

Module C: History and Memory

“The Fiftieth Gate”

- **Purpose of the text:** a memorial to Baker’s parents’ experiences, an attempt to link their story to the large history of the holocaust. Its genre of memoir applies to the collecting of memories and recorded history that constitute the text
 - Also a memoir of Baker’s process of writing a book about his parents’ experiences. Baker tries to re-create his “journey through memory” from his rigid demands as a historian at the outset to his gradual enlightenment about the nature of those experiences and the holocaust as a whole
 - The point of this is the reader’s enlightenment. The enlightenment consist not of understanding that history and memory contradict or agree with each other but to engage us in the struggle to emphathis with human suffering, to understand the terrible waste and loss entailed in the holocaust.
- Key theme: the existence, belief and strength of Jewish faith despite the horror of past experiences as reflected in the beginning of Gate 7 where Baker asks Yossl if he believes in God?
- A text which attempts to fill in gaps in history and memory rather than open up responder’s imagination
- The style of the text attempts to imitate the intricate nature of human memory and how it can be influenced by the nature of its recollection.
- **Most apparent contrasting of history and memory is that of his parents’ experiences:** Yossl’s particular details are well documented (his time in labour camps, the events occurring before his imprisonment, his family archives in Poland) as his experiences and survival is part of a well documented larger history that is already written. Genia’s experiences, on the other hand, exist only in her memory: she is the sole Jewish survivor from her village home, Bolszowce in Poland, a community whose stories have not entered the annals of Holocaust history. Her story does not have the sanction (and cultural meaning) of the camp survivors’ stories. Baker challenges the fact that her tragic story of loss and survival is not part of the historical discourse available to us; and endeavours to insert it into documented history to authenticate his mother’s memories.
- Raises questions about capacity for history to record authenticity of human suffering
- Text not only about discovering parents’ story, but also enrich responder’s understanding of the universal experiences of those involved in Holocaust
- Text initiates and concludes with “.. it always begins in blackness, until the first light illuminates a hidden fragment of memory”
 - Exploration of history and memory
 - Incomplete nature of text
 - Continuation / Cycle of history and memory
- The boundaries of remembering the past through the scholarly discipline of documented evidence associated with history is expanded by Baker with his inclusion of fragments of memories.
- The quest for knowledge is vital for Baker as it enables him to gain knowledge and to form and reaffirm his identity. The Holocaust had such an impact on his parents → affected him. By reconciling his parents’ past Baker is able to gain greater self knowledge and out Holocaust in past and move on with present and future

- Baker repeats the imagery of graveyards, stones, fire, candles, gates and fields to link the past, present and future
- The poem that appears after the glossary and acknowledgements provides Baker's own interpretation of the fiftieth gate. To him this gate is the one through which "all other gates may be seen". To unlock it requires the key of memory

Text Types

- Text made up of several intersecting and overlapping discourses enabling Baker to question authority of history as the **only** way of recounting past events.
- The use of different discourses enables Baker to question the authority of 'history' as the dominant narrative, the only way of recounting past events. Rather he presents multiple histories in order to try to approach closer to the truth through the use of both documented and artistic representations
- The use of diverse text types is the major technique employed to capture the many voices of the holocaust experience. Each type employs a different aspect of the reader's thinking.

Oral Testimonies / Transcripts / Verbatim Accounts

- E.g. Transcript of Genia's interview in Gate 4
- Gives responder direct access to memories without narration or commentary to intrude on such personal accounts, as well as a completely different perspective than that in which the author discovers through documents and history → responder is able to objectively react.
- Engage our emotional and interpersonal understanding as we see the character of the speakers and their feelings
- The oral testimonies of Yossl and Genia, denoted by the italicised text, gives these characters their own distinct and personal voices to which the responder is able to recognise despite the lack of clarification on whose recount it actually is.
 - Characterisation of Genia: "should I at least put a bit of lipstick on?"
- Cultural depth and humanising dimension
- Confronting method create a sense of spontaneity and verisimilitude (truth)
- Genia uses short sentences → disjointed nature of memory affected by emotion and trauma
 - "What I can hear. Fell. Alone. Crying. 'Run' she said. From there"
- Recalls events in simplistic terms → remembering as a child rather than as an adult

Poetic Representations

- E.g. Hebrew Verse in Gate 3 Poem by Dan Pagis "Written in Pencil in a Sealed Railway Car"
 - Everytime this poem is used → fragmented → fragmented nature of memories and incomplete lives that were stolen
 - Eve, Mother of Cain and Abel – entire Jewish race is referenced
 - Cain/Abel: two different sides of man (Cain kills Abel)
 - Metaphor for Mark's experience with his past. A pencil is not permanent and can be erased → Mark's realisation of the importance of memory in his quest for knowledge. The facts are destroyed ("sealed") and Baker utilises this poem to invoke the fictitious voice of his grandmother Hinda
 - Re-worked, through the inclusion of Hinda's name, to add more depth
- Appeal to responder's emotions in contrast to dry and detached statistics

Letter

- Baker intertwines the exchanging of these letters with his parents personal accounts to emphasise the distress of such an experience.
- The letters themselves, although on the surface of things appear to be official documents, collaborate history and memory, because of both the personal and contemporary nature of the source.

