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## I.

“Auschwitz. Not Far Away. Nor Long Ago” is an exhibition coproduced by the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum (Poland) and the European – Spain-based – company Musealia. The fact that this exhibition – scheduled to be held in 7 European and 7 US cities – not only will be shown around Europe but also that its inauguration took place in Madrid on December 1, 2017 demonstrates a keen interest in Holocaust-related issues in Europe in general and in Spain in particular. The subject of the Holocaust has proven to be especially popular with Spanish students at a tertiary level. Therefore, in order to better understand the attention to Jewish American Literary Studies within this framework, it will be helpful to explain the changes that European – and Spanish – education has undergone at a tertiary level in the past decade.

From an educational perspective, 1999 was a key year because the “Bologna Declaration” was signed by the ministers of Education from 29 European countries. From its inception in that year until 2010 – the adoption of the Budapest-Vienna Declaration – the aim was to create “The European Higher Education Area (EHEA),” whose main goals have been, among others: (1) to shift from a teacher-centered to a student-centered approach in education through the development of students’ competences; and (2) to promote mobility and employability of European citizens.<sup>1</sup> (Throughout this process, universities have played a vital role in the enhancement of a European cultural area.)

Traditional degrees were gradually replaced by Bachelor's degrees in European universities between 2005 and 2010. Undoubtedly, this has brought about many changes in European – and Spanish – syllabi. One of the Bachelor's degrees affected by these changes is “English Studies” – in Spain, known as “Filología Inglesa” (“English Philology”) until recently. Specifically, throughout this degree students are trained, for instance, in “literature and culture in English.” This includes, but is not limited to, introducing them into literary analysis of texts in English, and Modernist and Postmodernist Movements such as Feminism, Psychoanalysis, Cultural Studies, and Multiculturalism, among others. In virtually all “English Studies” syllabi in Spain, there are courses devoted not only to U.S. canonical literature but also to literature of ethnic minorities and of the diaspora. Since the implementation of the Bachelor's degrees in European universities, many advances have been made but there is also a lot to be done.

A decisive concept in shaping current European education policies has been – and still is – “competence.” The European Commission aims to improve “key competences” – “knowledge, skills, and attitudes that will help learners find personal fulfilment and, later in life, find work and take part in society.”<sup>2</sup> These include not only “traditional skills” such as literacy, foreign languages and Science, but also “horizontal skills” such as learning to learn, cultural awareness and creativity.

One of the most important “traditional skills” pointed out by the European Commission is “literacy.” Eurydice, a network that supports European cooperation within the framework of lifelong learning, opens the “General Introduction” of *Teaching Reading in Europe: Contexts, Policies and Practices* like this:

The written word is present everywhere and therefore reading is a fundamental skill which is increasingly needed in almost every sphere of life. *A wide range of reading skills, including digital reading, are essential for an individual's*

*personal and social fulfilment, for taking an informed and active part in society and exercising full rights of citizenship. Furthermore, these skills are essential for entering and advancing in the labor market. Those with inadequate reading skills have their life chances limited in today's society*<sup>3</sup> (emphasis added).

It is clear, then, that promoting the reading competence is beneficial for students not only at an academic and/or professional level but also at a personal level because it will help them develop as individuals in a far better way.

As regards “horizontal skills,” a “key competence” is “cultural awareness.”

Chapter 5 “The user/learner’s competences” of *The Common European Framework of Reference for Language* (hereafter, *CEFRF*) is partly devoted to “cultural awareness.” It explicitly says that “[k]nowledge, awareness and understanding of the relation – similarities and distinctive differences – between the ‘world of origin’ and the ‘world of the target community’ produce an intercultural awareness.”<sup>4</sup>

In order to help develop through Jewish American Literary Studies “cultural awareness” and a number of competences as required in present European syllabi, this chapter will look at how Cynthia Ozick’s *The Shawl* (1989), Michael Chabon’s *The Final Solution* (2004) and Jonathan Safran Foer’s *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* (2005) can be used in a university literature classroom.

## II.

Although the competence-based model does not necessarily equate to better quality education, a number of European educators and researchers think this new approach can be interpreted as a chance to enable students to adjust themselves to different

situations.<sup>5</sup> The competence-based model is a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes.

