmentary as in *Losing the Dead*. This could be because, in her more explicit autobiographical text, the author tries to express her lived and inherited traumatic experiences, but their unspeakable nature makes it complicated to narrate them through a linear time dimension. *The Memory Man*, on the other hand, even though it is based on a similar journey through trauma, offers the author greater distance to portray the main

character's traumatic experiences. Yet a parallel amalgamation of voices to that identified in her memoir features prominently in *The Memory Man*. Here, a third-person, extra- and hetero-diegetic narrator leads the narration and what changes is its focalisation, which moves between Bruno, Irena, Amelia, and even Irena's mother, Marta. This combination of perceptions indicates that the recovery of hurtful memories cannot be effectively achieved by relying on individual accounts, but needs to incorporate all the agents implied in these episodes—Bruno as a Holocaust survivor; Irena as a successor of those many Poles who attempted to help the Jews during the war; and Amelia as a peculiar representative of the second generation of Holocaust survivors, being Bruno's black adoptive daughter.

Accordingly, the use of narrators and focalisers in this novel can be understood following Gilmore's theory that many liminal stories are told from the perspective of a child or refer to traumatic experiences that occurred during the protagonist's childhood (Gilmore 2001, p. 75). In fact, the recourse to internal focalisation from a child's perspective appears to be a recurrent mechanism in narratives dealing with traumatic memories, as this technique offers "a highly subjective and emotionally involved version of the past" (Neumann 2008, p. 142). In Appignanesi's fiction, the child focaliser is essential as readers have access not only to digressions to the war years through his childlike eyes but to the emotions experienced at that moment, which have been blocked out with the passing of time. For instance, in the sixth chapter ("1938"), we find some examples of this child focalisation as Bruno remembers an encounter with Nazi officers before his father was killed through the eyes of the child he was by then—a child who wondered about trivial things such as the clothes he was wearing and used infantile and affectionate vocabulary to refer to his relatives:

Bruno refused to look up. His gaze was stubbornly fixed on his knees. They were knobbly . . . Why hadn't they let him put on his long trousers? *Grandpa* and *Grandma*, when they came to meet them at the station, would think he was still a baby, like Anna. There she was lying in *Mamusia's* arms . . . And the border guards had been horrible, scoffing at them when they came to check their papers. (Appignanesi [2004] 2005, p. 73, my emphasis.)

In this chapter, we can also identify his childlike reaction, again because of the caring words he used to allude to his father, to the exclusion he suffered at the Polish school because of his Jewishness: "He had never thought much about being a Jew until some of the boys in school had made it an issue. He had to ask *Papa* . . . what was wrong with it" (ibid., p. 74, my emphasis). Nevertheless, on other occasions, the account points to the rupture between the child who witnessed the Holocaust and the contemporary focaliser, who can now reflect on the way his earlier self confronted these historical events: "[Y]oung Bruno had not known when he returned to Przemysl in that autumn of 1940 that in a few brief months, his boy's-own-story sense of the war would be thrust backward. . . . That their murderous battle against the Jews had only just begun" (ibid., p. 119). These words illustrate that, as young Bruno was immersed in the war, he was unaware of the personal and historical meaning these events would have in the narrative of his life and that of his generation.

#### 4. The Journey as a Symbol and Structural Device

Another relevant aspect is that these two texts are motivated, and, therefore, organised according to the main characters' unsettling physical and spiritual journeys to the past. In the case of Appignanesi's *Losing the Dead*, this journey is motivated both by her father's death and her mother's memory loss due to Alzheimer's: "I would like to give my mother's past back to her, intact, clear, . . . the task, I know is impossible" (Appignanesi [1999] 2013, p. 8). She describes the meaning of this journey for her memoir on several occasions. For instance, she refers to the process of writing the book by making use of imagery and terminology related to the journey and the act of excavating the past:

a *journey* into my parents' past . . . I suspect they passed these patterns on to my brother and me . . . Understanding this transgenerational haunting is part of the *journey* . . . The *journey* is not a pleasure *cruise*, with its stopping points already marked in our good, linear fashion. In

a sense it is more like an *archaeological excavation* . . . I question my own shards of memory. But this is the only place I can begin. (Appignanesi [1999] 2013, p. 9, my emphasis)

