

# Fiftieth gate essay



History is the factual, objective recording of events through documents, archives, records, artefacts and physical evidence whereas memory is the recollection of individuals of their personal experience and sequence of events however, adding the human element to the situation or experience. However, history and memory sometimes contrast with each other but most importantly they need to complement each other; without one, the stories of events that shape human experience are incomplete. While history offer the factual, documented record of events. Memory is also necessary to complete the story but at the same time enabling the human element of the story. The differing nature of history and memory frequently causes them to conflict and contrast with each other. In attempting to reconcile history with memory, disagreement and tension will inevitably arise.

Nevertheless both history and memory can be just as distorted as one another. History can be distorted by being misrepresented by bias, by the absence or hidden evidence and information. Yet memory can also be distorted as they are personal recollections of events that have occurred. In spite of this they can be biased and open to inaccuracy and can be scattered all over the place. The book *The Fiftieth Gate – A journey through memory* traces the author Mark Baker's search for the details of his parent's early life.

The son of holocaust survivors, Baker is aware that his own experiences are very different to those of his parent's, and sets out to discover their hidden stories. However, Baker as the historian is unable to rely on his parents recollections and needs documented evidence to validate their recollections of the past. As Baker's parent's stories unfold he finds himself on a journey through memory. With Baker unfolding his parents stories are taking him on

a journey which is helping him discover himself. In addition to Baker unveiling his parents past he is becoming more aware of the suffering his parents went through and still are. Along with gaining a greater awareness of why they act the way they do and understands what it means to be a survivor of that terrifying time period. Uncovering his parent's inner turmoil he evokes a sense of admiration and sympathy for them. Although Baker evokes admiration and sympathy he however, evokes conflict and tension between himself and his beloved parents.

The Fiftieth Gate is a multi-layered text. Baker has not made it a history narrative nor neither is it a traditional biography of his parents past. Baker uses a variety of textual forms to evoke his parent's experiences, both the past and present. Yossi and Genia's experiences are told in their own words, and through the use of European records and the arcades of the Yad Vashem in Jerusalem. Baker stumbles across a problem as he could not find any type of document about his grandmother's last journey to the death chambers with her small daughters. Although there were documents that account the deaths that happened in Wierzbnik. The text of the novel jumps from voice to voice as well as the time period, going from past to present as Baker's parents trace their memories and recollections of their past and their frustration of attempting to reconstruct their past in the present. At the same time Baker finds himself frustrated and with personal anguish as he attempts to reconcile the memories of his parents with documented evidence – historical fact.

The exploitation of such a selection of textual forms that allows the responder to gain a better understanding of the rich interplay between

history and memory, providing the responder with an insight into the complex relationship[ between personal recollections and documented “ trusted” history. This is inviting the responder to simultaneously question and appreciate the representation of history and memory that are given to us by Yossi and Genia. With the range of textual forms applied it is evident in throughout the text that history and memory may conflict at certain points but also complement each other perfectly. Baker’s family has conflicted with history and memory. The text allows us to accompany baker on what is at the time a difficult personal journey. Baker also refers throughout the text to the difficulties he has faced being a historian and writing the family history, especially for a family especially his family that has had traumatic and catastrophic events happened to them. The journey for baker is troubled not only with the methodological problems.

Baker was getting frustrated due to the inconsistencies between the documented history and the history told by his parents. Baker also suffered from personal problems of his own through the journey of his parent’s memory. Baker cannot totally distance his emotional turmoil and tensions that are brought to the surface by his parent’s memories and recounts of their experiences. The historian strives for accuracy; this is often dissatisfied by the personal memories of his parents. His parent’s recollections of events that occurred are not in chronological order. Baker is attempting to piece together their past by trying to trigger significant events helping baker linking up their recollections with documented evidence. Both his parents share their memories.

For example baker finds documented events of the “ aktion” which separated him from his younger brother and from their mother and sisters forever. Baker’s father, Yossl, cannot recall the date but can recall the weather of that day. He stated that it was cold. But however his son found a piece of paper stating that the weather was not cold it was warm, causing him to fear “ that my father’s narrative had surrendered to forgetfulness” (p. 24). This then gives the historian reason to question the accuracy of his father’s recollections and is therefore forced to accept that recollections of personal events do not occur within a neat chronological sequence. Due to the traumatic circumstances of his parents past. Baker realises that the anticipated events for his parents especially his father did not occur in a neat chronological order because of the turmoil he has suffered. As his father is endeavouring his past he feels that it has “ leaped” back at him with terrifying speed and intensity (p. 125). This is where the human elements of recollections come into play and how they totally depend on the individuals circumstances of the time. Baker has the same struggle with his mother as he did with his father to retell the past. However the historian struggles to find evidence about his mothers past as she was not submitted into a death camp or concentration camp like his father. The frustration of baker is shown yet again as there is no evidence on the Bolzszowce Aktion. As baker searched the Yad Vashem archives to find evidence to support his mother’s recollections. Finally, after searching the archives he found a document with “ a single lone sentence” on a reel of microfilm (p. 138) - “ among 1380 people, one family survived by chance.

They were Leo Krochmal and his wife Rosa... ” (p. 139).

baker is then distressed as he didn't believe his mother without solid documentary evidence to support her recollections. The Fiftieth Gate – A journey through memory traces the author Mark Baker's search for the details of his parent's early life. The son of holocaust survivors, Baker is aware that his own experiences are very different to those of his parent's, and sets out to discover their hidden stories. However, Baker as the historian is unable to rely on his parents recollections and needs documented evidence to validate their recollections of the past. As Baker's parent's stories unfold he finds himself on a journey through memory. With Baker unfolding his parents stories are taking him on a journey which is helping him discover himself. History is the factual, objective recording of events through documents, archives, records, artefacts and physical evidence whereas memory is the recollection of individuals of their personal experience and sequence of events however, adding the human element to the situation or experience.

However, history and memory sometimes contrast with each other but most importantly they need to complement each other; without one, the stories of events that shape human experience are incomplete. While history offer the factual, documented record of events. Memory is also necessary to complete the story but at the same time enabling the human element of the story as written throughout the response.