As described at the outset of Chapter 1 of The *CEFRF*,  
The *Common European Framework* provides a common basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, examinations, textbooks, etc. across Europe. It describes in a comprehensive way what language learners have to learn to do in order to use a language for communication and what knowledge and skills they have to develop so as to be able to act effectively.<sup>6</sup>

One of the syllabi to which The *CEFRF* refers is “English Studies,” which in the case of the Universidad Complutense de Madrid (hereafter, UCM) was implemented in 2009-2010. My proposal in this chapter is to introduce Ozick’s *The Shawl* and Chabon’s *The Final Solution* in two undergraduate courses, “Ficción Contemporánea en los Estados Unidos”<sup>7</sup> and “Literatura de Etnicidad en los Estados Unidos: Literatura Afronorteamericana y de la Diáspora.”<sup>8</sup> As specified in the section of “competences” in these two course syllabi,<sup>9</sup> through *The Shawl* and *The Final Solution* students can not only learn from such catastrophic events in European *and* world history like the Holocaust but they can also learn to make informed judgments about this historical period that the teacher has previously contextualized.

My proposal also includes introducing Jonathan Safran Foer’s *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* in two courses – “The History of America as a Land of Immigrants” and “Multiculturalism: Ethnic American Cultural Expressions” – in a Master’s Programme in “North American Studies” taught at “The Franklin Institute” (Universidad de Alcalá de Henares, hereafter UAH) and at the already mentioned

UCM.<sup>10</sup> To give an example, the second part of “Multiculturalism,” as specified in its syllabus,

focuses on the representation of history and memory in contemporary literature [...]. The concept of “traumatic realism” will help students understand some ways in which victims of war, the Holocaust and other genocides, natural disasters, violence or terrorism can work through the horror of their experience, overcome silence and represent memory when writing or producing other forms of art.

I firmly believe that Foer’s novel is not only an ideal novel to explore the theme of “traumatic realism” but it can also help students develop a series of competences that are part of this Master’s Programme, such as competence 2 (CE2) which enables them to learn about a variety of key events in the recent History of the United States. In this case, *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* is the traumatic experience of the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the Twin Towers seen through the lens of a 9-year-old child.

### III.

Cynthia Ozick’s *The Shawl*<sup>11</sup> is made up of two stories, “The Shawl” (1980) and “Rosa” (1983), originally published in *The New Yorker*. “The Shawl” focuses on Rosa – a Holocaust survivor – and her efforts to save her 15-month-old daughter Magda from starvation. It is a narrative about the protagonist’s suffering as an epitome of the Holocaust victim’s pain. The second story is about Rosa, whose past is a burden that does not allow her to live in the present, but just in the past. “The Shawl” is like a symbol of the memory of Magda, who has been haunting Rosa for the past 40 years in the same way as images of the torture and murder of people in concentration camps

haunt Holocaust survivors. I find that these two stories are an excellent choice for at least two reasons: on the one hand, they can be used in the aforementioned “Ficción Contemporánea en los Estados Unidos” to analyze, among others, issues like women writers’ fiction, gender and race included in this course syllabus; on the other, they facilitate the introduction of the theme of PTSD in literature, a topic through which part of the first objective of this course can be achieved.<sup>12</sup>

According to The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorder IV*<sup>13</sup> of 1994, the diagnostic criteria for PTSD include, among others: (1) an individual’s exposure to a traumatic event that he or she will eventually re-experience through a number of repetitive images and/or thoughts, flashbacks and nightmares; (2) an individual’s use of violence as a way to lessen his or her feelings of anger and/or sadness; and (3) his or her impairment at social, occupational and personal levels which results in social withdrawal.<sup>14</sup>

In “The Shawl,” Rosa clearly refuses to sleep for fear that Magda, her young child, will be discovered and killed. The fact that she has become accustomed to living like this could explain why she has developed hypervigilance – a typical symptom of PTSD – defined as an “abnormally increased arousal, responsiveness to stimuli, and scanning of the environment for threats.”<sup>15</sup>

In spite of Rosa’s alertness, her baby is discovered by an SS officer – possibly Magda’s father. The officer kills Magda by flinging her onto an electrified barbed wire fence. Undoubtedly, this is Rosa’s most traumatic concentration camp experience. Her persistent re-experiencing of this event is clear in her daily repetition of Magda’s life and death. Soon Magda becomes an *idée fixe* for Rosa, for whom time stops after seeing her daughter’s murder. I think that Rosa’s replay of Magda’s death, her fantasies, obsessions, and inability to overcome the horrors of the Holocaust are symptoms of

PTSD. Rosa's emotional unbalance is obvious when she tells Magda that "to soothe [Stella's] dementia, to keep her quiet, I pretend you died."<sup>16</sup>

The first reference to Magda's death is made almost at the end of "The Shawl," where the electrocution of the little girl on an electrified fence goes like in slow motion.