Likewise, in *The Memory Man*, Bruno's trip to the land of his Jewish past is what initiates the reconstruction of his memories: "Had Bruno Lind known what awaited him when he returned to the city of his birth, he might not have made the *journey*. As it was, he wasn't quite sure what had brought him to visit a Vienna he hadn't set foot in since childhood" (Appignanesi [2004] 2005, p. 7, my emphasis). Furthermore, the narrative contains another journey within this journey: the one Bruno undertakes with his daughter and friends to Krakow in Chapter Five, which culminates in the visit to his father's unmarked grave in the concentration camp. Episodes like these show that these journeys are made of various entangled layers that complicate the processes of memory "excavation": the journey into the parents' past by visiting the protagonists' homeland (Poland, in both cases); the revisiting of the main characters' childhood; and the journeys into the protagonists' unconscious, which give access to their lived or inherited repressed traumatic memories, ultimately culminating in the writing journey on which Appignanesi embarked when she decided to transcribe her fragmented memories into textual artefacts.

These aspects seem to offer strong proof of David Brauner's argument that post-Holocaust British-Jewish writers in the 1980s started to feel intrigued about the meaning of their Jewishness and felt the need to initiate, and, thus, represent in their writings, spiritual and physical journeys to the past (Brauner 2001, p. 3). For this critic, this is mainly the case when the writer has recently faced his or her parents' deaths and needs to revitalise their memories to keep their (hi)stories alive. Appignanesi is also motivated to embark on this journey because of the disintegration of her mother's memory, just like other British-Jewish women authors such as Linda Grant in *Remind Me Who I Am, Again* (Grant 1998). The fact that Appignanesi's return originates in her mother's illness adds a significant transgenerational value to this challenging journey, since the figure of the mother as the keeper and transmitter of memory for the Jewish religion and tradition is essential (Tylee 2006). If this matriarchal memory figure quivers, the pillars of the Jewish family memory are at risk, and, thus, Appignanesi seems to try to restore them in her memoir.

Apart from the journey, other images textualise traumatic processes. In *Losing the Dead*, some recurrent images refer to the traumas of Appignanesi's parents. There is a telling episode in this regard when the narrator compares the hospital where her father is about to die with the moments he endured in the concentration camp: "[H]e transformed the ordinary London hospital ward where he lay into an SS camp. The white-coated doctors became black-uniformed officers, their boots hammering over floorboards with deadly intent as they approached its cell. Medical implements were instruments of torture, the oxygen mask a purveyor of poison gas" (Appignanesi [1999] 2013, p. 3). This comparison also exemplifies the process of repetition-compulsion and acting out of trauma—defined as the stage in which "tenses implode, and it is as if one were back there in the past reliving the traumatic scene" (LaCapra 2001, p. 21)—that her father was going through during the last days of his life. In this sense, uniforms, as well as other symbols related to war episodes like the crossing of frontiers, are relevant images in this memoir, which symbolise her father's fear of SS soldiers: "Terror, for him, always came in uniform" (Appignanesi [1999] 2013, p. 4). In addition, memory processes are symbolised in numerous ways, such as through photographs (*ibid.*, p. 29) and mirrors (*ibid.*, pp. 110, 120), and their unreliable and multidimensional nature is regularly highlighted. In fact, the most persistent metaphor in *Losing the Dead* is that of ghosts that haunt the author-narrator's present and force her to revisit a past whose "traces lingered on. Like some *ghost*, it *haunted* our lives and appeared in odd places. Writing this book has made some of these *hauntings* clearer to me" (*ibid.*, p. 237, my emphasis). The recourse to ghost imagery as a metaphor of the acting out of trauma and the haunting nature of the past has been well-documented in Trauma Studies (Abraham and Torok 1994; LaCapra 2001; Atkinson 2017) as a textual motif to symbolise the insidious and tormenting nature of trauma. In Appignanesi's case, the ghost metaphor both refers to relatives whose memories come back to life in the present and to

the verbal and physical language through which those experiences have been transmitted to the writer and her brother, as will be further analysed.

