



Araştırma Makalesi / Research Article

EXPLORING AMBIGUITY: LITERARY SIGNIFICANCE OF HOLOCAUST REPRESENTATION IN RAYMOND FEDERMAN'S *TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN*

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Abstract

As a significant literary tool and narrative technique, ambiguity is regarded as one of the most common and striking components of postmodern writing. The obscurity in its definition, context and usage leads researchers and literary critics to take interest in this concept and authors to refer to it frequently as well. In this sense, Raymond Federman's *To Whom It May Concern* is one of the novels in which ambiguity, as a narrative technique, emerges overtly. This study tries to define and explain the context of ambiguity which is among the major narrative elements of postmodern literature. Likewise, how it appears in the novel and for what purposes authors apply it will be handled. Moreover, how ambiguity is included in the main elements of novel such as the character, theme, time-space, point of view and plot, what apparent and embedded purposes the author has by applying to narrative ambiguity and its connection with the Holocaust will be scrutinised. On the other hand, whether this ambiguity in narrative is a genuine ambiguity or just a narrative clarity intentionally used by the author to steer the readers toward an intended objective will also be discussed.

Keywords: Narrative ambiguity, Holocaust, Raymond Federman, To Whom It May Concern

BELİRSİZLİĞİ KEŞFETMEK: RAYMOND FEDERMAN'IN *TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN* ADLI ESERİNDE HOLOKOST TEMSİLİNİN EDEBİ ÖNEMİ

Öz

Önemli bir edebi araç ve anlatı tekniği olan belirsizlik, postmodern yazının en yaygın ve öne çıkan bileşenlerinden biri olarak kabul edilir. Bu kavramın tanım, kapsam ve kullanımındaki muğlaklık, edebiyat eleştirmenleri ve araştırmacılarının kavrama ilgi duymasına, yazarların da yapıtlarında bu kavrama sıklıkla başvurmalarına yol açar. Bu bağlamda Raymond Federman'ın *To Whom It May Concern* adlı romanı, bir anlatı yöntemi olarak belirsizliğin bariz bir şekilde ortaya çıktığı yapıtlardan biridir. Bu çalışmada postmodern edebiyatın en önemli anlatı öğelerinden olan belirsizlik kavramının tanım ve kapsamı açıklanmaya çalışılacaktır. Ayrıca romanda bu kavramın nasıl ortaya çıktığı ve yazarın bunu hangi amaçla kullanıldığı ele alınacaktır. Ayrıca karakter, tema, zaman-mekân, bakış açısı ve olay örgüsü gibi romanın ana unsurlarında belirsizliğin ne şekilde kullanıldığı, yazarın anlatı belirsizliğini kullanırken açık ve örtük amacının ne olduğu ve bunun Holokost ile olan ilişkisi irdelenecektir. Öte yandan anlatıdaki bu belirsizliğin gerçekten bir belirsizlik mi yoksa yazar tarafından bilinçli olarak kullanılan ve okuru amaçlanan hedefe yönlendiren bir anlatı açıklığı mı olduğu da tartışılacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Anlatı Belirsizliği, Holokost, Raymond Federman, To Whom It May Concern

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Başvuru Tarihi (Received): 01.05.2024 **Kabul Tarihi** (Accepted): 21.05.2024

Introduction

In traditional novels and stories, certain elements serve as the foundation of the narrative. However, literary critics have not reached a consensus on which elements are essential and which ones are secondary or optional. There is ongoing debate regarding what constitutes these foundational elements and which should be included or excluded from analysis. For example, while Klarer (1999: 14) submits those elements as plot, characters, narrative perspective and setting, Forster (1927) presents and discusses them as story, people, plot, fantasy, prophecy, pattern, and rhythm. Nonetheless, Wielechowski (2021: 15) claims that the common view among literary critics and researchers, as the essential elements in all stories, is theme, character, setting, plot and point of view.