All at once Magda was swimming through the air. The whole of Magda traveled through loftiness. She looked like a butterfly touching a silver vine. And the moment Magda's feathered round head and her pencil legs and balloonish belly and zigzag arms splashed against the fence, the steel voices went mad in their growling, urging Rosa to run and run to the spot where Magda had fallen from her flight against the electrified fence.<sup>17</sup>

This passage is an epitome of Rosa's traumatic memory. Her re-experiencing of this haunting thought is a clear symptom of (1) in the diagnostic criteria for PTSD explained above.

On other occasions, Rosa's traumatic memories are activated when she sees objects that remind her of the concentration camp, for example, the barbed wire which, she feels, is an impediment to leave the hotel,<sup>18</sup> and her niece Stella's birthday present, a blue-striped dress whose stripes remind Rosa of inmates' clothes:

Rosa tugged, and the dress with the blue stripes slid like a coarse colored worm out of twisted bedsheets. The hole in the armpit was bigger now. *Stripes, never again anything on her body with stripes!* (Emphasis added). She swore it, but this, fancy and with a low collar, was Stella's birthday present, Stella bought it.

As if innocent, as if ignorant, as if *not there*<sup>19</sup> (emphasis in the original).

Rosa instinctively associates the smell of the room, the barbed wire and the blue-striped dress with her concentration camp experience, which provokes in her anxiety and fear.



A second key PTSD symptom in Rosa is her use of violence. Anger and hostility are often associated with post-Holocaust sequels. Typically, after a traumatic experience like the Holocaust, the persons with PTSD undergo periods of time when they feel rage toward anyone who could be blamed for their trauma or toward those associated with the trauma. Their anger may be so intense that the individuals with PTSD display it symptomatically by attacking other people or breaking objects. In Rosa's case, her bouts of violence help her mitigate her feelings of anger and helplessness. At the beginning of "Rosa," her use of violence is obvious when she smashes her glass store: "Rosa Lublin, a madwoman and a scavenger, gave up her store – she smashed it up herself – and moved to Miami. It was a mad thing to do."<sup>20</sup> This kind of behaviour – "a mad thing to do" – is probably caused by her own frustration. If this is the case, Rosa has used violence to mitigate anger, a coping strategy pointed out in (2) of the diagnostic criteria for PTSD above.

The last distinctive symptom of PTSD in her is connected with the significant personal/social impairment she has been experiencing for the past 40 years. Her desire to dwell in the past and her inability to overcome her trauma help us better understand why she is incapable of developing a stable relationship with her suitor Persky, an American Jew, who embodies the present/future. Persky is the man who could help her leave her trauma behind and, consequently, help her come to terms with herself. Unfortunately, many Holocaust survivors find it hard to form long-standing, intimate relationships. Rosa, who has a serious psychological problem, needs medical treatment. Without it, she is most likely to continue to suffer from a disorder like PTSD that will prevent her from communicating with other people in a more natural way.

Rosa is an epitome of the adult who suffers from PTSD symptoms. In Linus Steinman's case – the protagonist of Michael Chabon's *The Final Solution*<sup>21</sup> – PTSD

symptoms are experienced by a 9-year-old German-Jewish refugee: “The introduction of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as a diagnostic category in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (American Psychiatric Association, 1980)<sup>22</sup> prompted a focus on children’s symptoms that appear after the occurrence of disasters.”<sup>23</sup> In children, PTSD can be perceived days or weeks after a disaster has struck. As in the case of adults, PTSD is typical of children who have experienced a man-made genocide like the Holocaust, or a natural disaster such as an earthquake or a tsunami, to give two examples. Among others, children with PTSD may typically show the following symptoms: (1) they often have nightmares; (2) they develop specific fears such as the fear of death/dying; (3) they have difficulty in establishing social relations; and (4) they may reveal communication problems.<sup>24</sup>