In *The Memory Man*, there is also a persistent use of metaphors associated with acting-out processes. For example, traumatic memories are represented by overwhelming sensorial images, evoking the unbearable presence of the past. This can be observed in Bruno's description when he enters the family apartment: "Would there be ghosts lurking in the walls, odours to choke him springing up between floorboards, stray messages from his mother lost behind sofas . . . ? He needed to get out of here. The place was airless. Like a tomb" (Appignanesi [2004] 2005, pp. 36–39). These "ghosts", "odours," and "messages" embody the haunting and disturbing memories of his parents who seem to come alive, like his father moving in his "tomb". Another recurrent metaphor is that of the train, which symbolises a kind of time machine that allows Bruno to go back to the years when he became a displaced person (ibid., p. 61). Its movements also reverberate the memory journeys Bruno and the other characters undergo in the narrative, as he thinks "in his night-state of random associations that perhaps her death had brought all the others back, like a train which moved backwards to pick up its passengers" (ibid., p. 254). Yet the train is also associated with death, as it was the means of transport used to take Jews from the ghettos to the concentration camps during the Holocaust, and are described as "movable cemeteries" (ibid., p. 60). Finally, beyond its title, the novel is replete with metaphors that allude to memory processes. An excellent example appears when Irena Davies summarises the results of her research on memory by listing diverse ways in which different fields of study conceive it:

There were metaphors from photography in which memory acted like a chemical, leaving ghostly images behind; and from archaeology with its shards and relics, all needing sifting and reassembly. Meanwhile, from the digital world came hard and soft discs and neural nets. There were also homunculi and mystic writing pads in which scratchy traces or scars were left on a hard plate that was continually being overwritten. (ibid., p. 44)

These words illustrate the processes of constructing and representing memories according to such different fields as photography, archaeology, the digital world, and psychoanalysis. However, all of them allude to the process of tracing and uncovering memories described in the novel, echoing in a metatextual way the theories on memory that are used to read Appignanesi's texts.

Nevertheless, in the particular case of *The Memory Man*, I have previously explained (Pellicer-Ortín 2019) that the process of forgetting and the failure to recall memories become even more relevant than the remembering itself. This failure tends to be represented by the collapse of language when putting Bruno's repressed traumatic memories into words: "He began to feel they were hieroglyphs in a lost language poised to reveal a long-hidden secret he hadn't known they contained" (Appignanesi [2004] 2005, p. 4). Bruno evolves from repression, which causes the repetition-compulsion observed in the narration, to the dissociation of his traumatic memories until he can assimilate them. According to the Freudian notions mentioned before, it is usually a second traumatic event, a "deferred action", which activates the memory of the initial shock. The "deferred action" happens when Bruno arrives in Vienna and hears a name related to the war times, but which he is unable to decode: "Aleksander Tarski? The syllables coiled round him and forced him to turn. Somewhere in him, it seemed, the fear was still alive, despite the passage of years. He stumbled, had to lean against the counter to catch breath and composure" (ibid., p. 5). Such acting-out symptoms as fear and breathing difficulties prevail in the first chapter, and they terminate in Bruno's breakdown in front of his childhood home when he is hit by a skater. This episode describes the scene in very violent terms to highlight the physicality of the acting-out process in which the subject relives in his body the traumatic experience of the past: "Each punch came with the punctuation of vile curses he wasn't allowed to use. All of them ending in the word 'Jude'—'Jew' until the taste of blood was the taste of that word, and the world ended" (ibid., p. 11). It is this second shock that triggers his repressed memories and makes him faint (LaCapra 2001, p. 21). Two pages later, the focaliser, due to his background as a memory specialist, recognises it as part of the repetitive compulsion of the traumatic attack his family suffered in that very same

place (Appignanesi [2004] 2005, p. 13). Thus, the narrative offers several hints suggesting that there is a deeper trauma that has been repressed by the protagonist, and the major moment of disclosure takes place in Chapter Thirteen, when we discover that in 1942, Bruno witnessed Nazi soldiers shooting his mother and sister, but could not prevent it. The focaliser recounts how his immediate reaction was that of paralysis and of not wanting to wake from such a nightmare: “He was only able to move after what felt like an eternity trapped in stone. He stumbled. The blood was terrible. Terrible. Everywhere and terrible. . . . He wanted to say some prayer, sing some song. But nothing came to him. . . . Then he covered the graves and lay down beside them. He hoped he would never have to wake” (ibid., pp. 177–78). Bruno had felt paralysed since that initial shock because his defence mechanism was that of burying his mother and sister, both literally and metaphorically.