Although many authors try to keep these elements alive, postmodern authors do not give much importance to those crucial elements of fiction and do not contribute more to resurrect them. Moreover, Barry Lewis (2001), in *Postmodernism and Literature*, points out that John Hawkes brings this traditional approach in fiction up for discussion and introduces plot, character, setting and theme as the true enemies of fiction. (Lewis, 2001: 126) For instance, in the plot, authors sometimes intentionally leave the reasons or outcomes of events ambiguous, allowing readers to interpret and clarify them in their own minds. In this approach, while the text itself holds significance, what readers derive from the text carries even greater weight. This deliberate ambiguity fosters multiple interpretations and a sense of plurality, known as polysemy, which is often employed by postmodern authors as a narrative technique. That is to say, they do not pay so much attention to precision and completion and they prefer to leave all the doors open for readers. They usually and mostly intentionally leave the readers in ambiguity and lead them to multiple meanings. Raymond Federman's narrating style also embraces and reflects this tendency:

“What a shrewd way of getting around the problem. Diderot really understood that to get on with the story one must avoid precision. One must digress. Skip around. Improvise. Leave blank what cannot be filled in. Offer multiple choices. Deviate from the facts, from the where and the when, in order to reach the truth. Why this obstinate need to give stories a neat beginning, middle and end?” (Federman, 1990: 104)

Another fundamental element of traditional fiction is the point of view, which can introduce uncertainty and ambiguity for readers. In some narratives, multiple points of view may be presented, leading to confusion about the identity of the narrator or speaker, thereby perplexing readers as they navigate the text. Federman applies to this narrating style and uses a few narrators in this novel. Buran Utku (2018: 379) also draws attention to the same point in her article and focuses on multiple voices in the novel: “We do not just hear one voice speaking to us but multiple voices throughout the text; the author narrator's, Sarah and her cousins' and the other characters' and that of text.”

Time, as a crucial aspect of setting, is another example that postmodern authors often distort in their works. They manipulate the linear and chronological progression of time within the plot, employing narrative techniques such as stream of consciousness to present a fresh perspective on traditional storytelling. This experimentation with temporal structures offers readers a new and unconventional experience, challenging traditional notions of narrative coherence and linearity.

1. Ambiguity in Literature / Literary Ambiguity

Ambiguity is among the narrative techniques that the authors, particularly the postmodern ones, have frequently applied to enhance the literary quality of their fictions and to appeal the attention of readers to mostly the plot. It is “a word or expression that can be understood in two or more possible ways. ... Ambiguity (and ambiguous) comes from the Latin *ambiguus*, which was formed by combining *ambi-* (meaning “both”) and *agere* (“to drive”). ... Ambiguity may be used to refer either to something (such as a word) which has multiple meanings, or to a more general state of uncertainty.” (Merriam-webster, 2024) If you say that there is ambiguity in something, you mean that it is unclear or

confusing, or it can be understood in more than one way (Collinsdictionary, 2024). For Sennet (2021), "... it can mean uncertainty or dubiousness on the one hand and a sign bearing multiple meanings on the other. ... Authors, poets, lyricists and the like, on the other hand, have often found ambiguity to be an extremely powerful tool. ... Ambiguity is generally taken to be a property enjoyed by signs that bear multiple (legitimate) interpretations in a language or, more generally, some system of signs".

Ambiguity has its roots in Latin, *ambiguus*, and it means uncertainty or it is something that has multiple meanings, that is to say it is polysemic. It is a word, phrase, or statement that can be interpreted in different ways. "While it can be unintentional in some cases, many writers intentionally use ambiguity as a writing tool to make their writing more intriguing" (Bartleby, 2024). And intentional ambiguity is "the use of language or images to suggest more than one meaning at the same time, esp. in a poem" (Cambridge, 2024). Similarly, although Abrams (2009: 12-13) claims that it has a pejorative meaning and it seems to be a fault in style in its ordinary usage, he underlines its poetic and intentional usage in criticism. He points out that it has been used to signify multiple references, attitudes or feelings

In literature, there are different types of ambiguity that the authors or poets use as an influential tool for their writings. One of the most significant works on ambiguity that should not be disregarded is William Empson's *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930). He suggests that "uncertainty or the overlap of meanings in the use of a word could be an enrichment of poetry rather than a fault. Empson sought to enhance the reader's understanding of a poem by isolating the linguistic properties of the text. He suggested that words or references in poems are often ambiguous and, if presented coherently, carry multiple meanings that can enrich the reader's appreciation of the work" (Britannica, 2024). However, his study mainly focuses on words and phrases, that is to say, on linguistic characteristics of the texts. So, conceptually, his definition of ambiguity seems to be related to the language of the text more than of plot and narration.