In *Voicing the Void: Muteness and Memory in Holocaust Fiction* (1997), Sara R. Horowitz explains that “[t]he trope of muteness, predominant in Holocaust narratives of all sorts, functions in fiction deliberately and explicitly to raise and explore connections and disjunctures among fictional constructs, textual omissions, and historical events.”<sup>25</sup> In effect, muteness symbolizes the source of trauma – the Holocaust itself – and the effect of such trauma throughout an individual’s life. To my mind, a paradigmatic example of this kind of trauma is 9-year-old Linus Steinman. Michael Chabon introduces a mute child who is unlikely to recover his voice. Linus’s speechlessness points to the atrocities suffered by the child. In this sense, his muteness is probably a synecdoche for the inadequacy of language to express the horrors of Auschwitz – “l’univers concentrationnaire” to use David Rousset’s phrase, or in Aharon Appelfeld’s explanation, “[t]he inability to express your experience and the feeling of guilt combined together and created silence.”<sup>26</sup> This is the case with Linus: he is incapable of talking to any of the people he encounters throughout the story: the Anglican priest and

his family with whom he stays, the local inspector Michael Bellows, the old detective, etc.

In spite of being spared the traumatic experience of the death trains and the concentration camps, the children of Holocaust survivors like Linus were transmitted their parents' fears, anxieties and other traumatic experiences: "... the boy and his parents were spared deportation in 1938. Taken off the train at the last moment, I gather."<sup>27</sup> Linus Steinman, who arrived in England from Germany as a deportee, was one of the ten thousand child refugees brought on the *Kindertransporte* (Children's transports): "Master Steinman came to us from Germany. ... He formed part of a small group of children, most of them Jewish, whose emigration to Britain was negotiated by Mr. Wilkes, the vicar of the English Church in Berlin."<sup>28</sup> The so-called "Holocaust trains" were used to send Jews to forced labour camps. Without the mass transportation of Jews on these trains, the scale of the "Final Solution" – *Die Endlösung der Judenfrage* – would have been very different: Thousands of deaths could have been prevented.

After his parents' disappearance, Linus only trusts his parrot Bruno. Every single evening, he listens to Bruno's train song – a traumatic event – that the parrot only performs at night. This echoes the time when the trains loaded with Jews were bound for the concentration camps.

The sound of the train song, arising in the middle of the night, would jar the man from his slumber, send him scrabbling for his pencil and pad. When at last he was awake, sitting in a circle of light from the lamp with pencil clutched in his fingers, then – of course – Bruno would leave off singing. Night after night, this performance was repeated.<sup>29</sup>

As in the case of “The Shawl” and “Rosa,” the references to the electrified (barbed-wire) fence are another clear example of a Holocaust-related image that eventually underscores the protagonist’s PTSD. Early in the narrative, when the old detective sees Linus approaching the fence, he shouts at him “[f]or pity’s sake, you’d be fried like a smelt! [...] One can only imagine the *stench*. ”<sup>30</sup> Later in the story, the boy skewers his hand on barbed wire. While the old man is helping him get the wire out of his hand, Linus bursts into tears: “He took hold of the boy’s hand. On the back, just below the wrist, a puffy nipple of flesh, tipped with the black filament of the barb. [...] The boy wept freely during this procedure.”<sup>31</sup> The fact that his hand gets stuck in the fence does not only account for his inability to escape the horrors of his background, but it is also a reminder of the presence of history as trauma in many individuals’ daily lives.

The last Holocaust-related image used in Chabon’s story that I would like to analyze is the numbers in German that Bruno utters. The first reference to this is made at the outset of the narrative when the detective hears Bruno recite sets of numbers in German: 2175473 (“Zwei eins sieben fünf vier sieben drei”),<sup>32</sup> 4849117 (“Vier acht vier neun eins eins sieben”),<sup>33</sup> and 9938267 (“Neun neun drei acht zwei sechs sieben”).<sup>34</sup>

Although the narrator cannot explain the meaning of the numbers, it is obvious that the numbers Bruno repeats throughout *The Final Solution* allude to the registration numbers inmates were tattooed upon their arrival at Auschwitz. The tattooed numbers on the left forearms of the prisoners held and killed at Auschwitz evidence “the horrors of dehumanization” – i.e. the hatred of Jews. When addressing this theme elsewhere,<sup>35</sup> I refer to the “speakability/muteness dichotomy, a major feature of Holocaust narratives.” This dichotomy, respectively epitomized by the parrot and Linus, seems to “reveal ambivalence, a struggle between the impossibility to express the horrors of the Holocaust and the obligation to do so.”<sup>36</sup> Unfortunately, Linus’s inability to utter a

single word – this is connected with PTSD-related symptom number (4) – is unlikely to be overcome.