### 5. The Transgenerational Transmission of Holocaust Memories

The narrative disruptions analysed mirror the generational conflicts depicted by Appignanesi, as her texts demonstrate that the children of survivors of traumatic events in general, and of Holocaust survivors and refugees in particular, often face the contradictions implicit in any traumatic process, between their desire to leave their families’ past behind and their responsibility to bear witness to it. According to Efraim Sicher, the second generation is more driven to pursue meaning and understanding (Sicher 1998, p. 27) because they need to comprehend as well as maintain the “burden” (ibid., p. 35) inherited from their predecessors. Memory researchers such as Sicher (1998), van Alphen (2006), Hirsch (2008) and Frosh (2019) have explained that the second generation act as the recipients of their ancestors’ traumatic memories either through their silences or repetitive stories (Frosh 2019, p. 157), and of the collective memory of the Holocaust. Although they have a strong desire to create a natural bond with their ancestors, they do not manage to foster this continuity, as they did not witness those experiences (van Alphen 2006, p. 497). The notion of “postmemory” coined by Hirsch in 2008 has become extremely popular when highlighting the disconnection between the survivors and their progeny. According to her, this term “reflects an uneasy oscillation between continuity and rupture. And yet postmemory is not a movement, method, or idea; I see it, rather, as a structure of inter- and trans-generational transmission of traumatic knowledge and experience. It is a consequence of traumatic recall but (unlike posttraumatic stress disorder) at a generational remove” (p. 106).

In a recent discussion on the concept of postmemory, psychologist Stephen Frosh has referred to this second-generation struggle by relying on Polish-American author Eva Hoffman when she described the inheritance of her parents’ Holocaust memories as “shadows” haunting her present (Hoffman 2005, p. 66). Thus, he explains that

The tendency is to think that when we are haunted by ghostly figures and events from the past, the “shadows” to which Hoffman refer, it is because the issues that they raise—mostly of maltreatment, violence, untimeliness, and trauma—have not been resolved and continue to fester, becoming a kind of poison in the bloodstream of the present. . . . This places responsibility for dealing with these ghosts not on the individuals who are possessed by them, but on the circumstances . . . that impede their laying to rest. (Frosh 2019, p. 159)

His words can be useful to comprehend the complex process of dealing with the ghosts of the past for the subsequent generations, who need to solve the inherited conflicts that hover over their lives and are urged to know more about the historical context that allowed those traumatic episodes to happen. This issue becomes especially evident in British-Jewish writings, as Gilbert has argued that there is a “wider cultural anxiety about disconnection among British Jews” (Gilbert 2013, p. 33), which has become even more prominent in women authors. For example, she examines memoirs by Eva Figs, Anne Karpf, Lisa Appignanesi, and Eva Hoffman, focusing on how they “explore the ways in which the experiences of the children of refugees and Holocaust survivors are formed in relation to memory” (ibid., p. 45). Most of these writers have thus created “narratives of the self that recognise the often provisional, unstable nature of both memory and subjectivity. . . . In negotiating their way

through layers of family memory these writers show that memory can be unreliable, inconsistent, fickle and dangerous" (ibid., p. 46). Applying these ideas to *Losing the Dead*, the Holocaust comes to the surface through the process of excavating memory described above. Moreover, when this happens, the author-narrator reclaims her personal attachment to this historical episode: "[T]he Holocaust presented to us was not a distant, unitary horror, an inviolable absolute, like some secular religion through which a collective identity built on suffering is consolidated. They had lived through it and their memories particularised it for us" (Appignanesi [1999] 2013, p. 242). These words make clear the conflicts lived by the descendants of Holocaust survivors when they attempt to connect with the episodes suffered by their ancestors. The process of the transgenerational transmission of traumatic memories in *Losing the Dead* is represented through the repetition of stories from a past that seemed very distant and unknown to young Lisa: "The stories were repeated, amplified, changed for each new listener or each new occasion. Their common point was that they had nothing to do with the here and now. They were another time and distant places" (Appignanesi [1999] 2013, p. 22). Eventually, they became part of her family mythology, evident in episodes like: "[T]hese were my childhood fairytales . . . No one bothered with Grimm. But at the age when I had grown out of fairytales, they persisted" (ibid., p. 25). The recourse to the imagery of fairy tales is very common in writings by descendants of Holocaust survivors, as we can observe in Yane Jolen's *Briar Rose* (Jolen [1992] 2019), Louise Murphy's *The True Story of Hansel and Gretel* (Murphy 2003), and Eva Figes' *Tales of Innocence and Experience* (Figes 2004) among others, who end up integrating the history of the Holocaust into their own mythologies (Brauner 2001, p. 32) as part of a reality that can be better explained through the language of myth.