However, the crucial problem with the term of ambiguity is this: there is still not a consensus among the philosophers, critics and linguists on what ambiguity is and what it is not. The lack of consensus is valid for the classification of ambiguity as well. Awwad (2017: 201) asserts that although the linguists, in general, haven't agreed on a unique classification of ambiguity, most of them classify ambiguity under two broad categories as lexical and syntactic. Later on, some others added pragmatic and semantic ambiguity to this classification. Besides the ones written above, some other types/subtypes of ambiguity can be ranged as scope, referential, analytical, transformational, morphological, manipulative, strategic, structural, conceptual, narrative ambiguity and so on.

Taking into account the various forms of ambiguity discussed, it appears that the most comprehensive classification can be made into linguistic and literary ambiguity. Literary ambiguity can be an inclusive classification encompassing semantic, narrative and contextual ambiguity. In fact, semantic ambiguity and narrative ambiguity have always been confused, but modern criticism separates them. For Tallant (1980: 10) while semantic ambiguity is constricted to language, narrative ambiguity appears in some units of the literary form such as point of view, plot, setting, point of view and character. So, narrative ambiguity arises in the lack of clarity about the plot, character, setting and point of view. For example, if the plot of a story creates uncertainty or doubts in the minds of readers, then this plot is obviously ambiguous.

The specific type of ambiguity that is the focus of this study is narrative ambiguity. The novel under scrutiny deliberately incorporates narrative ambiguity, where the author intentionally introduces elements of uncertainty or multiple interpretations within the narrative. For example, the mind of author-narrator is so sophisticated that the readers endeavour a lot to overcome the inconsistencies and ambiguities in his discourses and actions. These discourses lead the readers to confusion about the reality and the fiction. Similarly, Buran Utku (2018: 380) also focuses on the same point and

mentions of the narrator's confusion about the construction of his story, that is history. For her, the author-narrator is always in betweenness about the fiction and the real.

On the other hand, ambiguity also appears in the characters of the novel. For example, one of the protagonists is Sarah's cousin, but the readers are not allowed to know his/her name. Besides, the author deliberately ambiguates the past and future of those characters well and he intentionally keeps the readers in suspense. Yet, the aim of the author doesn't seem to be arousing the readers' curiosity, but enabling them to ruminate on the subject.

2. Narrative Ambiguity in *To Whom it May Concern*

As a postmodern novelist, Federman employs a range of narrative techniques such as metafiction, intertextuality, temporal distortion, irony, fragmentation, surfiction, stream of consciousness, ambiguity and so on. However, the focus of this study lies specifically on ambiguity, particularly narrative ambiguity, as it serves as a foundational element in Federman's work. From the beginning to the end of novel, ambiguity and uncertainty force the minds of readers to make out something to get the hang of the plot through unlimited, open-ended and fragmented lives of characters. To apprehend the plot, analysing the actions and discourses of the characters is crucial since plot and character are the two interdependent critical elements of novel. Henry James (2005: 17), in *The Art of Fiction*, points out to this dependence as:

“What is character but the determination of incident? What is incident but the illustration of character? ... It is an incident for a woman to stand up with her hand resting on a table and look out at you in a certain way; or, if it be not an incident, I think it will be hard to say what it is. At the same time, it is an expression of character.” So, the analysis of the plot is shaped around the characters in general.

Many events in the novel are unclear and to figure out silhouette of truth in a foggy atmosphere is left to readers. Ambiguity starts at the cover page, in the name of the novel. It has been written to whom it may concern, not to a specific person; maybe to everybody or to nobody. Whoever thinks of that the novel concerns himself/herself, it has then been written to him/her.