#### IV.

In the previous section, I attempted to demonstrate that Cynthia Ozick's *The Shawl* and Michael Chabon's *The Final Solution* are two excellent novels that not only help explain the theme of the Holocaust but they also favor the acquisition of a number of competences in the two aforementioned undergraduate courses in "English Studies."

For this section, I have chosen Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* because this novel enables us to explore the issues of "memory," "trauma" and "genocide," among others. These three themes – which are connected with the topic of PTSD – are included in a "Programme Specialization: Literature and Culture" in a Master's Programme in "North American Studies" taught at "The Franklin Institute" (UAH) as well as at the UCM. In two of the Master's courses offered – "The History of America as a Land of Immigrants" and "Multiculturalism: Ethnic American Cultural Expressions" – one of the aims is to study "theoretical concepts" that include "immigration, American dream, ethnicity, canon, race, gender, genre, feminism, Marxism, *genocide, trauma, memory*, etc." (emphasis added) "to approach the study of literature in America from a new perspective."<sup>37</sup>

As in the case of Linus Steinman, Oskar Schell, the protagonist of *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*,<sup>38</sup> is a traumatized child who suffers from PTSD. Apart from the symptoms pointed out in *The Final Solution* above, children who have been exposed to a traumatic event – in Oskar's case, The World Trade Center terrorist attacks – among others, typically (1) tell fibs to avoid such things as confrontation or trouble; (2)

play posttraumatic games like drawing, writing or pretending; (3) develop specific fears such as the fear of death/dying, airplanes or undergrounds; and (4) experience feelings of uncertainty about the future.<sup>39</sup> (Below, I will show how 9-year-old Oskar has these symptoms. If, as explained above, Linus's muteness can be a synecdoche for the inadequacy of language to express the horrors of Auschwitz, Oskar's fear of death and bouts of anger, among others, show the degree of severity of the PTSD symptoms in him.)

Oskar is a highly imaginative child who explicitly says that his inventions and fabrications are linked to his father's death and, more specifically, with his uncertainty about how he really died. When Oskar talks to his grandfather Thomas Schell, he explains that "I need to know how he died ... So I can stop inventing how he died. I'm always inventing. ... I want to stop inventing. ... There were so many different ways to die, and I just need to know which was his."<sup>40</sup> As Oskar acknowledges very early in the novel, if his father were alive, he would have no need for imaginative invention: "Being with him made my brain quiet. I didn't have to invent a thing."<sup>41</sup> Consequently, his fibs and inventions,<sup>42</sup> a kind of shell to protect himself from the outside world, probably account for his wish to retrieve a world exterminated after his dad's death. To my mind, Oskar's inventions are part of his childish fantasy world where people can be saved from a terrorist attack like the one his dad suffered: "All I wanted was to fall asleep that night, but all I could do was invent. What about frozen planes, which could be safe from heat-seeking missiles? What about subway turnstiles that were also radiation detectors?"<sup>43</sup>

Oskar's fantasy world, like Rosa's, often clashes with reality. For instance, when he confesses to Mr. Black that there are plenty of things which have often made him panicky and anxious after 9/11.

“There was a lot of stuff that made me panicky, like suspension bridges, germs, airplanes, fireworks, Arab people on the subway (even though I’m not a racist), Arab people in restaurants and coffee shops and other public places, scaffolding, sewers and subway grates, bags without owners, shoes, people with mustaches, smoke, knots, tall buildings, turbans.”<sup>44</sup>

Some specific people, places and objects make him more aware of death. In a conversation with his mother, Oskar expresses his anguish about dying and she reassures him saying that “[y]ou’re not going to die any time soon. You have a long, long life ahead of you.”<sup>45</sup> This preoccupation with death appears again when Oskar is watching an interview with a Japanese woman whose daughter Masako has died in her arms after the attacks. Oskar occasionally suffers from bouts of anxiety and uneasiness when he faces the possibility of ceasing to exist.

She came back over and put her hand on my cheek and said, ‘*You’re not going to die.*’ I told her, ‘*I am.*’ She said, ‘*You’re not going to die any time soon. You have a long, long life ahead of you.*’ I told her, ‘*As you know, I’m extremely brave, but I can’t spend eternity in a small underground place. I can’t.* Do you love me?’ ‘Of course I love you.’ ‘Then put me in one of those mausoleum- thingies.’ ‘A mausoleum?’ ‘Like I read about.’ ‘Do we have to talk about this?’ ‘Yes.’ ‘Now?’ ‘Yes.’ Why?’ ‘*Because what if I die tomorrow?*’ ‘*You’re not going to die tomorrow.*’ ‘*Dad didn’t think he was going to die the next day.*’ ‘*That’s not going to happen to you.*’ ‘*It wasn’t going to happen to him.*’ ‘Oskar.’ ‘*I’m sorry, but I just can’t be buried*’<sup>46</sup> (emphasis added).