Furthermore, for Appignanesi, the family tensions largely revolve around the traumatic memories she and her brother inherited from their parents: "I suspect my parents infected me with their wartime experiences of waiting" (Appignanesi [1999] 2013, p. 19). Just as transgenerational memory was referred to as something physical, as a "living tissue" (ibid., p. 6), the term 'infection' alludes explicitly to the transmission of traumatic symptoms, mental and psychosomatic, that has often been observed in the descendants of Holocaust survivors (Kellerman 2001; Fossion et al. 2014). In her case, she does not proclaim that she is traumatised and she even recognises that her childhood was not especially unhappy or traumatic (Appignanesi [1999] 2013, p. 241). However, we can observe some traumatic traces in her identity and memory construction throughout the narrative. To begin with, she admits her impulse to repress the past (ibid., p. 68) because a "whole reconciliation process" in herself (ibid., p. 71) was a very overwhelming task. Furthermore, she identifies self-prejudices about Polish and Jewish relationships (ibid., p. 79) as well as feelings of fear, resentment, and displacement (ibid., p. 222)—all of them inherited either from her mother's silences or from her father's fits of rage. Another consequence of this transgenerational transmission of traumatic memories relates to the fact that the author-narrator has particular difficulties with feeling connected to the main model embodying memory in Jewish families: her mother. This becomes more evident in the chapter "Blonde and Dark". The symbolic relationship between blonde and non-Jewish and dark and Jewish saved Appignanesi's family during the war, since while her mother pretended to be a Pole, her father had to hide due to his 'Jewish' looks. Being a very young child, Appignanesi learnt to relate darkness to negative and shameful qualities, while fairness represented the opposite. This led to an ambivalent relationship with her mother, her admiration mixing with her rejection of her 'non-Jewish' appearance. This ambivalence could also be interpreted as part of the author's internal struggle about the role of memory carrier she seems to inherit from her Jewish mother. In the "Afterword", she acknowledges that she recognises bits of herself in other children of survivors when she explains some of their traumatic symptoms:

There is sometimes a parent-child dynamic at work in which a messianic hope is attached to the child who must enact great deeds to justify prior loss. This can be felt by the young as a burden or as an electric charge, an act of faith. Children can experience the tragic weight of their parents' past lives as something which is so much greater than their ordinary, everyday complaints, that these can never be voiced or shared. . . . Alternately, this burden from the past can be experienced as something children need to compete with to gain parental attention

... In the ghost language which passes between the generations, all this played itself out over time between my parents, my brother and myself. (ibid., p. 241, my emphasis)

This episode refers to the expectations projected over the children of survivors, the guilt and extreme responsibility this could imply for them, as well as the nullification of their emotions. Appignanesi admits that she and her brother inherited all these contradictions through their parents' "ghost language", verbal or physical, which haunts the whole narrative.

*The Memory Man* narrates the process of the transgenerational transmission of memories through the relationship between Bruno and Amelia. Amelia becomes a central element in Bruno's return to the past once she arrives in Vienna, as she insists on visiting the family house: "Her voice was an invitation to tell the story he had always avoided" (Appignanesi [2004] 2005, p. 32). Thus, the second-generation role in decoding the past is emphasised in this novel. Amelia is also a clear model of the transgenerational process of transmission, which becomes evident when she says to Bruno: "Even if you don't talk about it, it's there. It's there in your silences, in your gestures, in the odd things that make you angry. ... You're a mystery I want to understand" (ibid., pp. 124–25). This comment suggests that Amelia has perceived her father's trauma through his silences, in opposition to the repetitive stories that were transmitted to Lisa and her brother in *Losing the Dead*. Again, the trip around Krakow they undertake together unveils the contradictory feelings between wanting to know their family history and to deny it that are so common to the second generation: "She had wanted to hear, wanted to know, but she also wanted to block her ears to the horror" (ibid., p. 222). However, despite this initial reluctance, she becomes an essential agent in his father's process of reconciliation. The most evident episode in this regard happens when Bruno visits his mother and sister's grave. This moment helps Bruno confront the pain he had repressed for so many years, and some kind of reconciliation happens when Amelia convinces the people inhabiting the area to build a proper grave for them. After this difficult encounter, Bruno seems to start incorporating the original traumatic event into the narrative of his life. Accordingly, Amelia acts as a guardian of her father's memory and thus becomes a member of Hirsch's "generation of postmemory". Similarly, understanding Amelia as a fictional alter ego of the author, in that Appignanesi recounts a similar reconciliatory journey in her memoir, the role of this writer in decoding her family history in *Losing the Dead* also positions her as part of that "generation of postmemory". Just as Appignanesi's memoir is about her process of discovering her family history, this progression is reflected in *The Memory Man* because Amelia acts as a witness of both Bruno's father's traumatic (hi)story and the process of rediscovering that (hi)story.