Considering of the whole novel, we cannot assert that the novel is about only this topic or this is its unique plot or theme. After reading, some readers can claim that it is about the painful lives of Sarah and her cousin and of course about their heart – wrenching past. Some other readers can put forward that it mentions of the struggle of an author to write a novel. The other ones can claim that it is about the general pains of an excluded nation, especially the children during a war. Each of them is possible; yet, none of them can represent the plot of this novel alone.

After reading the novel, pangs and pains in the lives of Sarah and her cousin remain in the readers' mind. For author, the pains they experienced were so profound that the details of incidents were not important at all. While he tells the sorrowful story of Sarah and her cousin, he rejects to give the details of time and place. Although he is so clear on the occurrence of the events, he shuns from giving the information where and when it happened (1990: 104).

The realities about the lives of Sarah, her cousin and their families are not clearly shared by the author with readers. The readers do not have any information about the origins of their families. Does this cousin have a name? If s/he does not, why not then? Who are Sarah and her cousin? What is their nationality and where do they come from? Which country do they live in? There is a war causing disastrous results, which war is it? Why did the government arrest their families? Where were they evacuated? What happened to them? Were they alive or not? All of these questions engage the minds of readers after reading the novel. Many events were deliberately left mysterious and unsettled by author.

Similarly, the question why the author prefers not to give a name to the cousin seems to be another mystery for the readers. A protagonist without a name would be nonsense and absurd but the author

nevertheless refuses to give him a name: "Should this cousin be given a name? A name is so cumbersome. So limiting. It confines a being to the accident of birth, imposes a civic identity. Perhaps for now, he can simply be referred to as Sarah's cousin. Yes, Sarah's cousin. Though her name too might be deleted later on." (Federman, 1990: 10) At the end of novel, neither is the cousin given a name nor is the name of Sarah deleted. The author refrains from giving a name to him since he thinks of the names as limiting. Postmodernism itself is already a movement refusing limitations of everything. For postmodernists the truth is concealed under plurality, so reducing it to just a sole definition would not contribute to reveal the truth properly.

The origins of Sarah, her cousin and their families are also unclear. The readers deduce that they are foreigners or immigrants, but from which country they migrated is surely indefinite. The author never mentions of where and when exactly they came to this country; however, from the pains they experienced it is obvious that they are foreigners and they have come to their adopted country (1990: 53) from somewhere else which is not their own country. Not only the origins but also the doom of their families is ambiguous. The readers do not have certain information about their origins and they face difficulty to figure out why they have been taken to uncertainty by soldiers. Why only a few families in that neighbourhood were arrested is the other problem engaging the minds of readers. The fate of their families is obscure, no one knows, even the author, what happened to them, even 35 years later. Sarah wonders where her family were taken, what they did there and when they died. She goes on worrying about them and questioning whether they were hungry, they were persecuted by the soldiers or their bodies remade into objects and so on. (1990: 23) The author leads the readers to think over their end by asking so many unanswered questions.

Considering of her family, Sarah always remembers only one of her brothers, Benjamin. Her other brother, Simon is not mentioned by the author and its reason is indefinite again. Why only Benjamin is alive in her memoirs seems to be difficult for readers to comprehend, but the author tries to explain it through his resemblance to Yossi, her son. Yet, it is not so plausible since her other son Tamar is not mentioned either. We have no information about Tamar and Simon but we know Yossi and Benjamin. The readers can easily make out her weakness to Yossi who is a policeman in the age of twenties and always calls down her mother due to her fixation to past. The reasons of this weakness remain unclear and the curiosity of readers has not been satisfied by the author.

In fact, there is certainty in most of the events; yet, the ambiguity emerges in the reasons and results of the events. They are left to readers to comment and find something from their own lives. For instance, there was a bomb attack: the bombing itself was definite, a bus was blown up; its exact time was certain, happened at noon; the locale was also clear, on the main avenue in the capital city. However, its details were not evident; not only the number of victims and their identities but the agents were unknown. Moreover, the reason of bombing was remained undetermined (1990: 58).