As explained before, many children with PTSD like Oskar develop specific fears such as the fear of death/dying.

Oskar has another symptom of PTSD. In connection with posttraumatic games like drawing and writing pointed out above, there are several allusions to pictures and writing in the novel. For example, while Oskar is searching for clues which enable him to find out how his father actually died, the kid enters a stationery shop where he sees papers handwritten in many colours. He comes across his father's name Thomas Schell<sup>47</sup> written in red – in reference to blood (death). The postmodernist device of using a number of pages filled up with names in different colours<sup>48</sup> is a *leitmotif* in the story that contributes to bringing to mind several mementos of the father-son relationship.

Like Rosa and Linus, Oskar goes through moments of loneliness, sadness, anxiety and anger. Oskar's feelings of loneliness and sadness are accurately depicted in the picture of Laurence Olivier when he is holding a skull in the well-known Hamlet performance.<sup>49</sup> This scene, which points to the same scene Oskar is going to perform, probably echoes his father's death and by extension the deaths occurred at the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

I felt, that night, on that stage, under that skull, incredibly close to everything in the universe, but also extremely alone. I wondered, for the first time in my life, if life was worth all the work it took to live. What *exactly* made it worth it? What's so terrible about being dead forever, and not feeling anything, and not even dreaming? What's so great about feeling and dreaming?<sup>50</sup>

Oskar's sense of alienation and purposelessness could be due to the fact that he feels that he does not have a trustworthy person he can talk to: "*Everything I do know I had to teach myself on the Internet, because I don't have anyone to ask*"<sup>51</sup> (emphasis added).



As in the case of Rosa, Oskar's sadness alternates with outbursts of rage and aggressiveness that he directs against different persons like Mohammed Atta – the terrorist who crashed a plane into one of the Twin Towers – and Dr Fein – his psychiatrist. Probably mainly due to his need to avoid recalling the traumatic 9/11 attacks, Oskar vents his rage against his psychiatrist, the one who brings back the horrendous memory of the “worst day.”<sup>52</sup> Oskar even has a tendency toward aggressiveness which, combined with a belief that his feelings are bad or wrong, lead him to self-mutilation.

It is quite surprising to find that when the last 15 pages of the book – a series of photographs of a man falling from one of the twin towers – are flipped through, the body looks as if it were going upwards. The turning of pages brings up an event especially traumatic for those people who were somehow involved in the tragedy. The fact that the body goes upwards probably shows the narrator's/author's wish to restore normal life to a city which went through 9/11 and its aftermath.

The interrelation between image repetition and emotional instability is crucial at this point because, as Walter Davis explains, “[i]mage is the native language of anxiety, the language psyche uses in an effort to mediate the emotional and psychological impact of events.”<sup>53</sup> Exposure to traumatic events, whether it is direct or indirect – e.g. TV exposure – is enough to induce PTSD, at least in the most vulnerable populations like children. Indeed, PTSD seems to be closely connected with the number of hours of TV coverage of the attacks viewed on September 11 and days after the attacks. In *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*, the number of hours of TV coverage of the 9/11 attacks is acutely shown through a number of pictures which are, in some cases, explicit snapshots of the tragedy. One snapshot implicitly points to the 9/11 events: the picture of the “paper airplane ≠ 14”<sup>54</sup> hand-drawn by Oskar's dad is most likely connected with the

plane crashed by Mohammed Atta into World Trade Center North Tower One; and the image of an x-rayed hand<sup>55</sup> probably symbolizes the deadly atmosphere after the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

An appropriate way to reduce the devastating effects of the tragedy on Oskar has been to cut down on his exposure to 9/11-related news: “[w]e watched approved documentaries”<sup>56</sup> and “[d]on’t let him see the news.”<sup>57</sup> I believe that both mother’s and grandmother’s decision to restrict Oskar’s TV viewing habits and his solving of the mystery of the key are two catalysts that explain why he has almost come to terms with the tragedy.<sup>58</sup> Oskar’s need “to tell [Mum] all of the lies that I’d told her”<sup>59</sup> provides evidence of improvement, but not full recovery yet. Almost at the beginning of the story, Oskar says that “[e]ven after a year, I still had an extremely difficult time doing certain things, like taking showers, for some reason, and getting into elevators, obviously.”<sup>60</sup> Unfortunately, as in Linus Steinman’s case, whose ability to speak again is not likely to happen at least in the short term, it seems that Oskar’s complete recovery may still take some more time to materialize.