Furthermore, the problematic Jewish bonds with the land and with identity questions, which tend to characterise contemporary British-Jewish writings, are also revisited by Appignanesi. Following Gilbert's idea that "Jews need memory, transmitted through families, to substitute for the breaks and fissures resulting from a collective history that has been marked by repeated geographical and cultural displacements" (Appignanesi [1999] 2013, p. 26), efforts to define Jewish identity and to establish connections with countries where Jews have settled characterise their liminal writings. This can also be explained if we look at the vast number of critical works trying to define what we mean by Jewishness (Gilman 1986; Lyotard [1988] 1990; Webber 1994; Cheyette 1996; Stähler 2007). The ambiguity of this concept has been promoted both by Europeans in the West, who have considered the Jew as the archetypal Other, and by Jews themselves, who have often fostered this otherness by interpreting war and migration in mythical terms.

In *Losing the Dead*, Appignanesi describes how her family chose Canada as a refuge from war "because it was terra incognita, a blank whiteness, unmapped by myths, unpeopled by named individuals. ... My father ... would even joke that when Moses, that lifelong stammerer, had designated the promised land as 'C ... C ... Canaan'" (Appignanesi [1999] 2013, p. 16). Her words reveal the family's attempts at escaping the conventional identity of Wandering Jews by migrating from Poland to a country "unmapped by myths" and embracing the possibility of starting a new life far from stereotypical Jewish identities. However, these stereotypes are very difficult to evade, as the author-narrator remembers she did not feel wholly at ease as a Jew in Canada, realising that she

was not really part of the Canadian community either physically, when her nose started to grow and her darkness was more than evident (*ibid.*, pp. 41–42), or spiritually, when she experienced feelings of shame and self-hatred (*ibid.*, p. 75) and internalised her exilic nature: “I could never quite get rid of my romantic sense that if the Jews were really to be Jews, they had to be in exile” (*ibid.*, p. 80).

The role of Jewishness in contemporary Europe, as Drewniak has observed, is specifically addressed in *The Memory Man* when, for instance, the characters visit the old Jewish neighbourhood in Krakow. Even though there are almost no Jews left, it can be noticed that, “Jewishness flourishes in a very acutely performative way” (Drewniak 2012). Through Appignanesi’s characters’ visits to sites of the past, the singular Jewish bonds with the land are problematized as Jews are again associated with a status of exile. When Bruno visits his family’s old neighbourhood, for instance, these places make Bruno remember how, as a child, he already learnt that being a Jew meant living in fear, and “living in fear meant living in secrets. Hiding in one way or another” (Appignanesi [2004] 2005, pp. 160–61). Moreover, in this case, the attachment to the land also becomes necessary for the main character to recover his traumatic memories and acknowledge his Jewish memories and roots. This is underlined when the reader finds out that Amelia had converted to Judaism before this trip, showing an unconscious but deep connection to her father’s past and displaying a personal tribute to her adopted ancestors.

As for Appignanesi’s relationship with her place of birth, Łódź, she had visited Poland previously, but it was not until 1997 that she could relate to her family’s Jewish roots in more personal terms. Although she could not find the grave of any of her relatives and found out that her “parents’ house has been torn down and replaced by a public library” (Appignanesi [1999] 2013, p. 120), she could feel “the full weight of this terrible history” on her shoulders when she encountered such Polish Holocaust landmarks as the Umschlagsplatz in Warsaw. She discovered the original sites of her father’s recurring nightmares and even reached the cemetery of Łódź, where she imagined her parents desiring to leave Poland after the war. As she says, echoing the recurrent phrase in the novel that became its title, “they want a new life. They want to *lose the dead*. Maybe that’s all I’m doing here in Poland, too. *Losing the dead* all over again” (*ibid.*, p. 220, my emphasis). Consequently, the places of the past connect Jewishness with the atrocities endured by European Jews during the Holocaust, from which only some of them, like the author-narrator’s family, escaped, at least physically.