On the other hand, ambiguity is generally observed in the lives of the characters, not in their dreams or imaginations. Their dreams are tremendously explicit and all the details of events – exact dates, names, places and numbers – are clear in their reminiscences. The author propounds that he has given certain and exact information in order to make the events more reliable. For example, he alleges that the events started on July 16, 21.884 people were captured and 9.051 of them were children, forty-six of them died, sixteen were by suicide, three little girls were raped and murdered (1990: 22). All the details of some events are unambivalently remembered by protagonists and they are conveyed to the readers with certain dates, places and numbers. Why the author prefers giving such exact details calls the readers' attention since ambiguity prevails in the novel as a narrating style. The author states that he tries to be more reliable through giving exact numbers and dates.

On the other hand, some people in the novel seem to be superior to the others; however, Sarah, her cousin, their families and many other families living in the same neighbourhood are inferior to the others. They do not have the same rights as of the other people who live in the same country and they

do not, particularly the children, have any idea about why it is so. This problem is questioned by the author's implicit statements that lead the readers to comment. Sarah, her brothers and many people around them were not allowed to utilize public sphere such as swimming pools, libraries, cinemas, public baths etc. No one gives the reason why they are debarred from such facilities (1990: 59).

Such type of marginalising practices that exposed to Sarah and her brothers remind us the racial and social apartheid and reserved areas enforced in South Africa for centuries. Kızıldağ points to this situation through referring to The Reservation of Separate Amenities Act which came in force in 1953 in South Africa. According to the act, the accession to public facilities was restricted and the limited allowance to the services was practiced through racial discrimination. 'Whites Only' notices divided the society and provided many advantages to the White. Regulations by the colonizing government gave priority to the white people to get benefit from public services such as ambulances, buses, trains, parks, restaurants, hotels, schools and so on. On the other hand, the non-white people were prevented from their participation in public areas via restricted practices carried out by racist governments of South Africa (2016: 238). The experiences of characters in the novel seem to be the same as the experiences of native people in South Africa for centuries.

In the novel, the recurring theme of war captures the attention of readers, as it holds significant importance for the characters, particularly Sarah and her cousin, and resonates throughout the wider society depicted in the narrative. Although this war inflicts a deep wound in their psychologies and changes the flow of their lives, the author does not share any details of the war with readers. The readers know that there is a war and it destroyed the lives of so many people; but, they do not have any idea about which war this is. Similarly, they are aware of a war that demolishes all the families of protagonists but they don't know when and where it took place. For the author, it does not matter where and when it happened since it is not verifiable. He claims that he focuses on the truth, not on the believability and claims that the certain truths do not need the exactitude of time and place. He also centres upon the unendingness of suffering and goes further by stating that the suffer is inherent referring to the exile of his nation (1990: 39).

The author contends that all wars share a fundamental similarity in their destructive consequences. In the novel, once again, he draws attention to the pathetic consequences of the wars in general:

“Once upon a time, after the war, the cousin went away to one place and Sarah to another. They were separated for many years. Doesn't matter how long, or which war. All wars separate people. All wars make orphans of children and mourners of parents. They suffered. Years later, when they were reunited, they cried.” (Federman, 1990: 105)

However, the ambiguity in details of this war is totally different from ambiguity in postmodern writing. The author does not aim at multiple endings or plurality through this indeterminacy. The readers feel that he just wants to allude to something else. As a Jewish and Holocaust writer, indeed, he deliberately indicates to the past experiences of Jewish community. Yet, instead of writing it directly, he prefers implicit discourses by applying to ambiguity. The reason why he does not outspokenly and directly refer to the Holocaust seems to be a huge dilemma. For Heled (2007: 111), it is the general tendency of Holocaust literature: “... when Holocaust literature avoids direct representation of horror, it does so because of ethics or social taste, or for fear of repelling the reader”. Some critics and readers may adopt this as one of the reasons of his abstention from writing the story of the Holocaust directly. On the other hand, extracting from Elie Wiesel, Gaies (2016: 7) states that the Holocaust is too magnitude to be used for literary purposes as it is a humanitarian plight. Through this approach, one can conclude that Federman may have stayed clear from explicit statements mentioning of the Holocaust.