## V.

Throughout this essay, I have tried to demonstrate that introducing Jewish-American fiction in European literature (university) classrooms is a very effective way to help students develop a number of competences as specified in their course syllabi. When addressing second- and third-generation Holocaust writers like Melvin Jules Bukiet, Jonathan Safran Foer, Thane Rosenbaum, and Art Spiegelman, among others – I would also mention Shalom Auslander, Michael Chabon and Allegra Goodman – Victoria Aarons explains that “[f]or such writers who have not directly experienced the

Holocaust but are compelled to bring it back to imaginative life, memory becomes the master trope, the elusive and cryptically coded narrative figure in their work.”<sup>61</sup> Then, Aarons claims that “[s]uch writers, through a variety of literary forms, attempt to make sense of and articulate the horrors experienced by the victims of the Holocaust.”<sup>62</sup>

Many European readers are familiar with the Holocaust-based works of Paul Celan, Anne Frank, Primo Levi, and Elie Wiesel, to name only a few. A particularly interesting author for us is Jorge Semprún, a Spanish politician, intellectual and writer who wrote about his experience as a Buchenwald prisoner in books originally written in French like *Le grand voyage* (*The Long Voyage*, 1963), *Quel beau dimanche!* (*What a Beautiful Sunday*, 1980) and *L’écriture ou la vie* (*Literature or Life*, 1994).

Apart from the Jewish-American and Jewish-European writers whose work is entirely – or partly – devoted to Holocaust-related themes, it is appropriate to say here that in the past few decades, there has been a proliferation of literary works by Jewish-American writers whose narratives address not only the theme of memory but also other major issues such as identity, ethnicity, race, trauma, etc. Since Jewish-American fiction seems to have been going through a literary revival, this is a good moment to encourage European literature instructors to include in their classes (more) works of this kind of fiction in order to make a contribution – however small it is – to the consolidation of the Jewish American Literary Studies in Spain.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> “Bologna Declaration.” Available: [www.magna-charta.org/resources/files/text-of-the-bologna-declaration](http://www.magna-charta.org/resources/files/text-of-the-bologna-declaration) (accessed December 6, 2016).
- <sup>2</sup> “Education and Training: Supporting Education and Training in Europe and Beyond.” Available: [http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/school/competences\\_en](http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/school/competences_en) (accessed February 4, 2017).
- <sup>3</sup> Eurydice. *Teaching Reading in Europe: Contexts, Policies and Practices*. Brussels: Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency, 2011. Available: [http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/thematic\\_reports/130en.pdf](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/thematic_reports/130en.pdf) (accessed December 1, 2016).
- <sup>4</sup> *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment*. (Cambridge, U.K: Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, 2001: 103. Available: [http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/Framework\\_EN.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/Framework_EN.pdf) (accessed June 30, 2016).
- <sup>5</sup> See Juan A. Núñez Cortés, “El modelo competencial y la competencia comunicativa en la educación superior en América Latina.” *Foro de Educación*, 14.20 (2016): 467-488. Available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.14516/fde.2016.014.020.023> (accessed December 6, 2016).
- <sup>6</sup> *Common European Framework*: 1.
- <sup>7</sup> This is the link to the syllabus of “Ficción Contemporánea en los Estados Unidos.” *Estudios Ingleses*. Universidad Complutense de Madrid. 2016-2017. Available: <https://www.ucm.es/estudios/grado-estudiosingleses-plan-802224> (accessed October 8, 2016).
- <sup>8</sup> This is the link to the syllabus of “Literatura de la Etnicidad en los Estados Unidos: Literatura Afronorteamericana y de la Diáspora.” *Estudios Ingleses*. Universidad Complutense de Madrid. 2016-2017. Available: <https://www.ucm.es/estudios/grado-estudiosingleses-plan-802232> (accessed October 8, 2016).
- <sup>9</sup> A detailed list of the competences specified in each syllabus is included in the links in notes 7 and 8.
- <sup>10</sup> The quotes used here are in the link to the syllabus of “Máster Universitario en Estudios Norteamericanos por la Universidad Complutense de Madrid y la Universidad de Alcalá.” Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte, 2014: 40-43. Available: <https://www.uah.es/export/sites/uah/es/estudios/.galleries/Archivos->

[estudios/MU/Unico/AM157\\_10\\_1\\_1\\_E\\_MU\\_ESTUDIOS-NORTEAMERICANOS\\_16\\_07\\_15.pdf](#).