Documents / Archives

- E.g. Grandparents' wedding certificate in gate 6 and Yossl's report card in gate 13
- Delivered in a detached manner often creating a distancing effect as well as demonstrating that history and historical research are a discipline.
- Detached language
- Formal and abbreviated → efficiency → emotional detachment
- Supports and contrasts personal memories

Visual Representation

- Map at conclusion of text detailing the journeys of Yossl and Genia: intertwines personal memories to a historical source (overlapping of history and memory); demonstrates Baker's understanding of his own history; and contrasts the human personal stories with a 2D geographical point of view.
- Use of gates at beginning of each chapter: Symbolises the reader and Baker moving towards enlightenment as they proceed through each chapter/gate similar to the gates mentioned in the Bible (Gates of Heaven), and significantly, numerous Jewish literature such as the "Zohar" and "Kabbalah".
- Roman Numerals: extend and give depth and weight to text as it relates to Rome (ancient history) → establishes a sense of history; and contrasts Jews prison numbers

Songs

- E.g. Yiddish lullaby in Gate 13
- Appeals to the responder's sense of sound as well as that of emotions.
- Emphasises the parents' capacity and ability to be able to recall accurate details from their pasts despite their son's distrust of the reliability of their accounts.
- Stresses the importance of memories as the grief emerging from this text type is apparent, although there is no historical documentation to back it up.
- Imagery parallels parents' lifestory; universalises personal experiences

Techniques

- Use of Yiddish acknowledges cultural differences and authenticates it. Brings awareness of culture and various meanings of words to the text
- Narrative recounting allows story to be held together. Often Baker bridging and wholes the story together
- The first few gates of the text includes the consistent use of constant flashbacks (in jumping to and from various events) to give the effect of fragmentation, reflecting the process of memory.
- The constant interjections of dialogue, interspersed with Baker's own memories of his father
- Polyphonous (multiple voices) structure and multi-layered
 - 1st layer: facts and documents

- 2nd layer: personal accounts of parents
- 3rd layer: universal experiences of Jews
- 4th layer: Baker exploring his emotions and understanding of parents' experiences contributing to his identity.
- Symbolism, especially of the gates
- Use of various voices and perspectives
- Layered storylines of Baker's parents' experiences, which are interwoven with the reconstruction of events and situations from memory interwoven again with historical documents and records
- Contrasting
- Motif of the gates is repeated with different meanings: revelation; life and death; passing from youth and innocence to maturity

Mark Baker

As a Historian

- Seeks the "truth" of events; however the facts can be no absolute version of the truth, it can only be a version
- Aims for objectivity, accuracy and validity throughout
- Tries to find proof → use of primary evidence

As a Son

- Personal interpretations: can speculate on representations of events
- Emotional attachment
- Acknowledges that he is subjective
- Presents own personal experience to speculate the effects of events and how it has affected him
- Record parents stories for the future
- The book can be seen as a gift to his mother – trying to provide some validity for his mother's claims, trying to give her back the life she lost
- The fact that his parents aren't appreciative, they are reluctant to talk about experience makes book confronting, complex and vexing

As Storyteller

- Tries to engage the reader
- Aims for empathy – builds up on truth, might embellish (exaggerate)
- When he hasn't got facts to rely on, relies on historical knowledge and own imagination to recreate events

Jewish Intellectual

- Colours perspective
- Collective memory
- Ultimate vengeance on Germans – Shoah has given the Jewish people the defining sense of identity
- Weaves a personal story into a collective memory

Framing the Text

- **Main title and Subtitle** ("a journey through memory") initially frames the text
- **Dedication:** looks back and forward through generations and the connections
- **A note to the reader:** sets parameters and controls how responder readers the text strictly e.g. pronunciation of various Yiddish words

- **Glossary:** to preserve authenticity; sets mood; creates identity; transports responder.
In another sense, creates distance as responder will never be able to understand the depth and experiences in the text as evident through the consistent use of foreign words → distance and identity at the same time. Allows responder to look at it in a factual way rather than completely immersing in it because of such foreign language and confusing events (flashbacks) → demonstrates the complexity.
- **Archives list:** historian's perspective reinforced; illustrates the difficulties of piecing together fragments of memories, especially those that have been lost or chosen to be forgotten; reminds responder that the story goes well beyond the Holocaust (aftermath and displacement camps) → extending limits of text . "Gates" for responder's own research

- Makes text more multi-dimensional
- Extend the text beyond its time frame
- Reinforcing complexities and difficulties

Representation of History

- "Representation": background, gender, political and social views affects how text is written and read. Thus history is a construction and its originality, reliability and objectivity to questioned
- Discourse of documented events claiming to record truth of past events
- Partial – informed by interests and agendas of people recording
- Valuable (academically, culturally) but susceptible to manipulation by governments and institutions for purposes of indoctrination; censored
- Through archival data Baker is able to explore the notion of fallible history, and question the validity of the scholarly discipline of history. To a certain extent, history is reliant on those writing it for their own individual purposes, and thus is subject to inaccuracies, similar to that of memory
 - Yossel lies about his age at Auschwitz, Buchenwald and to the refugee organisation depending on his motives
 - Leo Krochmal also constructs different versions of his life only revealing "snippets of the truth"
- While personal history is able to fill in the gaps in terms of emotional impact on people, it is also subjective and possibly inaccurate, in what it presents
- Baker also utilises such archival evidence in many different forms to represent the numerous perspectives a single historical event may produce. He contrasts or supports his parents' testimonies with other eye witness accounts and documentation:
 - Genia's version of the Aktion in her town is juxtaposed with that of the Commandant in charge of the region, Hermann Muller. Baker unites several eye witness accounts of the same incident to reveal the many different view points
 - Muller: "I had to remain there"
 - Witness' observation: "he remained and kicked a baby with his foot"

Collective History

- Collective or shared history is represented through Yossel's experiences in the camps and his network of support from fellow survivors