However, why the authors prefer implicit references to the Holocaust can most appropriately be explained through the aphorism of Aharon Appelfeld, a novelist and survivor of the Holocaust, as “... one does not look directly into the sun.” (Landwehr, 2007, p. 1) For those survivor-authors, the

Holocaust issue is as bright as the sun; thus, explicit or implicit statements in Holocaust writing, ambiguity or clarity in other words, do not make much sense for the readers. In this context, Federman's avoidance of unequivocal and firsthand expressions of the Holocaust do not mean that he neglects it or puts it aside. On the contrary, as a survivor-author and representative of Holocaust writing, his works reflect or at least directly imply to the Holocaust.

In this regard, Raphael (2003: 227) focuses on the fact that "All forms of Holocaust literature - diaries, memoirs, fiction and poetry - compel the reader to enter imaginatively into the experience of the Holocaust". Therefore, the objective of Federman through narrative ambiguity is to lead the readers to identify themselves with the characters and allow them to feel their experiences in the fiction. In doing so, he struggles to form a social memory about/of the Holocaust and narrative ambiguity in his writing serves his implicit purpose. As a matter of fact, Roskies and Diamant (2012: 2) similarly refer to the objective and function of Holocaust literature as: "Holocaust literature comprises all forms of writing, both documentary and discursive, and in any language, that have shaped the public memory of the Holocaust and been shaped by it".

Returning to novel and the war, what the author tries to do by applying to this ambiguity is to generalise this war among people and allow them to feel that such type of pains and griefs are universal and they should not be allotted to particular group or nation. Anybody or any nation in the world can experience this anytime and anywhere. It is quite clear for the readers that this war is the Holocaust, and for Federman, the Holocaust is universal:

"My work is really about the post-Holocaust, what it means to live the rest of your earthly existence with this thing inside of you – and I don't mean just me, I mean all of us, wherever we may be – those who experienced it, those who think they experienced it, those who survived it, those who did it, those who witnessed it and said nothing, those who claim they never knew, those who claim it never happened, and so on and so on. The Holocaust was a universal affair in which we were all implicated and are still." (Leo, 2011: 17)

In the novel, the author sometimes refrains from giving the exact time, events, places or dates; because the concrete details take the characters to the damaging events they have experienced in the past. The readers can easily figure out that Sarah and her cousin want to forget or at least try not to remember what happened in the past. Because the details mean torture for them and the author does not want to persecute them more. They just want to forget the tragic events they have experienced and they never talk about the details of those events. For example, although they are just children, they don't talk about what happened to their parents. (Federman, 1990: 104) In fact, their minds are always busy with the fate of their parents but they never talk about it. Another tragic event that protagonists never talk about is a murder. Sarah kills a boy in the first years of her marriage with Ellie. Neither Sarah nor her husband speaks of that night again although the boy she kills takes after their son, Yossi. (Federman, 1990: 145) In the novel, the past seems to be a closed area or a taboo for the characters in general.

However, there are some images/motives in the novel that attract the readers' attention and lead them to the Holocaust. The most striking one is 'the patch' (badge in other words) on the clothes. The badge that the Jews generally had to wear by force was a yellow star. Cassen (2017: 6) claims that although it has its roots in beginning of 13th century, it became one of the most iconic symbols of the Holocaust in the twentieth century.

In its historical background, the requirement for Jews to wear badges started in 13th century to make a distinction between Jews and Christians. In her efficient article, Jablon (2015: 39) discusses the definition and usage of the badge as:

“... the Jewish badge was meticulously, and in fact legally, encoded with a precise and well-defined meaning. Jews and Christians alike understood not only the explicit message of the wearer's Judaism, but the deleterious connotations as well, that Jews were inferior and deserving of stigmatisation and discrimination.”