## 6. “Remembering as Imagining”: Generic Hybridity and Metatextual Dimensions

The narrative struggle and overlap between the representation of the self and trauma obscures the distinction between literature, testimony, and autobiography in Appignanesi’s texts. In *Losing the Dead*, the author not only relies on family records to fight against the fear of losing family memories but also has recourse to historical sources (databases, libraries, museums), which impregnate some sections of the book with a historiographic tone. Returning to Gilmore’s ideas about limit-case narratives, she has claimed that these works tend to blur the boundaries between autobiography and other genres such as fiction, history, legal testimony, psychoanalysis, and theory (Gilmore 2001, p. 14) in order to render visible the inconsistencies resulting from the conflict generated when the representation of the self and trauma intersect (*ibid.*, p. 19).

Further, Appignanesi’s memoir contains numerous references to the act of storytelling. For instance, her mother is portrayed as a fiction teller who made up many of the family stories, increasing the unreliability of Appignanesi’s inherited memories (Appignanesi [1999] 2013, pp. 34, 39). This aspect seems to have influenced her own career as a novelist—“Sometimes I secretly think that writing fiction, which is what I mostly do, is simply a way of acting out my mother’s fabulations, while being able to insist on a certain honesty in everyday life” (*ibid.*, p. 238)—and even her consideration of life as “the story we tell ourselves about it” (*ibid.*, p. 241). This conception relates to the fact that liminal autobiographies are not only concerned with the story of what happened to family members during the Holocaust, but with the “story of getting that story” (Kacandes 2012, p. 180). For Kacandes, Holocaust family memoirs are characterised by narrating the process of recovering family history so

that “anchoring these authors’ parents’ stories in ‘real’ history [may be] partially accomplished by foregrounding how that history made itself in the authors’ own lived experiences” (ibid., p. 183). This would explain the abundance of metatextual references to the process of the creation of *Losing the Dead* as well as the fact that the memoir is framed within a preface and an afterword that make the process of recollection undergone by the author in the production of this text more visible.

Both of these liminal texts are characterised by a self-conscious testimonial nature, since they usually contain a vast number of references to traumatic processes. As such, the author-narrator explains how familiarising herself with trauma theory, to which she makes extensive allusions in the last section of her memoir (Appignanesi [1999] 2013, pp. 239–42), and meeting other people in a similar situation helped her notice that there was a deep gap at the centre of her life. In fact, she is aware that many of the traumatic symptoms her parents showed and she inherited have since been catalogued as mental illnesses: “[M]y parents shared with others who lived through the Holocaust a range of problems which the psy-professions have now described . . . I recognise bits of myself in other children of survivors, too” (ibid., pp. 240–41). The presence of metafictional features is more telling in *The Memory Man*, which is not only a novel about memory but also a novel about the repression and representation of memories as well as how scientific and collective memory discourses are constructed. The allusions to scientific concepts within neurobiology, Trauma Studies and Holocaust Studies evince the metatextual dimension of this narrative.

As a final point, the parallelisms mentioned between the author’s own life, her narrative persona in her memoir and the memory journeys depicted in fictional form should be considered as part of the dialogue between fact and fiction that Appignanesi establishes between these two texts at a variety of levels—formal, thematic, and paratextual—which increases their liminality. Regarding form, in spite of their differences—such as the abundant mixture of verbal tenses present in *Losing the Dead* or the greater emphasis on failure in the process of recalling memories characterising *The Memory Man*—these two writings have recourse to belatedness and circularity as organising narrative devices that produce texts characterised by discontinuities and polyphony as well as representing lived or inherited traumas through haunting images. These parallels are obvious in paratextual terms since, as Grekul argues, “the same wartime photograph of Appignanesi’s mother appears on the covers of both and the novel’s back cover blurb tells us that, with this book, Appignanesi ‘returns to the terrain’ of her family memoir” (ibid., p. 178). Following Grekul’s ideas, these aspects point in two directions: Appignanesi’s memoir requires and imposes some fictional interpretations and the author explicitly acknowledges the presence of storytelling and fabulation in her text, whereas her novel demands and restricts readers to an autobiographical reading. As Appignanesi writes in the afterword of her memoir: “Remembering—as the poets and writers have long known and neuroscientists have now concurred—is also a form of imagining” (Appignanesi [1999] 2013, p. 260). This sentence fuses the three dimensions—literature, neuroscience, and memorialising practices—that Appignanesi wisely intertwines in her works with the ultimate goal of “giving life to [her] parents’ war and its rumbling aftermath” (ibid., p. 260).