- Numerous allusions to different types of shared experiences:
 - Gate 22: Yossl meets survivors from Wierzbnik and although they do not remember him “they remembered his stories”
 - Yossl bears the tattoo from Auschwitz, a physical representation of a shared history
 - “the Buchenwald Boys”
 - Reconstructed history of Yossl’s mother’s and sister’s deaths at Treblinka → shared by thousands of other victims

Personal and Individual Memory

- Baker validates individual and personal history through Genia’s unique past. Her experiences are not shared as she is the sole survivor from her town: “Who can you ask? There’s no-one to ask”
- The nature of her story creates difficulties in terms of the author’s ideology of history. He is intent on verifying her stories but is unable to in the academic sense as there are no documents available to him.
- Genia is unable to share her pain with fellow survivors like Yossl and thus unable to release such feelings: “no Bolszowce Survivor Society, no means of validation”
- The portrayal of Genia’s past allows Baker to authenticate the role of personal and individual recollection as a way of viewing the past

Representation of Memory

- The text opens and concludes with the idea of blackness, representing ignorance or lack of knowledge, which is only illuminated by memory
- Memories, however, can be painful as they are enlightening, as both Genia and Yossl experience
- A range of **symbols and motifs** are used to represent memory
 - Allusions to darkness and light
 - Photographs
 - Candles
 - Stones
 - Geographical locations
- Memory, in the psychological sense, can be triggered according the state of need in the present
 - **“a neglected site of memory is retrieved”**
 - Parents’ memories are jogged on their visit in Europe
 - Yossl is able to recognise a site in Buchenwald through a feature of the landscape, and at Auschwitz he remembers his cabin when he sees the toilet where he hid
- Enemy of memory: forgetting or the gaps that appear
 - Baker juxtaposes Genia’s dialogue in the past tense before their trip to Poland, with that of her present tense as they visit her home town
 - Unable to locate certain places but is able to recall what her mother wore to the synagogue
→ due to emotional dislocation
 - Genia stored her memories as isolated fragments which rely on the stimulation of senses
- Baker’s initial assertions of history’s supremacy over recollections shifts over the progression of the text and comes to accept memory as a valid method of remembering the past. By the conclusion of the text, he acknowledges his “shame”

for not accepting the validity of his parents' stories; and the historical documentation simply emphasised to him the emotional traumas involved → memory gives history an emotional context

- Reconstructing and making sense of the chaos of what happened to us
- Experiential and thereby authentic (individual experiences cannot be denied)
- Ephemeral / Momentary as the passing of time transforms and deteriorates essence of experiences
- Elusive / Indefinable as one can choose to forget certain aspects of an experience
- Essential for one's emotional, social and cultural development
- Fragmentary Different perspectives of same event also represented through character of Avraham, whose narratives about Yossel's town recreate the colourful characters of his father's youth in a way recorded history could not.
 - Baker also discovers the difference in Yossel's perspective on Wierzbicki and Avraham's view.
- Through Avraham, Baker learns to accept the role of oral history and value personal stories as a means of recollecting and recording a personal perspective of the past

History and Memory

- History and memory are the only tools we have to understand the Holocaust. Each stems from a different way of remembering and thinking.
- The uniting symbol of the gates: the metaphor suggests that each chapter opens a gate onto either a moment of realisation (light) or a confusion or obstacle (dark). By the time the fiftieth gate is reached all these moments are complexly related to each other to form an understanding.
 - The repetition of the opening image at the close, suggests that enlightenment, having been so hard to reach must always begin again in the dark of ignorance until a light illuminates "a hidden fragment of memory"
- History owned by those who write it. Intimately connected to power and who controls it. In the case of the Holocaust, only Nazis were the only ones to record history thus proving how significant memory (of Jews) is in remembering the facts that have been lost
- History is a discourse of documented events that claims to record the truth of past events. However, history is always partial; it cannot tell the whole story. Always informed by the interests and agendas of the culture and individuals embarking on this form of knowledge
 - Joe: "fecks, fecks"
 - Genia refers to his work as "shopping lists"
- Collective memory: culture of group constructing its version of the past, agreeing to remember things in a particular way
- Memory is highly selective in what and how it remembers; it can distort facts and be full of gaps and silences as it is often coloured by trauma and emotion leading to such distortion. Alternatively, it may simply be the passing of time that leads to such distortion.
- Memory challenges the boundaries established by archival research and fact finding, allowing for other parameters of understanding to intersect with documented fact
- Baker asks "**Does history remember more than memory?**" → raises questions about the capacity for history to record the authenticity of human suffering

- Always be materials unavailable to the historian, and history will always be filled with gaps, silences and inconclusiveness
- Memory is coloured by emotion and trauma distorting events and facts
 - Gate 24: Baker's search for the illegitimate child in which Genia's family beg him not to record
 - Genia's memory differs from the evidence he hears from the family whom he believes sheltered her:
- Fragmented nature of text represents fragmented nature of memory
 - Non-linear chronology
 - Flashbacks of memory
 - Incoherent memories
 - Moves between two parents stories
- Limitations of history
 - Some material always unavailable to historian
 - History filled with gaps, silences and inconclusiveness
 - Written by selective group with ideological agendas → bias view
 - Emotional detachment → can be viewed as positive and negative
 - "Were you there? You think because you've read a few pieces of paper that you suddenly understand everything?" – Genia
- Limitations of memory
 - Coloured by emotion and trauma → distort events
 - Genia remembers the darkness of being locked in cellar while Baker learns that she often looked out the window from the house she was sheltered in
- This text can be seen as recording the significance of the role of memory in one's family traditions and history
- By end of the text Baker symbolises his parents' defiance of the past and celebration of the present in the context of their pasts through the Buchenwald Ball → commemoration to past whilst enjoying the present
 - Act of transcendence (go above or beyond): singing and dancing represent the freedom of survivors from pain of their memories, particularly that of Joe and Genia
- Examples of Baker's difficulties in recovering picture of parents' experiences
 - Leo's infidelity with the peasant woman who hid him opens the moral question of whether the truth once found should always be told
- Baker seeks the "truth" of events – although there can be no absolute version of **the** truth – only **a** truth