She also focuses on its covert connotations and denotations of the badge. She states that it carries an obvious message that the wearers were not only inferior but dangerous as well and they should be kept away from the rest of the society. For her, it was also an image of communication emphasizing oppression (2015: 45)

In the novel, Sarah and her family are compelled to wear patches during the war. The author again doesn't reveal why they are forced to wear those badges. Indeed, the readers can easily deduce the latent intention of the authority by patching their clothes; yet, the author doesn't write this intention openly. They are so ashamed of wearing the badge and moreover they do not have the slightest idea why they have to wear it. Whenever the children ask, the response they receive from their parents is just a silent sob (1990: 62). For children, the reason of their mothers' tears is obscure again. The adults, insistently, avoid giving explanations to the children about the reasons of this patching. However, in his diary, Sierakowiak (1996: 63) stresses on not only the humiliation and embarrassment, but the fear as well. He asserts that people did not venture to go out with the badge on their clothes. If they were compelled to do so, they walked dreadfully, timidly and abashedly

The ambiguity in the novel manifest itself again in the life of Sarah's cousin. After the war, he leaves Sarah behind and sets out to an obscurity. Of course, his destination is clear when they say goodbye to each other in a train station, but it is deliberately concealed from the readers. The readers don't have any idea about where the train goes and where its destination is. He doesn't have any friends or relatives waiting for him there. He seems to be an aimless person who doesn't have any purposes in his life. Despair penetrates into all moments of his life at that time.

In the first years of their departure, they write letters to each other regularly and share something from their new lives, but it doesn't take a long time. They stop keeping in touch and do not write any letters to each other for nearly 20 years. Why they give up sending letters is still ambiguous although the readers predicate its reason as their reluctance to remind the pains they had in the past to each other. Recall of the past possibly would lead them to something they veiled in their subconscious which they struggle to forget.

On the other hand, absence dominates Sarah and her cousin's lives. After they depart from each other, the cousin goes to an unknown country where he finds himself in absence and Sarah moves to an infertile desert where can also be called as boundless land. Sarah tries to build a living space through shaping absence in this scanty land. She manages to give life to her obscurity and absence by curving and digging sand in the desert. The cousin also strives to shape his absence in sculptures. He endeavours to give form to concrete materials as he does to his feelings and absence. Although he becomes a very famous sculptor in the world, he is nevertheless not satisfied with his sculptures and he admits that he failed:

“... I failed because I have not been able to give shape to what can never be recovered. The cousin paused turning his head toward the desert. Sarah did not ask what could not be recovered, but as if her silence were a question he offered the answer: absence that's what can never be recovered, absence. And again there was silence between them.” (1990: 176)

Although the author left this absence unspecified, it is quite clear for the readers. Their experience during the war is not only an absence for them but an unrecoverable problem as well. The emotions which the cousin wants to shape into objects are mostly related to his bad experiences he had in the past. That is why his sculptures become savage, obscure and meaningless.

3. Conclusion

Ambiguity, a prevalent and effective narrative technique commonly employed by authors, stands out as a prominent characteristic of postmodern writing. While ambiguity can manifest in various forms, it can be broadly classified into two main categories: linguistic ambiguity and literary/narrative ambiguity. The readers can infer from the novel that Federman's preference seems to be contextual, that is to say narrative ambiguity. There is definitely the absence of clear explanations in the novel, but the readers are expected to figure out their meanings and to remark on them.

When the theme and plot of the novel is taken into consideration, it is surely beyond doubt that the fiction is based on a war and on the tragic experiences of people, particularly the children during this war. Although ambiguity appears in this war and the events, the guidance of author is so conspicuous that the readers automatically come to the Holocaust.

Additionally, the lives of the characters in the novel are marked by ambiguity, shaped by the pains and hardships they have endured. They try to shape their future through the pains imbedded in their subconscious which are not clear, mostly obscure and blurred. Those griefs are due to a war happened in the past and it is again left unclear by the author; yet, obscurity of this war is quite explicit for the readers and they unambivalently know that the author mentions of the Holocaust.

Ambiguity emerges in point of view once again and the author-narrator is always confused in his writing process. He usually applies to the readers to remove the confusion in his mind. However, his aim is not just the removal of the confusion in his mind but to direct them to think and feel the pains of the Holocaust deeply and to allow the readers to identify themselves with victims of the Holocaust who are also the characters of the novel.

Although the ambiguity/uncertainty is mostly used as a narrative technique in postmodern writing, Federman does not apply to it just for aesthetic and literary purposes. His employment of ambiguity in the novel seems to serve to the clarification of the Holocaust and it takes the readers to the Holocaust. Through narrative ambiguity, he obviously aspires to narrative clarity and this clarity directly refers to the Holocaust.

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