(accessed March 21, 2017).

<sup>11</sup> Cynthia Ozick. *The Shawl*. New York: Vintage International, 1990 [1989].

<sup>12</sup> See link to course syllabus in note 7.

<sup>13</sup> American Psychiatric Association. *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-IV*. Washington, DC, 4th Edition, 1994.

<sup>14</sup> For an extended analysis of PTSD in Ozick's *The Shawl*, see Gustavo Sánchez Canales, "'Prisoners Gradually Came to Buddhist Positions': The Presence of PTSD Symptoms in Rosa in Cynthia Ozick's *The Shawl*." *Studies in American Jewish Literature*, 30 (2011): 29-39. Available: <http://muse.jhu.edu/article/450989> (accessed May 1, 2017).

<sup>15</sup> *The Free Dictionary by Farlex*. Available: <http://medical-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/Hypervigilance> (accessed March 28, 2017).

<sup>16</sup> Ozick: 42.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 9-10.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 48, 49, 51, 52-53.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>21</sup> Michael Chabon, *The Final Solution*. New York: Harper Perennial, 2005 [2004].

<sup>22</sup> American Psychiatric Association. *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-III*. Washington, DC, 3rd Edition, 1980.

<sup>23</sup> Joy J. Burnham, "Children's Fears: A Pre-9/11 and Post-9/11 Comparison Using the American Fear Survey Schedule for Children." *Journal of Counseling & Development* 85 (Fall 2007): 461-466, 461.

<sup>24</sup> For an in-depth analysis of PTSD in Michael Chabon's *The Final Solution*, see Gustavo Sánchez Canales, "Holocaust Imagery in Michael Chabon's *The Final Solution*." *Americana: E-Journal of American Studies in Hungary* 9.1 (Spring 2013). Available: <http://americanajournal.hu/vol9no1/sanchez-canales> (accessed February 4, 2017).

<sup>25</sup> Sara R. Horowitz, *Voicing the Void: Muteness and Memory in Holocaust Fiction*. State University of New York Press, 1997: 1-2.

<sup>26</sup> Aharon Appelfeld, "After the Holocaust." *Writing and the Holocaust*. Ed. Berel Lang. New York & London: Holmes & Meier, 1988. 83-92: 86.

<sup>27</sup> Chabon: 68.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>35</sup> “Holocaust Imagery.”

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> See note 10.

<sup>38</sup> Jonathan Safran Foer, *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*. Penguin Books, 2005.

<sup>39</sup> For a detailed study of PTSD in *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*, see Gustavo Sánchez Canales, “Jonathan Safran Foer’s *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* and John Updike’s *Terrorist*: Two Different Literary Approaches to 9/11.” *Critical Analyzer: Literature, Theory & Criticism* 1 (2009): 17-35, 19-26.

<sup>40</sup> Foer: 256-257.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 36, 38, 40, 43, 44, 69, etc.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 258-259.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 168.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 168-169.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 45, 47, 48, 49, 63.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 145.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 192. It seems that all the references to Oskar’s letter writing (11-12, 40, 51, 106, 151, 192-193, 197, 199-200, 242, 304-305) are a symptom of his inability to establish open and effective communication with his family, peers, teachers and friends.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 68, 104, 326.

<sup>53</sup> Walter A. Davis, "Death's Dream Kingdom: The American Psyche after 9/11." *Journal for the Psychoanalysis of Culture & Society* 8.1 (Spring 2003): 127-132, 127-128.

<sup>54</sup> Foer: 56.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 225.

<sup>58</sup> Sien Uytterschout and Kristiaan Versluys explain that "[o]n a symbolic level, Oskar's quest for the lock to which he has the fitting key is a tentative step towards 'unlocking' his trauma." "Melancholy and Mourning in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*." *Orbis Litterarum* 63.3 (2008): 216-236, 230.

<sup>59</sup> Foer: 324.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>61</sup> Victoria Aarons, "Jewish American Fiction." *The Cambridge Companion to American Fiction After 1949*. Ed. John Duvall. Cambridge University Press, 2012. 129-141: 138.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*