History and Memory Contradict each Other

- Joe "remembering winter when it was autumn" (gate22)
- No record of illegitimate sister

History and Memory Support each Other

- In many of the chapters, Baker constantly interjects his parents' stories providing crucial background information so that their memories are understood by the responder, and ultimately his thought process → history and memory working together to tell a story
- Both Joe's and Genia's school reports
- In gate 14, Baker utilises an official report in conjunction with his father's memories allowing him to draw comparisons with his own life. Through this interweaving of

history and memory, an image of anguish and persecution is presented → history and memory working together to capture as much of the story as possible

Memory Affects our Identity

- Memory gives history a personal perspective that is necessary in understanding the historical value and meaning of both the past and the present. It is through a personal perspective of history that enables discovery and journeys to occur of self awareness and appreciation not only of the past but also how it has effected and created the present
- Genia cannot bear darkness and enclosed spaces
- Joe does not trust authority
- Genia “could have been anything” – full of potential and a stunted childhood
- Baker embraces Jewishness in name “Raphael”
- Yossl became Joe Baker – anglicised identity
- After many traumatic and emotional chapters of Baker’s parents’ past, he continues the text with an excerpt from his own childhood → as he understands more and more of his parents’ past and thus his heritage, he comes to gain more self awareness and a deeper sense of identity
 - Following gate 8 (Genia’s story of her mother telling her to run and hide) Baker follows with a memory of him at a sports carnival

History lacks Emotion whereas Memory is coloured by Emotion

- Short sentences and Nazi propaganda lack emotion and humanity
- Humanity provided by personal voices
- Lack of memories → lack of understanding of historical event
 - GATE 3: The younger generations represented by the visiting group of Israel students “observe the boulders from a distance but do not lose themselves within the maze” are respectful of this commemorative site as they understand the historical facts and figures behind the Holocaust but are not able to comprehend the full capacity of the emotional stipulations that the victims in this site had to endure. Despite their obedience and offerings of prayers, their lack of memories of what occurred at the site as well that they “have no single thing to find here” distances them from the full story of the Holocaust.

History is more Valued by Society that Memory

- Documents contradict Genia → Baker doubts her

Bias and Infallible Nature of History and Memory → No Ultimate Truth

- Both history and memory can distort as well as illuminate. Memories can be inaccurate and often falter in recalling the events precisely as they happened. How an event occurred, and ones perception of that event can be two entirely different things based on the person’s personal experiences. This can effect the way in which history is recorded and interpreted, as historical events may not be cohesive with the way an individual remembers.
- The distorted memories may be due to burdened minds, trying to live again, away from the blackness of their early life. Whatever the reason may be, these lapses in

memory posed a problem for Baker as he tries to immerse himself in his parents history, so that he too can reach an understanding of who he is

- History written by Nazis
- Differing and personal opinions and experiences of events can provoke great debate in the way in which history is recorded and interpreted
- Memory contradicts other people's memories
- Leo rewrites his own history
- Limitations to both history and memory: "the final moments can never be retrieved by history. Nor by memories" – Mark
- Discrepancy of two memories as to how Genia "hid" → reveals how memory is selective and Genia's is coloured by fear thus she only remembers the darkness.
 - "In a cellar all day, underground and closed and nothing, in the darkness all the time." – Genia
 - "she used to look through the windows at the cherry trees" – Elz bieta

Title: "The Fiftieth Gate"

- The fiftieth gate is a religious metaphor for "highest knowledge of God" or the hidden light of God's will which illuminates the world from one end to the other
- Also a personal metaphor in that each gate represents a collective memory of his family
- Spiritual significance in the form of enlightenment, new knowledge or perspective
- Reaching a state of self awareness, understanding and acceptance
- "In Jewish mysticism, it is believed that there are 49 gates that separate good from evil .. Beyond them lies a fiftieth gate, the point that we stop moving but become aware of where we are"
- Summarises underlying motive to hunt for light within extreme darkness
- How the light of memory can illuminate the documentation of history
- Combines literary dimension of book with highly important cultural dimensions of book – refers to specific set of beliefs
- His quests for the truth of his parents' experiences and mystery of relatives' lives are all discoveries made on his journey toward new realisations about his own life and his own "journey"
- Responder has to see the "journey" as the author's rather than his parents'
- Gates Joe pushed against in Poland, gates of memory around which book is constructed

Subtitle: A Journey Through Memory

- Journey is undertaken through parents' memories which are neither complete nor infallible → such a journey helps him gain insight into his own identity and memories of childhood
- Baker's own memories of childhood and family mythology, tradition, values and culture also part of journey
- Journey not always definite (i.e. to a definite place or conclusion); rather a sense of continuing process and greater revelation
- Memory: personal, familial, collective and communal → Baker's "journey through memory" takes all these into account → use of multiple voices
- Journey Joe and Genia undertake in memory and physically back to Poland and the Ukraine
 - Through such a journey, they undertake significant change