## 7. Conclusions: “One of the Most Intimately Engrossing Tasks Ever Taken on as a Writer”

As Caruth explains, trauma raises questions that “can never be asked in a straightforward way, but must, indeed, also be spoken in a language that is always, somehow, literary” (Caruth 1996, p. 5). Indeed, the representation of individual, family, and collective traumas in Appignanesi’s texts leads to an enriching dialogue between nonfiction and fiction and to the use of a variety of literary devices, which multiplies the layers that must be uncovered to understand the pain represented at the heart of these narratives. Thus, it can be confirmed that both *Losing the Dead* and *The Memory Man* should be read as limit-case narratives on the grounds that they blur literary genres, fuse testimonial and narrative layers, include metatextual references to memory and trauma, and represent and perform the transgenerational encounter with traumatic memories. Both writings textualise the struggles endured by the later generations of Holocaust survivors when negotiating their past and their Jewish

identities in the post-Holocaust world. As Appignanesi puts it in the quotation used for the title of this essay, “the ghost language which passes between the generations” (Appignanesi [1999] 2013, p. 241), her texts show the potential of the literary to create a specific language which contains the lived and inherited pain caused by such atrocious historical episodes as the Holocaust. Although “[t]he subject [of autobiography] is already multiple, heterogeneous, even conflicted, and these contradictions expose the technologies of autobiography” (Gilmore 1994, p. 85), these contradictions become more relevant for the structural and formal arrangement of those narratives that depict a process of negotiating traumatic memories, lived or transmitted, at the heart of the narrative. Following Ganteau and Onega’s ideas, considered either in terms of genre or mode, hybrid and liminal forms “harness their representational powers to the evocation of trauma” (Ganteau and Onega 2014, p. 14).

Appignanesi’s creations have been read as part of that trend of hybrid life-writing narratives fostered by contemporary British-Jewish women writers since the turn of the century. Works like these seem to prove that British-Jewish female authors are contributing to the expansion of innovative liminal autobiographical and fictional practices that try to represent what it means to be a Jew, a migrant, and an inheritor of traumatic memories in the post-Holocaust world. In Gilbert’s view, such writers as Michelene Wandor, Diane Samuels, Julia Pascal, Ruth Fainlight, Elaine Feinstein, Linda Grant, and Jenny Diski, among whose ranks Lisa Appignanesi should also be included, “have contributed to recent developments in British-Jewish women’s writing. As these women rewrite traditional stories, engage with history, and reflect on what it means to be a British Jew” (Gilbert 2013, p. 133). Belonging to the second generation of Holocaust refugees in Canada and then in Britain, Appignanesi problematizes both the troubled meanings attached to Jewish identity as well as the intricate process of establishing some kind of connection with the Jewish family roots. In effect, the theme of the Jewish family has played such an important role in texts by British-Jewish women writers that Claire M. Tylee has referred to them as “contemporary Jewish-British family sagas” (Tylee 2006, p. 17). These sagas, both fictional and (semi)autobiographical, usually trace a Jewish family in Britain through several generations, and the family (mainly the relationship with the mother figure) may appear either as a scene of generational conflict or a source of joyful perpetuation; however, what is certain is that “either way, Jewish writers do not take the existence of the Jewish family for granted as a secure background” (ibid., p. 17). These tensions are represented in both *Losing the Dead* and *The Memory Man*, in which the family is not “a secure background” but the sphere in which Jewish memories and identities are transmitted, negotiated and, perhaps, accepted.

Ultimately, the generic hybridisation and meta-testimonial dimension that characterise *Losing the Dead* and *The Memory Man* should not be seen as an isolated phenomenon that only affects this particular group of writers. Instead, it is a much more general strategy used by contemporary authors to problematize the conflicts created when the representation of the self and (family) trauma interact. The present essay has demonstrated that a different way of both writing and reading autobiography and fiction, looking for the intricate (dis)connections between memory, life, and the textual artefact, is necessary when it comes to comprehending “one of the most intimately engrossing tasks ever taken on as a writer” (Appignanesi [1999] 2013, p. 260); that is, the task of losing as well as recovering ghosts from the past.

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