- By end of text more open and positive attitude to experience with the image of “dancing” capturing this idea to which Genia equates it with living in full vitality
- Closure to past experiences: Children are no longer their revenge but rather heirs of their legacy
- Baker undertakes journey to find facts and memories associated with parents’ past
- Responder’s journey encouraged by structure and language of text
 - Reader “listens” to records of interviews
 - Reads documents and testimonies of witnesses
 - Listen to and evaluate author’s conclusions and comments
- Through the use of myth, fantast, satire and allegory, Baker turns history into artistic creation → a way of understanding “truths” of history undermining the many associated ideologies
- “A journey through memory”: filled with gaps, silences and distortions
- Including memory into history challenges how meaning was made in the past

Joe and Genia

Joe

- Worked in Wierzbnik-Strachowice metal works as slave labour
- Transported to Auschwitz, then Buchenwald where camp was liberated in 1945
- Implications: after his liberation he ceased to observe traditional Jewish law and only does so under family pressure, possibly due to fear of being exposed as Jewish
 - “his protective antennae are most active where more than three Jews are gathered together”
- Baker explores the concept of collective history through Joe as he shares similar experiences and binds with other survivors, with his tattoo as physical proof
- Recalls his story as if he was going through it at that age without the advantage of being an adult telling the story
- Idiosyncratic: tries to render the way he speaks in the writing
- Multi-layered aspect of his memories → very complex person

Genia

- Survived Holocaust by hiding out in the Ukraine → as she was never in a death camp, story can never be corroborated by historical data and relies wholly on her memory
- Kept clothes which mark important phases of her life → accumulating evidence of post-Holocaust life
- Maintains religious beliefs by cooking Sabbath meals
- Baker sets up Genia’s experiences in opposition to Joe’s; representative of individual or personal memory; being the sole survivor there is no-one to validate her history
- Baker’s portrayal of his mother shifts over the course of the text → as he comes to understand the equal importance of memories to documented facts, Genia’s portrayal becomes more sympathetic
- Very particular and selective voice – careful about what she omits, doesn’t want to disturb things
- Has been more adversely influenced in the long term by her experience because so isolated → she has tried to make up for it since by being very social
- Defensive – she feels he is questioning her story
- Strong emotive language
- Oscillates between elation and depression

- Talk: feels elation when she is living the life she imaged before the war
- When she cant find a meaning or truth behind that experience – gets depressed

Gate Analysis

Epigram

- Explains title and significance of fifty gates
- “ ... there are forty-nine gates that separate good from evil, the blessing from the curse”
- “ .. a fiftieth gate [is] larger than the entire world” → enlightenment and higher knowledge
- Baker gives responder metaphoric key to unlock the histories and memories of his parents’ and ultimately his, past.

Gate 6

- Baker presents family tree to Yossl with many ancestors’ deaths being marked as “unknown”
- Only “unknown in historical facts and statistics (i.e. specific details unknown)
- Although unrecognised by history, remain in memories of parents and other survivors → recorded in their minds

Gate7

- Without the personal memory of his parents, Baker’s historical facts would be as interesting as “shopping lists” - Geina
→ Memory brings emotions and colour to history
- Joe’s dislike for “fecks, fecks” and prefers memories as the source for recalling the past → values relationships based on trust → contributed to his survival

Gate 8

- Genia is confused at the changes in her surroundings
- Baker portrays the highly subjective and fragile nature of personal memory through Genia’s confusion about the locations of landmarks from her childhood.
- Fragmented memory with places and objects acting as catalysts to rediscover buried memories. The process of remembering is extremely disjointed

Gate 9

- Initially Baker resents his mother’s illness as seen in his diary. But over time he comes to discover their past through history and memory and thus becomes more aware of their background. Hence, he begins to idolise his mother’s strength: “she is a born survivor” and is able to identify himself with her saying that he is “weak like my mother, and strong like her too”,

Gate 10

- HISOTRY AND MEMORY INTERTWINE TO GIVE WHOLE STORY
- The inclusion of a dictionary definition provides background information and prompts Genia’s memories
 - Use of ellipsis implies continuation of history and memory

Gate 14

- Anti Semitic incidents in this gate:
 - Young Jewish boys thrust into compulsory labour
 - Ghettoisation of Jewish population of Wierzbnik
 - Child labour
 - Nazi policies decreased the amount of resources available to dense population of Jews

Gate 15

- Very personal account from Joe → significant
- Intimacy indicated by short, concise sentences → retelling memories from raw mind
- Lieb experiences loss of identity known as “5503” and a Jew
 - Demonstrates how Holocaust led to loss of identity → diminishes and renders them as object and lack of humanity and this is how history remembers victims of Holocausts, simply as numbers as that was how Nazis recorded it → questions validity and inability of history to present the whole picture of events in the past

Gate 20

- Yom Kippur: Day of Atonement – “one of the holiest days in the Jewish calendar”
 - Yossl lights a 24 hour anniversary candle
 - Rocks on tombstone
- Memory is kept alive not only through Baker’s history but through the continuation of these rituals

Gate 22

- Joe’s memory of being separated from mother and sisters
- Mark Baker then discusses his father’s memories → deteriorated memory
- However, this imperfect memory can recreate the traumatic nature of the past that the accurate “fecks” cant
- Yossl remembers it as a cold winter’s day but historical records and other witness’ testimonies reveal that it was actually hot. This memory of “winter” is linked to
 - His pain and fear
 - Significance of the boots which had been made to hide money for his and his brother’s survival
- Yossl’s birth certificate reveals that he is two years older than he believes; but Baker discovers through other documentation that Yossl gave three different birth dates to officials over the years
 - Accuracy of history relies on what people choose to reveal – the subjective nature of history
 - Baker realises he cannot define his father, and ultimately individuals, simply through such documentation alone
- “The war. Stop. No father. Stop” → the rambling and hesitant sentences reflect the pattern of emotions and difficulties of recollection of such painful memories

Gate 24

- As the only Bolszowce survivor, Genia's memories are very personal and to a historical quite subjective. She does not share the same stories as those of camp survivors like Joe, through which Baker questions why collective history (like that of his father) appears to be more reliable than personal or individual memory
 - "[Yossl's] was a past written on a page of history shared by other survivors. My mother could not point to anyone"
- "Does history remember more than memory?"

Gate 26

- Heated dialogue between Genia and Mark to reveal the potential for inaccurate information being recorded as "history"
- Genia repeatedly contrasts her personal experiences with her son's "pieces of paper"
 - She believes that history cannot be understood by anyone who has not felt it (to her MEMROY OVERRIDES HISTORY)

Gate 29

- Myth revealing that true religion cannot be destroyed or forgotten despite the Nazis' attempts
- "the parchment is burning, but the letters are soaring high above me"

Gate 31

- Returns to Bolszowce with Ukraine soldiers marching past
- Shows how memory can break through and victim loses all present context and shifts in time → triggering strong response as evident through Yossl "he has reverted to a different time frame" fearing the Ukraine soldiers
- 2nd part of Gate 31 is Genia's recollections of her attempted escape
 - Soldier's random act of compassion by letting her escape demonstrating THE RANDOM NATURE OF HISTORY
 - Genia's age is irrelevant because of her experiences. Dissolves importance of figures associated with history
 - Responder is kept in fluid state of understanding → Baker stops reader from slotting text into their own experiences and being at ease due to expectations. Rather, he undermines responder comfort and expectations and wants them to open up to thoughts on enlightenment and understanding
 - Language in Genia's verbatim account is extremely objective and child like
- Baker comes to an understanding of present actions and identity of his parents
 - Yossl's lack of trust and fright of uniforms
 - Genia: fights and survivor instinct
- ➔ Memory lays down framework for who we are / our identity

Gate 33

- "every shadow casts its darkness of someone else's light" (recurring motif of light and dark)
 - Events of history being set in a relative light
 - For every story there is alternatives → alternatives of alternatives → many branches of history illustrating its randomness

Gate 34

- Elder generations do not reveal their memories to Baker of Leo, the womaniser, as they are afraid it will bring shame to family name
 - Family distorts their memory to hide the history
- Reveals the selective nature of memory, whether they subconsciously or consciously “forget” such memories

Gate 35

- Genia only recalls being in the ark
 - Her perception is driven by fear – deep psychological
 - Young and hence gaps in her memory
 - Memories are exaggerated and distorted
- Illegitimate child only sparsely mentioned throughout the book
- History will always be incomplete
- Baker writes some gates in fiction to acknowledge that documents and memories are sometimes inadequate

Gate 42

- Only fictional chapter in which Baker attempts to recreate the last hours of the life of his grandmother Hinda
- Chapter begins with Dan Pagis poem
 - Ellipsis at end of verse implies that this is a fragment; an incomplete version of history and memory
 - Links this chapter, although only fictional, to that of the rest of the text based on history and memory → all survivors and victims can relate to someone they know of being subjected to a similar story → on the surface of things seems fictional, but really most like the truth !
- First person narrative voice provides a sense of the individual experience, rather than a simple description or recount
 - Baker’s descriptive and emotive language in this chapter, despite its basis on fiction, emphasises the lack of emotional impact that historical documents would reveal → seems at this point that Baker finally comes to accept that there are other methods of recalling the past than those that his historian nature allow.
 - Language appealing to the senses is used to communicate the trauma of the experience: “shrill whistle” and sounds of wailing and praying
 - Powerful imagery reveals the treatment of these victims identical to those of animals preparing for slaughter: “bodies are flying over the shoulders of the strong ones, like chicken wings strewn on a plate”
- Baker uses generic historical details and combines them with his own ideas to form this recreation. In the larger sense, this fictional recreation can be universalised as the deaths of many other Holocaust victims would have been similar in a sense, and thus again emphasises the limitations of history due to those writing it → Nazis could not have cared less about traumas
- By recreating this chapter fictionally, Baker emphasises the limitations of history and memory
- Synecdoche: mountain of shoes → mountain of bodies

- History has omissions → written by select few while memory is recalled by human brain coloured by various factors → accumulation of such facts and memories create fictional text → importance of chapter
- At end of chapter, the holy letters references earlier in gate 29, revealing that at death people gain understanding → truth and religion cannot be destroyed
- Crowd pushed through several gates into the darkness symbolising death; however after their murder, “the point of light” representing the fiftieth gate of enlightenment is reached
- The conclusion of the chapter with the Dan Pagis poem reveals the sudden ending of people’s lives and the lack of ellipsis here, in contrast to those present at the beginning of the chapter, illustrates that these victim’s have come to a realisation of their false sense of hope
 - No ellipsis = No continuation as they have already reached the fiftieth gate
- Starts with “Written in Pencil in a Sealed Railway Car” → don’t have Hinda’s story
- Style: clear voice
- She is caring, compassionate, humane, articulate → he imagines her as he wishes her to be
- She is part of the core of the Shoah(holocaust); most important voice because we can’t access it. Her story is precious and has to be recreated as she was one of the 6 million who died; need to rely on power of fiction to convey its meaning
- Depiction of small details, about how she manages to weave a cultural and political dimension into story reminds us of Jewish prayers, Yiddish etc → successfully authentic voice

Gate 43

- Poem revealing that infants are born with infinite memory until angels fly into their mouths and touch their lips, thereby removing their memories.
- The poem’s conclusion describes a central problem in the parents’ lives → to simply obliterate all memory of the Holocaust experience would be to continue the horror into the present in the form of tension inherent in constructing a new future on the bones of a horrible past

Gate 46

- Passage from Deuteronomy illustrates Baker’s understanding of his parents’ post-Holocaust lives in which they have not allowed their pasts to destroy them or to freeze them in permanent embitterment → life must go on. History and memory overshadowed by life and death
“I have set before you life and death/the blessing and the curse:/ therefore choose life.”
- “Trauma inventory” of Holocaust
- Structured approach → dry historical documentation
 - Yet Baker subverts the form by including highly personal details of his parents’ post war lives under these official headings → HISTORY AND MEMORY INTERTWINE

Gate 48

- Moved into the present and Baker starts to regain memories of his won childhood → the piecing together of his identity almost complete
- Lock of golden hair his mother reveals: symbol of continuity of family history and hereditary (Baker’s kids also have the same)
 - Cut off: fragmented and flawed nature

- **Motif: beauty of memory and the flaw of it as well**

Gate 49

- Dancing is antithesis / antidote to death → infuses a sense of hope
 - Symbol of hope
- Buchenwald Ball: commemorate and remembers → affirming their sense of life
- Baker's and responders' shift in attitude towards Genia and Yossel
- Ellipsis at the end → history is never finished and it is open ended for reader's interpretation
 - Contrasts the strict nature of the text previously
 - Seems that Baker was guiding us to enlightenment and now that we as responders have reached that it is then that it can be open to interpretation. Not allowed before receiving the whole picture and context of things
- Baker's family has succeeded in transcendence → represented by the act of dancing and commemorating
- Continual reference to rebirth, flames and dreams → atmosphere of hope in future

Important Quotes

- "it gnawed at me, the feeling that my father's narrative had surrendered to the forgetfulness" (Mark on the inaccuracy of memory)
- "His (Yossel's) was a past written on a page of history shared by other survivors. My mother could not point to anyone (Gate 24)
- "You read, you read. Books, books everywhere. But do you know how it feels?" (Genia to Mark, Gate 26)
- "What, all these years you thought I wasn't in Auschwitz like your father I didn't suffer? Because I don't have a number means I didn't survive? (Genia, Gate 22)
- "How easy it is to get things wrong .. to set your narrative in a tissue of unintended lies, to forget to read between the lines" (Mark on the fallibility of history, Gate 45)

ESSAY 1

Discuss the relationship between history and memory as it is represented in your prescribed text and two related texts

The interaction of history and memory is significant when representing the past. History involves the contextualising of events, and memory adds a humanising and personal perspective that is necessary to understanding the values of past events. However, the limitations of both must be considered in their evaluation. Academically and culturally, history has been defined as the factual recording of the past whereas memory is suggested to be coloured by emotion diminishing its accuracy and increasing subjectivity. The prescribed text, "The Fiftieth Gate" by Mark Baker, overturns these preconceived connotations, and through the exploration of the connections, authority and limitations of history and memory, these two concepts are acknowledged as equal in validity. "Anne Frank Remembered" by Miep Gies; and "The Things They Carried" by Tim O'Brien, are two additional texts which further emphasises how the combination of these two concepts enables the greatest verisimilitude

The prescribed and two related texts acknowledge that history and memory are equally valid methods of recollecting and examining the past, although the limitations and flaws of both elements are recognised. *The Fiftieth Gate* is a polyphonous text interweaving historical documentation, memories and fictional reconstruction as Mark Baker undergoes a “journey through memory” of his parents’ past. A key question asked throughout the text is whether “history remembers more than memory?” and Baker presents the many complexities involved in the process of remembering. By the fiftieth gate (i.e. the stage of enlightenment) this is open for interpretation by the responder. The fragmented structure of the text, in the non-linear chronology and consistent use of flashbacks, represents the partialities and difficulties of both approaches; and the consistent use of Yiddish creates an awareness and application of culture and authenticity in the text, distancing the responder from being overly-immersed. Baker sends the message that we as responders, and he, will never be able to completely understand the depth of someone else’s history and memory: “the final moments can never be retrieved by history. Nor memory”

Collective history is represented through the experiences of those in the death camps, which were well documented. Academically and culturally they are valuable sources of recalling the past, yet Baker comes to realise that they are delivered with great emotional detachment, causing him to question the full capacity of history to record the authenticity of human suffering. For example, historical documentation reveals that Yossel’s father, Lieb, and the millions of other Holocaust victims experienced a loss of identity by being diminished to being known as simply a number and a Jew. In contrast, Baker cannot provide historical evidence for Genia’s personal memories of being the sole survivor from Bolszowce. Genia’s experience during the Holocaust does not have the necessary social and cultural validations and she has no-one to corroborate her story: “who can you ask? There’s no-one to ask”. The nature of her experience does not fit into Baker’s ideology of history as there is “no means of validation”; however when he discovers a testimony of an SS soldier confirming her experience, he questions himself: “What are these papers except echoes of the past, dark shadows without screams, without smells, without fear”. This illustrates his shift in ideology as to what constitutes history and reveals his acknowledgement of the dual role of history and memory.

On the other hand, some personal memories coloured by emotion and trauma, or simply deteriorating over time, resulting in distortion of the recollections must have their validity questioned. Genia is so psychologically traumatised by the events of the Holocaust that her mind subconsciously recalls only those memories associated with darkness. As such she remembers being “In a cellar all day, underground and closed and nothing, in the darkness all the time”; however this is contrasted by the memories of the woman who sheltered her believing that “she used to always look through the windows at the cherry trees”. Yet through this discrepancy, Baker comes to understand how memory affects one’s identity – Genia still cannot bear darkness or enclosed spaces; and he realises that such memories must be linked to the metaphoric feeling of being hidden rather than physically being in the dark. As such, Baker’s ideology as to what constitutes “history” shifts to a view in which both history and memory have the ability to distort as well as illuminate.

Nonetheless, chapter 42, a fictional reconstruction in which Baker attempts to recreate the last hours of his grandmother, Hinda, is based on neither specific memories nor histories; yet is still a valuable component in understanding the experiences of Holocaust victims. Hinda is a core part of the Shoah in which the most important voices cannot be accessed. This recreation needs to rely on the power of fiction to emphasise its meaning as she was one of the six million victims who died. It also emphasises the limitations of history and memory: “the final moments can never be retrieved by history. Nor by memory.” The opening of this chapter with the Dan Pagis poem “Written in Pencil in a Sealed Railway Car” links this gate, despite its fictional nature, with that of the rest of the text in which the poem consistently recurs. On the surface, this gate is fictional, yet really it seems to be the “truth” that history failed to record, once again emphasising history’s limitations.

Similarly, “Anne Frank Remembered” by Miep Gies depicts the suffering of those who witnessed the Holocaust. Through the traumatic nature of such an experience, the balance of both history and memory is preserved in the text, to allow responders to perceive the greatest verisimilitude. This autobiography mainly focuses on the middle periods of Gies’ life in which she and her husband hide the Frank family during World War 2. Similar to “The Fiftieth Gate” this text challenges the social perceptions of ‘valid history’ in encapsulating numerous voices of those involved in the Holocaust which history failed to record. In accord with the conventions of an autobiography, memories play an imperative role in shaping the ideas of the text, although historical discourse is not completely disregarded. Gies gives a voice to one of the minority groups during World War 2 who have been culturally and historically silenced. In the prologue of the text, Gies acknowledges a vital limitation of memory, its deterioration over time: “more than fifty years have passed, and many details of events recorded in this book are half forgotten”. Nonetheless, the raw emotions captured in this text and the personal insights into the effects of the Nazi attacks and policies, omitted in historical documentation, increase the significance of such memories.

While memory conveys the humanising dimension of past events, history equally provides the more analytical and objective recollection. Through the exploration of historical documentation, Gies is able to expand on the memories recorded in Anne Frank’s diary, giving the responder a deeper understanding of the Frank family’s experiences. The author explores the letters of Otto Frank from the Yivo Institute for Jewish Research in New York, sent to his American business connections. These letters illustrate his increasing desperation to obtain visas to neutral countries. Through such archival material, Gies’ memories are brought to the surface “these letters evoke for me that terrible time long ago that most people cannot imagine”. Additionally, the use of photographs of the author and the Frank family, as well as the supplementation of various historical archives, for example the order liquidating Otto Frank’s company as a Jewish business, emphasise the historical context and authenticity of such memories provided in the autobiography. Thus, it can be seen that the interplay of history and memory has an equally vital role in portraying an understanding of the Holocaust with the greatest sense of verisimilitude, despite both their potential limitations.

The cultural and social sanctions defining history as the dominant method of recalling the past is similarly challenged in Tim O'Brien's "The Things they Carried". Though the text is acknowledged as fictional, the experiences encapsulated can be considered as part of O'Brien's autobiographical memories. The structure of the text parallels that of historical documentation in the use of a contents page dividing the text into twenty two short stories symbolising the "things" the soldiers carried into and from the war. Through this amalgamation of history and memory, a definitive summation of America's involvement in the Vietnam War is provided, where the author acknowledges the equal significance of both elements in recalling the past. O'Brien portrays the war stories with much bleak immediacy and a sustained urgency of tone mirroring his experiences in the war. This can be seen in his descriptively honest recollections of the man he killed, "his jaw was in his throat, his upper lip and teeth gone, his one eye was shut and the other eye was a star shaped hole" which provide the responder with a complete and moving account of a war experience.

Similar to the prescribed text, "The Things they Carried" is a polyphonous novel employing his own distinct voice through the use of first person narrator and those of his comrades, such as Ted Lavender or Rat Kiley, through the use of third person narrator. This illustrates the difficulties in retelling the past. Although the text is based on a momentous occurrence of history, there is a lack of historical information, and thus the body of work is comprised of various war memories. This emphasises the significance of memories as they "will lead to another story which makes it forever", immortalising the stories of his comrades. O'Brien defies the notion that memory, coloured by its trauma and emotions, cannot represent or validate the past. In conveying the horrific details of experiences such as the death of fellow comrade, Curt Lemon "hanging in pieces from the tree", O'Brien preserves the memories of such experiences and individualises these soldiers and their memories, in a way history ultimately fails to do. Furthermore, his emphasis on the significance of memories can also be seen through his early acknowledgement that "this is a work of fiction", where he seems to defy the cultural and social sanctions of the significance of history in portraying one's past experiences.

The cultural and academic disregard of the significance of memories in portraying past events is defied in the prescribed text, "The Fiftieth Gate" and the two related texts "Anne Frank Remembered" and "The Things they Carried". By the conclusion of these three texts, the flaws and limitations of both history and memory are acknowledged and more importantly, the equal significance of both in encapsulating the essence of past events with the greatest verisimilitude is recognised.

Word Count: 1589